

Latino council honors caregiver who helped youth conquer medical needs

Each year at the annual Latino Institute, a caregiver is honored with the Outstanding Achievement Award. The Latino Advisory Committee selected David Montejano, of Bellwood for his dedication to enrich the too-short life of Daniel Hernandez. Francee Henley submitted this reflection on David and his relationship with Daniel as nomination for the award.

David Montejano has been a foster caregiver since 2005. David and his wife Enriqueta have cared for two very special men with disabilities. David and his family have demonstrated a rare ability to love unconditionally, all the while making it possible for these two men to achieve success in foster care.

Daniel Hernandez at the age of 16 came to the Montejano home in 2005, after residing in a residential facility for most of his adolescent life. He was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy and used a wheelchair for transportation. Due to Daniel's special needs, he required a wide variety of services, including but not limited to full-time nursing, in-home therapy, behavior management and respite care. Because of staff shortages

in the nursing field, the burden of most of Daniel's daily care fell to David. This included waking up in the middle of the night (every two hours) to turn Daniel, bathing Daniel, brushing Daniel's teeth, giving medication and maintaining countless medical appointments.

Even with the obstacles of life indoors, Daniel also was able to have a life-changing outdoor adventure. He went camping for the first time this past July.

"I wanted him to feel like a regular teenager so we had a weekend trip with the guys," said Montejano.

It took hours of manual labor to make the campsite wheelchair-friendly. Every sweat-drenched minute proved worthwhile. Daniel said it was "the best time of his life."

The trip was part of the closing chapter of Daniel's life. On August 4, Daniel Hernandez went into cardiac arrest and died. He was 19 years old. Daniel had recently attended his senior prom, graduated from high school, reconnected with his younger sister and had plans of attending college and becoming a sportscaster.



David Montejano (right) accepts the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Latino Advisory Committee.

Those accomplishments and dreams were made possible by the unconditional love of the Montejano family.

Since Daniel's passing, David has stayed connected with Daniel's younger sister, who currently resides in a residential facility. He drives an hour and a half to visit her every other Sunday. Thanks to his efforts and his love for Daniel's family, Daniel's sister has progressed and looks forward to transitioning back into foster care.

David gave Daniel back life. He loved Daniel past his pain and made it possible for Daniel to be defined by his talents rather than his disability.

College help in Cook County

Introspect is a community-based agency that can advise students on how to pick a college, discover financial aid resources and assist with the application process from undergraduate coursework all the way through the doctoral level.

The agency is located in Chicago and focuses on Cook County. The organization primarily serves youth in care. However, young people who aged out of the system, left through adoption or guardianship, and even those who had never been in care can also receive assistance. For more information, contact Bernard Clay at 773-287-2290.

A second program called Project Success focuses on helping adults 19 or older attend the college of their choice. The program's service area includes Chicago and the south suburbs. Project Success targets students from low-income households who are the first in the family to go to college. Yet, the organization also can assist students in other circumstances.

Project Success can provide career counseling, college search services, and financial aid counseling. Project Success also does presentations to groups of young people or the adults who support them. To get an application for the program, call 773-995-2371.

Cook North offers school help in Wheeling

In recent years, the contracts between DCFS and the Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LAN) service providers focused on creating programs to stabilize children in the current educational settings. These programs are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion.

LAN 38A covers Wheeling Township. Omni Youth Services conducts three student programs, two of which support Latino youth. *Movimiento* focuses on students age 14 to 18 exhibiting behaviors that result in suspension or expulsion.

Services are individualized and include mentoring, ESL classes, tutoring, parent support groups, and computer training. The After School program is for Latino youth in elementary or junior high school. Students meet four days a week in small groups that focus on changing school behavior. Parental involvement in these groups is also encouraged. Omni collaborates with eight area high schools for its Project Reclaim. Students who have been truant, suspended or expelled receive on-site group counseling at an area Alternative School. Contact Jon Conway at 847-353-1552.

Cook South preps youth for school and jobs

Cook South caregivers learned of two new DCFS initiatives to prepare youth for school and work. The Community Assistance Program (CAPs) Transitional Jobs Program has four offices that DCFS youth in Chicago and the South Suburbs can go to for orientation, job readiness training, and employment programs. CAPs staff will work with the youth to get them into careers and vocations.

The Transitional Jobs Program has 100 slots available at any given time. For additional information, please call the CAPs office at 773-468-1993 or John Kasper of DCFS at 312-814-5959.

Angela Foster, an Education/Transition Manager with the DCFS

with the Division of Service Intervention, trained caregivers and staff on the Annual High School Academic Plan. According to DCFS rules, each year of high school in September or October the caseworker will complete the form with the high school student and his family. Too often students will be in their fourth year of high school and suddenly realize they are short credits or missing community service hours.

"This form will help each youth think about his or her future. A young person should not wait until the last minute of High School to think about college," said Foster.

Contact Angela Foster at 312-814-6389 for further information.

Holiday parties bring Bears and Bulls out for families

After making a list and checking it twice, the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation delivered Christmas cheer to nearly 30,000 youth who had been abused or neglected. The Holiday Gift Giving program covered youth in foster care and also included youth in residential centers, independent living programs, the armed forces and college students.

Connie Payton, wife of Chicago Bears legend Walter Payton, keeps her husband's spirit alive through a continued commitment to children in need. For 14 years, the foundation has helped collect and supply nearly 800,000 gifts to youth in care throughout Cook County and for the first time in 2007, Aurora and Bourbonnais.

"Our foundation is about helping underprivileged children. Working closely with the DCFS, we strive to help boost these children's self-esteem and give them a reason to believe that tomorrow can be different and that tomorrow can be better," said Payton.



Connie Payton visited each holiday party in the Cook regions.

With the generous donation of refreshments by Dominick's Finer Foods and countless hours of volunteer service from staff and individuals, on December 15, families in each of the three Cook regions had a party to remember. Just like Santa, Mrs. Payton had many stops to make that day. DCFS held gatherings at 1911 S. Indiana, 6201 S. Emerald and 3518 W. Division. At each site DCFS staff (and sometimes family and friends) volunteered numerous hours to unload, sort and distribute the gifts. Add in music, clowns, decorations and hundreds of happy guests, and you have good memories to last throughout the year.

The following day, the focus turned from Bears to Bulls when the Chicago Bulls invited families receiving intact services to a festival at their "winter wonderland" at the Bull/Sox Training Academy training facility in Lisle. A performance by Benny the Bull got the party started and Bulls players kept the mood festive as they played Santa's helper to serve lunch, hand out presents and sign autographs from center court. The Bulls organization partnered with Harlem Irving Plaza, McDonald's Corporation, Country House Restaurant, and Dominicks to make this event memorable for 450 Cook County children and parents receiving services from DCFS.

"We work hard everyday on behalf of families. But working to make these parties successful is special. It is great to do something that



DCFS Assistant Director Velma Williams thanks Chicago Bulls players Chris Duhon, Andres Nocioni and Tyrus Thomas for spending time with families who receive DCFS services.

allows everyone to enjoy all of the goodwill that comes at this time of year," said Director McEwen.

Cook County Advocate reporters

Cook South ~ Rod Mulford
773-371-6350 office
773-371-6065 fax
Rod.Mulford@illinois.gov
6201 S. Emerald, Chicago, IL 60621

Cook North ~ Jackie Bright
312-328-2505 office
312-328-2688 fax
Jackie.Bright@illinois.gov
1911 S. Indiana, Chicago, IL 60616

Cook Central ~ Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen
773-292-7700 office
773-292-7861 fax
Merrylee.Guge-Jorgensen@illinois.gov
3518 W. Division, Chicago, IL 60651

Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Cook Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs* (9 training hours)

This workshop provides practical information to foster parents about how to use effective discipline techniques such as I-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

Chicago DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald
Feb. 6, 13, 20 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Chicago DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana
Feb. 21, 26, 28 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Module 4 - *The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse*

(9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

Chicago Hull House
Feb. 4, 6, 11 (M/W) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Module 11 - *The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment* (6 training hours)

Chicago Irish American Center
Feb. 25 & 27 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Module 12 - *Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development* (6 training hours)

This new course will assist Caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best promote healthy development for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use while fostering teenagers.

Chicago Irish American Center
Feb. 4 & 6 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Matteson Aunt Martha's
Feb. 25 & 27 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Cook North

Chicago Association House
(SPANISH)
March 15 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Cook Central

Chicago UCAN
Feb. 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Oak Park Hephzibah
March 29 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Cook South

Chicago DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald
Feb. 16 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Harvey DCFS Office
March 15 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Child Trauma

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

Cook North

Chicago DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana
Feb. 2 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Feb. 23 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Chicago Irish American Center
Feb. 23 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Cook South

Matteson Aunt Martha's
Feb. 4 & 5 (Mon/Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Chicago DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald
Feb. 9 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393
toll free