



## Sycamore Teen Reach Spring Carnival 2022!



*Teen Reach is a program held at the Huntley Middle school in DeKalb. It has grown to almost 50 participants heading into the summer months and has become known for its caring staff and ability to help the kids to improve their school work and have a fun time doing it. (Read more on page 3 "Teen Reach")*



### **¡BIENVENIDOS!**

Welcome! to this great platform of *Noticias* (News), highlighting great community events, resources, colleague's accomplishments, cultural spotlights and much more exciting information. *Noticias* is shared twice a year with all DCFS and POS teams.

I'm thankful for having this opportunity to share little more about me. First, it is a great honor for me as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services-Latino Advisory Council Chair Person to represent our Latino and Hispanic community within IDCFS and POS's child welfare community.

I started my Child welfare journey about 14 years ago in the private sector/Purchase of Services (POS) and then joined IDCFS team; I have embraced all Child Welfare learning experiences, the spirit of serving others and being an agent of change.

### ***Who are the Latino Advisory Council members?***

All members of the Latino Advisory Council, in advising the director promote the values of social justice. In 1988 an idea came to establish a Hispanic Advisory Committee centered in Chicago and the surrounding area. In 1992, the Committee became statewide, expanding its membership to include DCFS employees and private agency staff from outside of Cook County. Throughout the years, many IDCFS and private agencies professionals have gotten together and contributed in many areas to the work of the Hispanic Advisory Committee (today known as the Latino Advisory Council). Many Latino/Hispanic professionals have and are currently working together in the areas of advocacy and professional development focusing on improving Spanish speaking services for the children, youth and families we serve, shaping Latino professionals' skills and practices, and strengthening the collaborative work and partnerships around the state. For these reasons I believe that having been part of the Latino Advisory Council is an honor and requires a strongly committed team. I invite each of you to join this great advocacy journey and make a difference in our Illinois Communities.

Sincerely,

**Yeni Rojas**

Latino Advisory Council Chairperson  
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

***"Diversity is not about how we differ. It is about embracing one another's uniqueness"*** (Author Unknown)

# Meet the Gastons

By Julia Monzón

This month as the Gaston Family shares their story at the Professional Day Conference Raul and Maritza Gaston will celebrate their wedding anniversary. Little did they know then that in October they would come to celebrate their Family Day. The anniversary of the day that Raul, Maritza, Brianna and Yazmin (Jazzy) legally became a family.

Raul and Maritza grew up in Chicago's Humboldt Park Neighborhood. They both attended neighborhood middle and high schools. By the time they were ready for college they were married. Both worked while attending school. They both wanted to become teachers, so they took most of the same classes to save money on books. Maritza would do her homework after dinner and Raul would take the books with him to work to study there. Of course, they had plenty of study time together.

After graduating with their BA degrees from Eastern Illinois University, Maritza chose to teach elementary school and Raul older students. Raul had a dual major of education and Spanish language, so he was able to teach Spanish.

In 2002, Raul and Maritza became foster parents, in Urbana Champaign where



The Gastons: Brianna, Yazmín, Maritza and Raul.

their daughters, Brianna and Yazmín, became part of their lives. They later moved to DuPage County where the family continued to solidify, thrive and overcome diverse challenges of adoption including the fall out of the psychological trauma of being foster children which intensifies during adolescence.

Raul states, “it’s not always what you

sign up for. It’s a journey, you have to be flexible and roll with the punches.” His advice is, “do your homework, gather materials, resources, take your time, and consider the financial aspects. Taking in two infant girls led to two major shopping expeditions.

Raul stayed at home with Yasmin because they received her as a newborn straight out of the hospital and Maritza



## LAC MEMBERSHIP

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Professional Development Day

Contact Julia Monzón at  
[julia.monzon@illinois.gov](mailto:julia.monzon@illinois.gov)  
if interested in becoming a member.



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## Meet the Gastons *(continued)*



had just started a new job at an elementary school. He requested a leave of absence from work because at that time, infants had to be at least six weeks old to attend day care. They had planned on fostering a 4 or 5 year and were not considering adoption.

Several months later, the caseworker contacted them about fostering Brianna, she was 14 months old at the time. Brianna didn't understand English and needed a bilingual home. Briana and Yazmin share the same birth mother. His wife was visiting her mother in Chicago at the time, so Raul had to care for Brianna on his own. The parting comment of the caseworker who placed Brianna was, "Oh, and she is fearful of men." Yet Raul rose to the challenge. Raul and Brianna were able to connect through everyday living activities with Raul as her caretaker. They had outings, ice cream and play time. After



Maritza returned from Chicago, she took her turn and established her own relationship with Brianna. With two infants to care for, Maritza decided to leave her job and stay home to raise the girls. She returned to work after the girls started middle school. Both girls graduated high school with honors and took AP college courses.

That brings us to the present day. How is the family doing now? Recently, Raul and Maritza have noticed that Brianna has become more mature in her attitudes. She recently commented to her mother that she had a really nice stove. Something she would have never noticed in the recent past. Even so, she brought tears to her mother's eyes when she expressed her sincere heartfelt gratitude to her for actually becoming her mother and raising her.

Currently Brianna is engaged to be married this summer and resides with



her fiancé in Chicago. At 20, she is two years older than Maritza was she was wed. She left school when the pandemic hit but plans to return now that the things seem to be tapering down. Brianna is quite artistic with make-up and hair and looks forward to earning her license so she can practice professionally.

Jazzy, who played in a band during high school still loves music and is involved in her own music musical production. At 18 years of age, she attends Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and wants to become a psychologist and conduct research.

Maritza teaches a dual language first grade class and Raul is the Principal of Jefferson Middle School and the President Elect of the Illinois Principals Association.

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## Teen Reach

Staff from one of NYAP's newest offices spent the day entertaining almost 40 youth by hosting a carnival in DeKalb County. The Carnival consisting of games and activities was hosted by Teen Reach program director Velvet Mason of the Sycamore Illinois office.

The games as well as some outdoors activities were made possible by

NYAP Sycamore Teen Reach staff which consists of Velvet Mason, Elana Fleshman, Madyson Lucas and DeLandon Mason.

Teen Reach is one of five programs run out of the Sycamore office. The program serves as an afterschool program offering STEM education, mentoring, tutoring, as well as field trips and fun days such

as the Carnival day as well as field trips several times per month!

Learn more by visiting [www.nyap.org](http://www.nyap.org).

## Service Milestones (Oct. 2021 thru May 2022)

# Congratulations

### 5 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Milagros Acosta, Chicago
- Julia Corral, Springfield
- Ariel Frias, Springfield

### 10 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Pedro Tomas, Marion
- Urbano Anacleto, Glen Ellyn

### 15 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Vanessa Castro, Elgin
- Anabel Michal, Glen Ellyn
- Maria Quintanilla, Chicago

### 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Beatriz Cueva-Cano, Chicago

### 35 YEARS OF SERVICE!

- Marisol Davila, Chicago

## Welcome!

The Latino Advisory Council welcomes the FY2022 Hispanic hires to the DCFS Family.

- Jessica N. Arroyo
- Brenda J. Burciaga
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**NOTICIAS** is brought to you by the Illinois Department of Children and Family

Services and the Latino Advisory Council. It is distributed to DCFS employees, POS agencies and agencies affiliated with DCFS. The newsletter includes articles pertinent to child welfare, Latino welfare issues and DCFS/POS programs, and strives to be an informative source for staff by providing updates on new child welfare initiatives as well as upcoming events.

It is our hope to continue providing staff with a vehicle for the sharing of information. A major part of this endeavor is you! We are asking for your input, submission of articles and suggestions for improving Noticias. Articles related to your experiences with families and personal stories are also greatly appreciated.

Please submit articles, information about incoming events or news to: Julia Camacho Monzón, Strategic Communications Committee Chair [julia.monzon@illinois.gov](mailto:julia.monzon@illinois.gov)  
1911 S. Indiana Ave. Chicago, IL 60616

Or to any of the **Strategic Communication Committee members:**

Julia Camacho Monzón, Editor, Chair; José J. López, Final Editor; Evelyn Martinez; Jennifer Contreras; or Yeni Rojas, contributing writers and editors.

If you would like more information or would like to participate in one of the LAC subcommittees, please contact Yeni Rojas, 2022 LAC Chair at [yeni.rojas2@illinois.gov](mailto:yeni.rojas2@illinois.gov) or any LAC member.

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