



Claudia Aguirre with her son Luis.

“He is my daily sparking touch to continuing working and advocating for those in need.”

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 CLAUDIA AGUIRRE,
Case Manager RAFT and ERMA at CTI

Nominated by **Karonika Pholy Brown**, Job Developer, Financial Education Center, CTI

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

The accomplishment that I am proud of is breaking the fear of learning the English language. As the first generation of my family to emigrate to the USA without a word of the second language, I completed my bachelor's in Community Engagement. I am able to use what I have learned and the skills I gained in the community and in the job I performed in the organization and with my clients.

- Case Manager for the RAFT program in the Housing & Consumer Education Center-HCEC.
- I am part of the Board of Directors at the Latinx Community Center for Empowerment LCCE.
- First Hispanic Latinx Festival Organizational Committee
- Coalition for a Better Acre & Lowell Alliance: Empower Leadership Program's Alumna.
- Ebenezer Church Soup Kitchen & Covid's Active Member Committee empowers and serves families in difficult times with "Obras de Amor".
- Flower Festival in New York Organizational Committee from 2012 to 2016
- Coordinator and Director for the Fundraising "Todos por Ashley" 2015 in the city of New York.
- Coordinator and Active Member in the Fundraising and First Aid Items for those who were affected by the Ecuadorian Earthquake in 2016 in the city of New York.

What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?

It is a time when Latinos enjoy sharing our customs and traditions with others in many ways; From our rhythms and dances to the music of the tamboras and the accordion, and to delicious plates rich with flavors are the combination's own identity. Furthermore, everyone is invited to enjoy and celebrate our roots.

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

I faced living in an estranged country as an adult where I didn't speak a word of English and had to work hard to accomplish my American dream. In my early 40s, I started to learn the language. I received my Bachelor's in my fifties, believing in my American Dream with all my ups and downs with the courage to teach my kids and others that no matter the difficulties, if you pursue your desire, you will achieve your goals.

I always say: "Get out of your comfort zone and embrace the future that is written for you."

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

Personally, love and respect for what I am doing in the community helps me promote inclusivity and equity, not only to my coworkers, family, and friends but to my clients as well. With my example of understanding that everyone has different situations and I cannot see the picture that is in the frame, I need to see out of that frame to understand that we have different backgrounds and roots that shape us in many ways. This is how I can serve others in their difficult situations at most moments.

What legacy do you hope to leave behind?

Advocacy and respect. My own experience with having a child with special needs taught me how to advocate for under privileged people. Treating with respect the organizations and the personnel that helped us at that moment opened many doors for my son's benefit. Understanding that the commitment to help is personal and respect starts in oneself. Therefore, I have taken that as my model.

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?

Back then I was fearless, I was ready to fight for what I was creating, to aid others, and be ready for them. Today, I take things more calmly trying to find ways to support and help those in need with love and kindness. Ultimately, every individual makes their own choices; at some point, we must accept them with respect. Understanding their beliefs and wishes.

How has being Hispanic influenced your work and your life?

Our Latino people have a lot to share and give to the community. Unfortunately, fear is one of the many issues that Latinos in this country have. The legal status situation in the country, the language barrier, and the lack of information about the resources that are available for everyone are the major issues that Latinos face. As a Latina who works in and for the community, I have the opportunity to share many of those resources that are for everyone. Sometimes, I was afraid to speak because of my thick accent, and overcoming that obstacle gave me the strength to help others when I found myself in the same situation.

What can the community do more of to recognize Hispanic heritage throughout the year?

The community needs to see Latinos for who we are. We are more than immigrants who are here to take jobs. We are humans with dreams and hopes too, we are just looking for a chance to enjoy and share our culture, our food, and music. The Latino community is kind, and caring, and we love to be accepted for our contribution to this country.

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

Having the opportunity to help those who barely speak the language, to guide them, to help them in the same language, makes me very proud when I provide the service.

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

Always had the calling to serve others. Back in Colombia, due to the lack of services for the community, we were forced to create a coalition with other leaders in the community, and even in our neighborhood to achieve the changes needed to help the community.

Speaking aloud and bringing the community's necessities to the right place will open the doors to making a difference. However, it was not until I arrived in the USA that I understood the importance of being part of the community through different organizations that are key to making a difference in our Latino Community and empowering them to be active members to achieve better lives for all.

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

Work more closely with those in need, helping them reach their goals and continue to reach out to more people depending on their needs. However, through time, fear is a wall we create. An obstacle that prevents us from reaching our potential as proud immigrants to this country. Everything starts with a dream and we have to work with passion, love, and caring to obtain the success in what we desire to do.

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