



Diana Santana

Throughout HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH, CTI will feature profiles of local Hispanic leaders to celebrate [#LowellHispanicExcellence](#) by learning about their experiences, perspectives, and the wisdom they share in our local communities.

**Hispanic Heritage Month 9/15-10/15
An Interview with DIANA SANTANA**

Nominated by **Claudia Aguirre**, Case Manager for RAFT-ERMA at CTI

What is your title/organization and/or involvement in the community, and what accomplishment are you most proud of?

- Lead Case Manager, Community Teamwork's Residential Programs
- Latinx Community Center for Empowerment (LCCE)'s Board of Directors
- City of Lowell's Hunger & Homelessness Commission's Commissioner
- Mel King Institute (MKI)'s Mentoring Program's Mentee
- Coalition for a Better Acre & Lowell Alliance: Empower Leadership Program's Alumna

The accomplishment that I am most proud of is obtaining my Master in Community Psychology and being able to utilize those gained training and skills in the area of homelessness/social services.

What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?

A month in which we celebrate and enhance the roots, dedication, and accomplishments of individuals who identify as Latinas and Latinos, as well as highlighting businesses, organizations, and entities also serving the Latin community –especially sharing our rich cuisine, el Sabor Latino!

What was one of the most difficult obstacles you have had to overcome?

Facing homelessness in the United States, a country that was not where I was born and raised from and when my English skills were not as polished or refined as nowadays.

In your leadership role, how do you actively promote inclusivity and equity?

I promote inclusivity and equity by treating our staff, clients, and community partners with the same level of respect and empathy, recognizing that I cannot follow a one-shoe-fits-all way of thinking. Instead, I continue striving to meet anyone where they're at, with an open mind, so I can best assist them.

What legacy do you hope to leave behind?

Advocacy and commitment. I believe that anyone, at their own pace and level of access/outreach along with some tools/encouragement, could have the capacity to advocate for themselves and for others in need. It would start with our will and maintained with our dedication (commitment).

Looking back on your leadership journey, what would you tell your younger self about embracing your identity and stepping into a leadership role with confidence?

An accent is just a “distinctive mode of pronunciation of a language.” Thus, anyone, no matter where they are from, has one. Don't be shy or afraid to express yourself just because some people asked you “where are you from” after hearing you speak. Particularly, it is perfectly fine to teach those who do not speak Spanish how to pronounce your name. :D

What has been the most rewarding part of your commitment to the community?

The most rewarding part of my commitment to the Latin community has been when being able to speak Spanish with clients who mainly or only speak the same. Seeing their reaction and the way they express appreciation with a level of relief is fulfilling. It also gives me a chance of taking a break of my inner “stress” of constantly translating my Spanish thoughts into English.

How did you become inspired to make a difference in your community?

I come from a family who love to work with the community, specifically when residing in the Dominican Republic. While facing homelessness in Massachusetts, in 2011, helping families experiencing the same issue at the shelter we were placed, was somehow “self-expected” for me but the feeling and outcomes of doing so was very rewarding. Despite the limited English skills and access, not knowing my shelter rights, and expecting my second child, I was inspired by my parents' willingness to help anyone, regardless of social-economic status. Therefore, it made my shelter experience meaningful and it gave me the inspiration to continue helping and getting educated in this field.

What do you hope to accomplish in the future to further your positive impact?

Being able to work in the field of homelessness/social services at an ecological level –from systems to individuals within families experiencing homelessness and the barriers attached to it.

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