

CONGRATULATIONS

DCFS ALL STARS

DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNERS

August 2011

Outstanding Direct Service Staff

Clarissa Mena, SCSW

Lancaster

Clarissa Mena is an Emergency Response Supervisor at the DCFS in Lancaster that is a source of knowledge, encouragement, and dedication to the children, families, and staff. Ms. Mena has demonstrated flexibility and willingness by working extended hours, supporting families, and staff.

Recently a child was brought into protective custody after normal duty hours from her parent's custody. During the removal process Ms. Mena was made aware that it was the child's birthday and after speaking with one of the parents was informed they were unable to celebrate her birthday. In turn, Ms. Mena organized an impromptu birthday party with the child, a parent, and her staff in the office. This situation was a reminder that the focus of a removal is child safety, but that sensitivity to a child's situation was also addressed.

Most recently due to Ms. Mena's diligence a 17 year old, with Legal Guardianship in place, came to the attention of the Department as the child and the relatives had serious family issues. Initially, the family members were unwilling to communicate with the Department. However, through Ms. Mena's perseverance, she built rapport with the family and extended family members, revealing increased risks to the child. After several conversations with the family members and a careful evaluation of the situation, a plan was made, which prevented the need for the family to come to the attention of the Court and the child was moved to a safer family home.

Ms. Mena's continuous attentiveness, leadership, and sensitivity to the staff and the families serviced illustrate how our Department is keeping kids safe, while also being attentive to needs of the children and their families. These examples to her staff ensure that families receive the best service possible and motivate her workers to be creative, sensitive, and use encouragement to help families succeed.

The entire staff at the Lancaster office knows that they can count on Ms. Mena as she continued to consistently be the "T" in Team Player. Therefore, as Ms. Mena dedication proves she is an asset to the Department she is the DERA award winner for Outstanding Direct Service Staff.

Outstanding Administrative Manager

Esther Valenzuela, CSA I, Service Linkage Specialists

Santa Fe Springs

Esther Valenzuela is a Service Linkage Specialist in the DCFS Mental Health Services Division. She has worked under the Division approximately four years. During this time Ms. Valenzuela has demonstrated leadership working under the Coordinated Services Action Team (CSAT) program. She has not only served as a MAT Coordinator for the Belvedere Office, but is currently a Service Linkage Specialist (SLS) at the Santa Fe Springs Office.

Ms. Valenzuela has demonstrated a commendable strong work ethic and dedication. She has been instrumental in establishing programs in both positions and works extended hours as needed to ensure their continued success and support to all involved. She provides training for colleagues and makes herself available for questions. She has participated in CSAT workgroups to brainstorm, provide feedback, and actively seeks more effective ways of implementing the programs during the implementation roll outs at other offices.

Ms. Valenzuela's willingness to actively participate and provide assistance lead to her becoming the Lead CSA I for RTS. Currently she covers the MAT and the SLS program as needed at the Santa Fe Springs office and other DCFS offices. In addition she has shown such competence that she has also been entrusted with covering for her managers when needed.

Furthermore, Ms. Valenzuela has also participated in the ER over 60 project at Santa Fe Springs to assist in reducing the number of ER referrals pending investigation. Due to her dedication to the Child Welfare field Ms. Valenzuela is well respected by her colleagues, regional and CSAT administrators, DMH staff and other professionals who have had the pleasure of working with her. With her passion for her work, Ms. Valenzuela has established she is an asset to the department demonstrated she is well deserving of the DERA award for Outstanding Administrative Service Staff or Manager.

Outstanding Support Service Staff

Wanhee Jin, Senior Typist Clerk

Contracts Administrative Division, Headquarters

Wanhee Jin is a Senior Typist Clerk in the Contracts Administration Division. Ms. Jin is often viewed as the glue that holds the Division together. She exhibits a positive, professional, and supportive attitude towards her colleagues and peers as evidenced by the frequent openly public comments and acknowledgements from her colleagues, peers and managers in the Contracts Administration Division.

Ms. Jin effectively plans her work, anticipates potential problems, and appropriately elevates issues to the attentions of supervisors to avoid potential delays or risk. Most recently, in addition to her day to day duties, Ms. Jin functioned as the Division's Secretary were she is routinely required to perform urgent, confidential, and/or sensitive assignments during the secretary's extended absence.

Ms. Jin's work product is always accurate, thorough, and completed by the established deadlines; and in many cases well in advance of the deadline. She provides exceptional customer service to those within DCFS and the County as well as our community providers. Ms. Jin is diligent and resourceful. She seeks and obtains needed information to provide timely assistance to customer inquiries in a courteous and respectful manner. She is well versed in the requirements and demands of the Division and provides superb support to contract staff in various aspects of the contract development and maintenance process.

Ms. Jin outstanding performance in the furtherance of her duties and in meeting the Departmental and County goals is the reason she is the DERA award winner for Outstanding Support Service Staff.

Outstanding Team Staff Award

Kinship Support Services Staff

North & South Kinship Resource Centers

The Kinship Support Services staff have done an outstanding job of demonstrating continuous commitment towards connecting the children and families served by DCFS with relative caregivers. Through mailings, phone calls, support groups, home calls, and meetings with walk-ins to the Kinship Resource Centers, this small number of staff have remained available and dedicated to meeting the needs of relative caregivers and the children in their care. This not only increases safety for these children, but also reduces detentions from relatives who feel they no longer have the support and/or resources they need to provide adequate care for their kin.

Kinship staff have been charged with the responsibility of contacting approximately 6,700 Kin-GAP relative legal guardians in regards to Assembly Bill 12 (AB12). AB12 brings about important changes to Kin-GAP benefits that legal guardians need to know. The new program allows Kin-GAP legal guardians to negotiate the benefit rate when appropriate, allows Kin-GAP legal guardians to move to another state and continue to receive benefits based on that state's regulations, and extends the age of Kin-GAP benefits beyond age 18 for youth having a qualifying mental or physical disability. With the deadline of the end of the calendar year to reach the 6,700 Kin-GAP families and complete necessary paperwork approaching, staff are committed to make extra efforts to get the job done by the target date of completion. As a result, mailings have been sent out,

telephone calls made, and home visits conducted. Drop-in centers are also being held across Los Angeles County so that relative legal guardians can conveniently walk in and get the help they need completing the required paperwork for the AB12 conversion. In addition, Kinship Support staff work hard preparing case folders with the necessary paperwork. Many staff have said they are motivated by the knowledge of how much AB12 will benefit the children, and expressed their committed to making contact on behalf of every child under Kin-GAP to ensure that no child will be left out. To date, all Kin-GAP caregivers have been contacted either via mail, telephone or in-person. Because of their diligence and hard work, the completion of the necessary paperwork to meet the deadline is well under way.

In the month of June alone, more than 2,000 relative caregivers had direct contact with Kinship staff in an effort to ensure that the caregivers were informed of the benefits of AB12 and that they had the support they need to prevent placement disruption of the relative children in their care. Way to go Kinship Support Services staff and those who have pitched in for this monumental task! Our families are benefiting from your perseverance and commitment to support every relative caregiver in need of a helping hand.

**An Outstanding Colleague
Of Yours Could Be the Next Winner.**

NOMINATE Someone NOW!