



## CPAR New York City Summer Intensive

Northwest Center Grants Manager Solange Leon Vazconez and Data and Evaluation Manager Trina Grogan recently attended the Critical Participatory Action Research Institute in New York City. The CPAR Institute is a four-day summer intensive program that immerses participants in the theory, methods, and ethics of critical participatory action research through discussions and activities led by institutional and community-led researchers.

"Throughout this summer intensive program, I listened to and learned from community researchers in the New York area who work in local, state, city, and government agencies and nonprofits that are leading research projects with vulnerable populations," Leon Vazconez said. "We covered topics such as the history, theory, methods, and ethics of critical participatory action research while also collaborating in discussions and activities with other participants. This was my first time attending an in-person out-of-state conference, and it allowed me to fully engage with like-minded individuals while providing a space for critical reflection and analysis of my role as a grant manager. One exciting piece of information I learned and can apply at NWC is the community-led research methods that can further amplify residents' voices in our programmatic goals and outcomes."

Throughout the intensive, the two gained insight on how to apply unique research methods within NWC.

"I learned that research comes in so many different forms than we are traditionally taught in schools," Grogan said. "We all do research as a natural part of our day-to-day when we chat with friends, residents, family, etc. about what's going on in the world and how they feel about it. The findings of research can also be expressed in many different ways beyond charts and tables; they can come in the form of songs, comics, art, and so on. The traditional methods of research have their time and usage, but using methods like mapping, community-generated surveys, and performances can create a much more expansive view of the issue and allow it to be better addressed."

# Re:SET Community Organizing Campaign

Re:SET Chicago was a 3-day music festival that came to Belmont Cragin without any public announcement or community engagement and shut down Belmont Cragin's largest green space Riis Park for over a week. After hearing concerns about the music festival, the Northwest Side Community Development Corporation (NWSCDC) with collaboration from Northwest Center brought together community stakeholders and residents to discuss concerns about the impact the festival would have on the community, as well as the issue that the festival came to the community without any community engagement or affordable ticket options for Belmont Cragin residents. The campaign included several community meetings, actions, including a meeting with Alderperson Ruth Cruz, and testimony at the Chicago Park District Board Meeting.



As part of the organizing efforts, Alderperson Cruz made a commitment to the community and joined us for a meeting with the Chicago Park District and General Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer Rosa Escareño.

Cruz shared the following statement against Re:SET Music Festival, "Upon my taking office last week, I have learned firsthand that this festival is causing significant concerns for many locals about noise pollution, harm to our green spaces, public safety and parking issues... it is for these reasons that I must stand in solidarity with the community and withhold my support of this event."



To involve the community in this decision, more than 830 petitions were collected. The group of organizations, including 30th United, Belmont Cragin United, Riis Park Advisory Council, Faithworld Church, and Northwest Center's Health Equity team continued to survey during the event and invited attendees to a post festival meeting to discuss how the community can be more heavily involved in decisions that directly impact them.

Since these discussions and feedback, Alderperson Ruth Cruz committed to creating legislation that requires any festivals happening in our parks, communities, and neighborhoods to have a community engagement process. Northwest Center was invited to be involved in writing this legislation.

"Moving forward, we want petition signatures from 75 residents within a one mile radius of the event, more community engagement, no disruption to trees, shrubs, or other greenery, and for promoters to have an environmental impact statement," Parent Mentor Organizer Ana Lorenzana said.



## NWC transit ambassador invited on to CTA advisory board

After getting involved in Northwest Center's transportation work, community leader and transit ambassador Emmanuel Garcia was inspired to fight for systems change on a larger scale. As a member of the Belmont Cragin Youth Leadership Council and as a Transit Ambassador, Emmanuel began organizing with the community and championing safer transportation in Belmont Cragin.

"The first time I ever heard of Northwest Center was two years ago after my mom attended a computer class at Parent University," Emmanuel said. "She told me about a bike event NWC was holding, and I decided to go. That's

where I met Jeremy. I realized advocating for the community was a passion for me."

Since then, Emmanuel's leadership has continued to develop through leading community bike rides, meetings, and speaking at legislative town halls, meetings, and joining NWC in Springfield and in Washington DC. Based on all this work, Emmanuel worked with NWC to apply to be a member of the Chicago Transit Authority Advisory Board.

"The CTA board is currently all adults, and I know this will be a great experience," Garcia said. "I get to speak up for the youth and their needs and discuss what improvements should be made for transportation in the community. After I started to work with Northwest Center, I learned how to be a leader."

Emmanuel was chosen to hold a seat on the CTA Advisory Board for a two-year term after being chosen from an application pool of over 125 individuals.

## First Time Home-Buying

Interested in buying your first home? We offer free group workshops and individual counseling to explore the home-buying process, build your credit, and close the deal.



In 2022, the NWC Housing Counseling Center's First-Time Homebuying (FTHB) team provided down payment assistance, supported the purchase of 10 homes, helped 10 individuals become mortgage-ready in 90 days, and hosted 21 workshops serving 217 participants.

**Request your appointment and learn more today!**

Email FTHB Counselor Edwin Pinto  
[EPinto@northwestcenterchicago.org](mailto:EPinto@northwestcenterchicago.org)



## Employee Spotlight



"Never be afraid of change because you don't know what good opportunities the change can bring to your life."

**Yeni Pinedo**

**Director of Community Schools & Youth**

Director of Community Schools and Youth, Yeni Pinedo, began her journey with Northwest Center in 2018. Before starting as a Parent Mentor Coordinator for Dr. Jorge Prieto Math and Science Academy, Pinedo was heavily involved with the school.

"Parents knew me; I was there asking 40 to 50 people to come to a meeting every time we'd advocate something," Pinedo said. "When the principal that was previously there left, the new principal brought the Parent Mentor Program with them. One of the secretaries invited me to join because of how involved I was in the community and how well I knew the school; I said yes."

In 2022, Pinedo became Director of Community Schools and Youth.

"At first, I was scared to accept the director position," Pinedo said. "I think I struggle more than others because English is not my primary language, and I have to think twice. Whenever people are speaking in English, I have to translate in my head, but so far it's been great."

A personal goal of Pinedo is to go back to school and learn more English to apply to her current role.

"Don't let language be a barrier for you," Pinedo said. "It's been a struggle for me, but I work with people who understand me and don't judge me. I'm grateful for that."

## Move Ahead with Dalia podcast

Northwest Center has recently been featured on the local podcast Move Ahead with Dalia, hosted by Dalia Cajigas. Each week, Dalia sits down with community leaders to highlight their work and the opportunities available to residents. Check out the podcast on her Facebook page to see conversations with Northwest Center's Director of Financial Opportunity Center and Housing Counseling, Youth Organizer, Director of Older Adult Programs, Executive Director, and more!



**LISTEN**  
**HERE**



# The fight for Francisco continues!



Community members gathered outside of the Cook County office in protest on June 28 for the release of longtime Belmont Cragin resident Francisco. However, Francisco is still currently detained by ICE and facing deportation. We are demanding that ICE Secretary Alejandro Mayorka halt the deportation of Francisco and release him from ICE detention immediately. Follow us on social media for any updates about future mobilizations and continue signing and sharing the petition (QR code above) to free Francisco. View a livestream of the rally on our Facebook page.

## We're hiring!

Join the Northwest Center team and apply for our open positions on our website. The application for Executive Director will close on July 21, 2023.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | [Click here to read the job description](#)

## Upcoming Events

For more information on events, visit our website at [www.northwestcenterchicago.org/events](http://www.northwestcenterchicago.org/events)



**Women Forward  
Parent University\***  
Sábado  
2 de septiembre al 18 de  
noviembre  
9:30 am - 12:30 pm



**Playstreets**  
2220 N Long Ave  
August 12  
12 -4 pm



**Belmont Cragin Club**  
Riis Park: on the corner  
of Meade & Wrightwood  
Thursdays  
6 - 7:15 pm



**Adelante**  
Parent University\*  
August 1 to September 7  
9 am - 12 pm

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