

CONGRATULATIONS

DCFS ALL STARS

DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNERS

July 2011

Outstanding Direct Service Staff

Jessica Carrillo, CSW II

Wateridge

Jessica Carrillo is an Emergency Response CSW in the Wateridge office whose exemplary work has been noted by her clients and the rest of her office. At a recent TDM, a single mother of two was struggling with depressive symptoms as a result of unresolved grief surrounding her husband's death. The mother was overwhelmed and feeling hopeless on losing her husband as well as her job. Early on, the mother appeared guarded and felt hesitant about our Department being involved in her life. Jessica engaged the mother by validating her feelings and letting her know that she was there to help her. Subsequently, the mother was able to open up to Jessica and began to view her as a support in her family's life. During the course of her investigation, Jessica contacted the local SSI office and inquired into social security survivor benefits for the mother and her children. She transported the mother to the SSI office and advocated for her. As a result, she was able to secure SSI income for the mother and family. At a recent TDM, the mother shared that she was very happy with ER CSW Carrillo's assistance and support. The mother shared that the income that she has received from her SSI benefits has boosted her self esteem and she is now feeling better about being able to provide for her children. With this income, the mother was able to secure a low income apartment in Orange County. The mother also stated that she was motivated to go back to school. As a result of her being able to talk with Jessica about these difficult issues, she was feeling much better and ready to "begin a new life." ER CSW Jessica Carrillo's social work skills, involvement, and support made all the difference enabling this mother to move past a very difficult time in her life. Jessica makes this kind of commitment with all of her families, providing critical resources as needed. Most recently, she transported a family to a food bank to request emergency groceries. Jessica's commitment to providing support to families in crisis is reflective of her true dedication to the field of social work. She has been with the Department for approximately one year and maintains a very positive attitude, is eager to learn, and help her colleagues. Her work over the past year has made a lasting impression on the children and families we serve, her unit, and the Wateridge office.

Outstanding Team Staff Award

Deaf Services Unit-Alternative Specialized Program

Covina Annex

The Deaf Services Unit was established over 18 years ago with the support of Edelman Children's Court and an advocacy group known as Advocacy Council for the Deaf Abuse Children (ACADAC). Families who are deaf and/or hard of hearing face unique language and cultural challenges in the court room. There are two Deaf Services Units and most of the Children Social Workers are either deaf or hard of hearing. The Deaf Services Unit also has a supporting clerk who is deaf. Amazingly, the primary language of the Deaf Services Unit is American Sign Language. What make the Deaf Services Unit unique is not only the deaf or hard of hearing families they serve, but the type of services the Deaf Services Unit implements. Emergency Referrals that require specialized services from the Deaf Unit are forwarded to the Deaf Services Unit immediately for assessment. The Deaf Services Unit's worker has to be on call daily to handle incoming referrals from the Department's Hotline. The Deaf Services Unit has a vast level of services to implement, including: the Emergency Response referrals directly from the Hotline, completing the Dispositional/Jurisdictional court report and the continued servicing of families till their cases close. This type of initial community response provides early intervention with deaf and/or hard of hearing families to avoid any mishaps or confusions. While responding to referrals directly from the Hot line, the workers are producing parallel day to day work that includes providing Volunteer Family Maintenance, Volunteer Family Reunification, Family Maintenance, and Permanent Planning services to already existing cases. The Deaf Services Unit also operates on a county wide basis—not just in a regional area. The Deaf Services Unit is stationed at the Covina Annex office and automatically responds to all of the County areas, and outside of Los Angeles County as well. Since the families serviced are deaf and/or hard of hearing, barriers for public services are challenging resulting in many of the units workers traveling outside the county. Their assignments may take them to northern California, or to the east coast to ensure that the children receive the necessary specialized services they need that can not always be found in Los Angeles County.

While the Deaf Services workers focus on providing specialize services, they also act as a role model to many of the families they serve. In general, many of the families believe that being deaf or hard of hearing, or having a deaf child means not having a chance to be successful in life. For deaf children, social workers represent "hope" and bring "inspiration" to their families. The Deaf Services workers illustrate that it does not matter what kind of disability people have; there is still a chance for success in all areas in life, including education and a successful career. In many cases, even after a family has closed its case, the families will continue to reach out to the Deaf Services Unit workers for on-going support and guidance. Some families often call to report successful milestone such as a school graduation, birthday events and at times, to report how their children have succeed and excelled at school. Other families may visit with the social worker to simply show how tall their child as grown.

Because they fervently believe in the Department's goals and mission, the Deaf Services workers will go out of their way to provide their clients with necessary services. For example, one deaf CSW and a Sign Language Specialist interpreter sacrificed their own personal/family time during a weekend to transport and supervise a deaf and emotionally troublesome youth to Mexico to achieve "closure" with his mother's recent death by visiting the burial site. While at the town, relatives were contacted and due to the language barriers, the Sign Language Specialist used her trilingual language skills to translate from American Sign Language to Spanish. It is very clear that for over 18 years, the Deaf Services Unit, of the Department's Alternative Specialized Program, has performed with compassion and excellence in serving their clients and are truly deserving of the DERA Outstanding Team Staff Award.

Jesus Estrada and Karen Bowman, SCSWs

Valerie Lopez, CSW

Stacy Simmonds, CSW

Leeanne Unchangco, CSW

Pedro Dominiguez, CSW

Monique McIntosh, CSW

Mark Dana, CSW

Gillian Reynolds, CSW

Trinia Watkins, Unit Clerk

Kathryn Collier, Unit Clerk

Aaron Gardner, Interpreter Supervisor

Pete Chavez, Interpreter

Diana Parks, Interpreter

Jesus Gomez, Interpreter

Veronica Pizana, Interpreter

Norima Lonesky, Interpreter

Tom Lam, Interpreter

Darlene Stevenson, Interpreter

Melton Collins, Interpreter

Takisha Carter, HSA

Miriam Cosso, CSW in Training

Outstanding Support Service Staff

Martha Acosta, Adoption Assistant

Pomona

Martha Acosta is an Adoption Assistant/Family Finder assigned to the Pomona Office. Her position is fairly new and was designed to assist Emergency Response children's social workers in quickly locating missing parents or family members that could care for at risk or newly detained children. Her work obligations include: initiating searches on various search engines, sending out contact letters to identified addresses and physically searching for individuals. She also participates in Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings to obtain leads on who to

search for. Martha's bi-lingual skills in Spanish greatly enhances her ability in locating relatives interested in caring for detained children. She is actively involved in the coordination of the families' safety plans. She locates non-offending parents who are able to care for their children, instead of having the children placed in foster care. She succeeds even when the offending parent declines to give the non-offending parent's information for fear that they will lose custody of the child. Martha serves as Pomona's go to person when a search is needed for a long lost sibling or relative. The back end social workers utilize her services to locate individuals that can be a permanent connection for older youth that cannot or do not want to be adopted.

Martha is a true team player. She makes every effort to assist office personnel when help is needed, even if the requested task is not part of her job description. This past year, the Pomona Office Due Diligence Clerk was out on medical leave. Martha agreed to be trained on how to perform due diligence reports. She learned the procedures and completed due diligence reports in a timely matter which helped Dependency Investigators get court cases adjudicated and youth legally freed on schedule. Her assistance enabled the Pomona office to get caught up and avoid court sanctions. In addition, she helped cover the TDM scheduling desk when the scheduling clerk was out for over six weeks. She learned the position quickly, scheduling TDM's, maintaining logs of all meetings, and completing end of the month reports. Martha also assisted TDM facilitators with their data entry and regularly assisted social workers in getting court documents necessary to expedite relative approval in accordance with ASFA requirements. She also assists Spanish speaking relatives in completing the ASFA forms, explains to parents how to obtain their reference letters for 366.26 hearings, and informs newly located parents about detention hearings scheduled.

Martha translates office phone calls where the respondent parties only speak Spanish. She regularly accompanies English speaking social workers on investigating home calls to assist with Spanish translations to locate families that need to be assessed for safety. If the children need to be detained, she assists with transporting them back to the Pomona office. Back at the office, she'll watch over the newly detained children seeing to their needs. She also assists in covering for HSAs in monitoring a family visit, transporting children to the VIP clinic in her own car.

Martha's contributions are so many that they cannot all be listed in this limited space. Yet what distinguishes her work from others is her cheerful, positive, and empathetic natural way of doing things to make others feel supported.

Outstanding Administrative Manager

Saskia Gonzalez, CSA I

Belvedere

Saskia Gonzalez has done an outstanding job in implementing structure and procedures to support that MAT program at the Belvedere office. She has put systems and protocols in place to set up specific deadlines for MAT assessors so that required information is received in a timely manner, facilitating the delivery of services to families. Saskia's focus is always on child safety. She works closely with DMH, MAT Assessors and families to prevent further abuse by highlighting needs and developing a plan to provide the necessary services to support successful reunification. Because of her past work experience with DMH she is successful in accessing mental health services for children in need. Additionally, her good work with the ER Over-60 project demonstrates her commitment not only to DCFS, but also to the safety of children in LA County. Congratulations to Saskia Gonzalez, the DERA winner for Outstanding Administrative Manager.

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

NOMINATE Someone NOW!