



Parent Mentors Prepare for Back-to-School

As Northwest Center welcomes the new school year, Parent Mentors have joined the community at back-to-school events to help spread information on available resources for families and students. With Parent Mentor positions currently available at Northwest Elementary School and Marvin Camaras Elementary School, Parent Mentor Organizer Ana Lorenzana encourages parents to learn more about the program and its opportunities.

"The Parent Mentor Program is an opportunity to continue your education and workforce development," Lorenzana said. "Parent Mentors often get hired within the schools they participated in and go on to become teacher's assistants or Substitute Special Classroom Assistants."

Connecting with our community and sharing our resources is a priority as an organization. Throughout August, Northwest Center has attended numerous outreach and back-to-school events to meet with parents, principals, and residents.

"Many of the Northwest Center teams have been attending, like our Youth and Health Equity teams, each sharing a little bit of everything," Lorenzana said. "We attend these events to engage with all the different parents and it has helped us as an organization to be recruit more diversity, build relationships, and engage the families and principals of schools. Although we try to share our resources through social media and our website, it's still important to continue face-to-face relationship building through our community."

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a Parent Mentor for the current 2023-2024 school year, please contact Parent Mentor Organizer Ana Lorenzana by emailing ALorenzana@northwestcenterchicago.org or visiting our website for more information.



Employee Spotlight



"Your mental health is just as important as physical health."

Cindy Santana
Health Equity Resilience Manager

Health Equity Resilience Manager Cindy Santana joined Northwest Center in 2018, first working in rental counseling support at our affiliate organization, Northwest Side Community Development Corporation. Since then, Santana has received her Masters in Social Work and moved into her current position at the organization.

"I began a lot of relationship building during my internship and working on projects within the community, one of them being the mural on Grand and Cicero," Santana said. "To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted to do with social work, I just knew I wanted to be here at Northwest Center. My peers in my bachelor program were focusing on one on-one-work, like therapy and counseling, but I knew I wanted to focus on helping a wider range of people on a macro level."

Santana advocated for herself to continue working with Northwest Center during her Masters program after external encouragement to try different fields of social work, as she knew there was still much for her to learn through working at the organization.

"I was exposed to what a non-profit could look like in different settings with different people and programs through working with Women Forward, data entry, rental support, and at Steinmetz College Prep," Santana said. "During the pandemic when schools shut down, I was able to take a resilience building course and invest my time and energy into learning the curriculum. That's when I discovered how much I enjoyed the resilience building aspect of my work."

Santana has gone on to lead CRI Training at Northwest Center and create a space for resident to feel welcome and safe to share their stories while learning grounding exercises they can use to help themselves, their families, and the community.

"The curriculum is easy to follow and opens up the space for people to feel comfortable and vulnerable with each other," Santana said. "People tend to talk about their own experiences and trauma and some of it is really aligns with other people, creating a sense that no one is alone. People come with their own experiences and it's important to have an open dialogue about mental health. Culturally, people don't always talk about this or go to therapy, so hopefully it can open the door to breaking the stigma and encourage people to seek professional help once they feel confident to do so."

If you're interested in becoming trauma-informed, reach out to Health Equity Resilience Manager Cindy Santana by emailing CSantana@northwestcenterchicago.org for more information.

Hoops in the Hood: Creating Community for Youth



Hoops in the Hood has invited Belmont Cragin youth to participate in activities such as basketball, volleyball, and relationship building and has officially completed its eighth year in the community. Youth Organizer Juvilee Hernandez participated in Hoops in the Hood as a young person in 2016, and has since come back to participate in a role of leadership for the program.

"I encouraged young people to come join as a way to block out all the noise from their daily life," Hernandez said.

Hoops in the Hood focuses on creating a space for youth to get to know each other, bond, and let go of stress in a positive and healthy way.

"We want to change the stigmas that young people in the park is a bad thing," Hernandez said. "We want to create a space where the young people can gain social skills and learn how to treat themselves, each other, and public spaces with respect."

With 20-30 youth ranging from ages 11 to 15 showing up to each session this summer, Hernandez's hopes for the future of Hoops in the Hood is to encourage more diversity in age and gender.

"If you're a girl and basketball is something you're passionate about, you should stick with it and don't be afraid to join us next year," Hernandez said.

If you or a youth you know is interested in youth leadership opportunities at Northwest Center, contact Youth Organizer Juvilee Hernandez by emailing JHernandez@northwestcenterchicago.org.

Upcoming Events

For more information on events, visit our website at www.northwestcenterchicago.org/events



First-Time Homebuyer

Virtual Classes

English Session 1

October 21 + 10am - 1pm

English Session 2

October 28 + 9am - 2pm

Spanish Session

October 4 + 9am - 2pm



Know Your Rights

Parent University*

En Español

11am - 12pm

2 de Septiembre

23 de Septiembre



Car Booster Seat Education Workshop

Parent University*

September 19

10 am en Español

11 am in English



Conoce tus derechos

Parent University*

20 de Septiembre

12pm - 1pm

*Parent University is located
at 3030 N. Mobile Ave.
Chicago, IL 60639