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PRESS RELEASE

LA County Social Worker Honored as “Woman of the Year” by Assemblywoman Blanca Rubio for her Work with Lupus Patients

On March 12, State Assemblywoman Blanca E. Rubio (D-Baldwin Park) declared Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services social worker Juana Mata as the 48th Assembly District Woman of the Year, an annual event at Sacramento to celebrate the achievements of exceptional women across the state. Mata, who has been a social worker for 24 years, suffers from lupus but does not let her symptoms keep her from serving the community she loves.

“We owe a debt of gratitude to women like Juana,” Assemblywoman Rubio said. “When women lead, our communities thrive. Juana shines a light on lupus, and her work continues to positively impact the lives of countless individuals and families suffering from this illness by providing them with valuable resources.”

“Juana is shining star with a heart to serve some of the most vulnerable children in our community despite her own struggles with lupus, which can be a debilitating disease,” said DCFS Director Bobby Cagle. “Her selflessness is inspiring, and DCFS is lucky to have her as part of our family.”

Juana’s days are hectic working closely with San Gabriel Valley families as a DCFS social worker. Her focus is on strengthening families and protecting children from abuse and neglect. In her free time, she’s taken on a second job as an advocate for patients struggling with lupus, an autoimmune disease that occurs when the body attacks its own tissues and organs.

“To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service”

Mata and her family immigrated to the U.S. when she was 10. A visit to Disneyland quickly convinced the family to make their home in Baldwin Park and they've been here ever since. A 24-year DCFS veteran, she first started working as an eligibility worker but became a social worker in 2006, knowing the positive impact she could have on children and families.

In 2009, she started experiencing severe pain and body aches. She was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis before doctors were able to correctly diagnose lupus. Says Juana, "It was devastating. I thought my life and career was over." She was also diagnosed with a low platelet blood disorder, and inflammation of the lungs. Two years of chemotherapy followed. Today, Juana still struggles with pain and flare ups but is able to function and do the job she loves. "I have more understanding and sensitivity for the children and families I work with because of my own experiences," says Juana.

She and her family were frustrated while trying to learn more about the mysterious disease that had taken over her life. Juana and her sister became involved with local and international organizations including Lupus LA and the Lupus Research Alliance to promote awareness about lupus and raise money to support patients. In 2011, she and her two sisters founded Looms4lupus, a nonprofit organization that educates and provides outreach to lupus survivors and their family members through hands-on workshops, informational clinics, bilingual resources, and psychosomatic support groups.

Twice a month for the past seven years, she and her sister lead a lupus support group for patients in Baldwin Park at the Kaiser Community Outreach Center. "Lupus is hard to diagnose. I want patients to understand the symptoms and what they need to do to get appropriate care," says Juana.

On May 10th, seven cities in the San Gabriel Valley will proclaim World Lupus Day, largely in part due to the efforts of one very special woman, Juana Mata.

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