

THE PROMISE



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Ms. Claudia and her students from her home country.

MY FIRST LITTLE STEPS

We are in the first months of the new year, and goals and purposes are still feeling in the atmosphere; that is why this time, with the purpose of continuing to motivate our community, we have decided to interview Teacher Claudia to share and highlight her story and trajectory as an educator and owner of *Mis Primeros Pasitos*, who is also currently an MPN Family Child Care Provider Community Partner.

The story begins in 2004 when Claudia, six months pregnant, decides to come to the USA in search of the American dream. Even though she was already working as an educator in El Salvador, Claudia embarked on this journey that would change her life radically. She tells us that three months after entering this country, she gave birth to her child, and as the only provider without economic stability, her worries began to grow. "My mind couldn't comprehend that in my country I had educated so many children, so why would I not have the privilege of caring and educating my son," says Claudia; it was then that with the unconditional support of her sister and brother-in-law who allowed her to use their house to care for their son and other children. Claudia was able to start her daycare; *Mis Primeros Pasitos* (My First Steps) daycare, which "As the name indicates, I wanted to be part of the children's first steps in an environment of love, protection and security" emphasizes Claudia.

But although it sounded easy, it was not, and Claudia told us that she faced several obstacles. One of her biggest challenges was the language barrier, a situation that worsened when she became a single mother since it was difficult for her to find time to work and study. That is how she realized the lack of support that there was in the area of early childhood in this country since the childcare system is essential for fathers and mothers like her to find economic and emotional stability. Although Claudia had

completed her education in her country of origin, she thought that she could not apply that knowledge here and that she would have to start over. However, despite the very adverse situation in which she found herself, she felt motivated and decided to take classes at night and little by little she began to establish herself until she was able to obtain a diploma as a child care teacher at City College.

Ms. Claudia mentioned, "Children are capable of achieving full development and learning when their abilities and needs are taken into account as unique individuals." It is with this belief that Claudia's mission through her Child Development Center, *Mis Primeros Pasitos*, has been to be a reference center for quality early childhood education. With that philosophy, her vision is to obtain a larger license and continue working with more low-income fathers and mothers.

Claudia tells us that she plans to retire one day. By then, she would like her legacy to be a positive and significant influence in the lives of many children who have received care at her childcare center, "I would like to install that love in them." and desire to learn so that they achieve their goals and ambitions and that they can create a better future, and can become solvers of their problems."

Claudia has had the privilege of sharing her experience and professional knowledge with new early childhood educators or child care providers so that they also can open their child care center and reach her goals as she achieved them; that is why we asked Ms. Claudia to share three valuable tips based on her experience, for all those people who are starting their career as a teacher or child care provider. Her first advice is, **"Study. Staying in constant training will allow you to grow as a professional and benefit the children because you will be able to provide them with quality care."** She also suggested to us, **"Be very patient. Growth as a professional or a small businessman is achieved step by step, with effort and dedication. There is nothing wrong with starting from the bottom but with patience and dedication, you will be able to grow as a professional."** Finally, she recommends that every early childhood educator: **"Take the time necessary to get to know each child well, understand and respect them as individuals and as a family member, remember that communication and respect for children and their families is the key to success."**

We would like to thank Dannhae Herrera-Wilson, Family Child Care Specialist Coach for connecting us to Ms. Claudia and sharing her inspiring journey.

MPN's model is to harness the power of our community so every family succeeds and every student has the opportunity and tools to go to college.



Good Sam's Jovenes Promotores at the CRC Presentation.

COMMUNITY REPORT CARD FOR THE YOUTH

The Community Report Card(CRC) has been an ongoing task that has been led through parents, youth and some of our MPN team members. This project started back in 2021, with this design team engaging in one-on-one interviews and focus groups to gain insights directly from community members. Parents and youth became the researchers, designing the questions and collecting stories that would shape the CRC's foundation. What emerged from these interactions were profound insights into the challenges families face navigating complex systems, especially during a pandemic. The report card also revealed that young people feel a tremendous pressure from their parents to succeed in this country, because of trauma and struggles parents have experienced migrating to this country and navigating the US system.

After months of collaboration, the design team came up with an App idea. The App aims to collect data on community barriers and desires, creating a dynamic platform for community members. Here, they can not only share their experiences but also access videos and stories from their peers, all while gaining instant access to the collected data. The App gives families the tools to advocate for their needs and drive systemic change.

The App includes a youth component that is evolving by facilitating a CRC presentation in youth safe spaces where they have the opportunity to learn about the app and how their contributions help shape this work, and share stories through it.

We recently hosted our safe space youth group with Good Samaritan's Jovenes Promotores to share the development of the CRC and the importance of the youth voices in the development of this work. We were able to discuss the youth component of the CRC application and asked for their feedback. Through engaging with the application and filling out the youth

survey, a dialogue arose regarding their experience as being children of immigrants and what that entailed as they navigate the school system, the language barrier, and having to work to help sustain their family. Many youth shared that this has been the first time they have been asked; if they can choose between school or work, which would they choose. Also the question of what are the expectations that your parents have for you, continue your studies after High School or work to help with expenses. These survey questions lead to a discussion about the immigrant youth experience in the community whether it is language barrier, legal status, mental health, their school climate, social or emotional relationships. The Jovenes Promotores youth shared an interest in wanting to continue to learn more about this work and be part of the system change movement to elevate their voices for a better future.

Our goal is to continue to host CRC safe space groups with other young people to capture their stories and have an open dialogue on the barriers that they experience as children. This story was brought to you by Susana Gil Duran, Family & Youth Engagement Specialist.



THE PROMISE COMMITTEE

From left to right: Alejandro, Karla, Aarón and Celina. Our mission is to share stories of students, families, and partner organization accomplishments and stories across our network. The Promise newsletter will be published quarterly, so the next one will be in Fall 2023. If you have an idea or would like to share your story, contact Alejandro at (415) 857-2834 or abautista@medasf.org.