



# Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition

**Rebecca Ford-Paz (Co-Chair; Workforce Capacity Workgroup Leader)** is the founding co-chair of the Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition's Ad-Hoc Committee for Refugee and Immigrant Children and Trauma as well as the co-chair of the Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee of the Chicago is With You Task Force in the Mayor's Office of New Americans. Dr. Ford-Paz is an Attending Clinical Child Psychologist within Lurie Children's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Assistant Professor at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and Psychologist for the Lurie Children's Center for Childhood Resilience. She has nearly 20 years' experience in community/school mental health. Her work focuses on reducing health disparities by increasing access to evidence-based and culturally responsive prevention/treatment interventions, building the capacity of community-based providers, and conducting community-based participatory research. Dr. Ford-Paz has a longstanding interest in Latinx mental health and clinical work, research, and advocacy with Latinx and immigrant/refugee populations.

**Willis Francis (Co-Chair)** is Director of Clinical Services at Heartland Human Care Services, SAFETY Initiative programs, with 20 years of experience in the field of mental health. His areas of expertise include specialized training in Social and Cultural foundations and the intersectionality between culture, human diversity and clinical practice. Mr. Francis has substantial clinical management expertise working with vulnerable populations. In this capacity, he has overseen clinical services provided to urban youth, unaccompanied immigrant children, LGBTQ, complex trauma & human trafficking victims. Throughout his career, Mr. Francis has worked collaboratively with organizations and providers to meet the needs of children and their families.

Mr. Francis direct practice in childhood trauma, relational approaches and CBT, including EBMs such as TF-CBT. He participated in a 2-year DBT training program provided by the Marsha Linehan group, and a separate Motivational Interviewing Advance Training provided by Dr. William Miller, Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. His practice has included work with victims of severe physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, gang involved opportunity youth, in-patient psychiatric adolescent, and tender age/pediatric populations with congenital medical conditions. Mr. Francis is Co-Chair of the Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition committee on immigrant and refugees. Mr. Francis is engaged in academia. He served for 3 years as Associate Professor at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, and as Preceptor for Northwestern University Masters of Counseling program in 2018-19. Mr. Francis is originally from Colombia. He joined Heartland in 2010. [wfrancis@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:wfrancis@heartlandalliance.org)

### **Gabriela Alvarado (Public Awareness Workgroup Co-Leader)**

Gabriela Alvarado is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor at AMK Counseling. She provides trauma-informed therapy to children, teens, and adults who struggle with anxiety, depression, family challenges, trauma, and cultural adjustment issues. Prior to earning her counseling degree, Gabriela worked for four years in the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) in San Antonio, Texas. As a legal assistant and BIA Accredited Representative, Gabriela provided Know Your Rights presentations and legal representation to detained unaccompanied minors in Texas. Gabriela has participated in RIC since 2016 and currently co-leads the public awareness workgroup.

### **Karen Chia (Public Awareness Workgroup Co-Leader)**

Karen Chia is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker currently working in the Academic General Pediatrics Primary Care clinic at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. She is also in private practice. Karen has a background in child psychiatry, immigrant & refugee mental health and school social work. She has worked at the UIC Counseling Center with international students, immigrant, refugee and DACA students, the Marjorie Kovler Center for Survivors of Torture and Jewish Child and Family Services Therapeutic Day School.

### **Sandy De León (Advocacy & Public Policy Workgroup Co-leader)**

Sandy De León, A.M., is a Policy Manager at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. In her current role, Sandy's work includes supporting the work of local, city, and state level committees in Illinois related to the development of comprehensive early childhood systems for children birth to five and their families and developing and implementing advocacy agendas and strategies to expand, enhance and reform programs and services. Among Sandy's most recent accomplishments is completion of the BUILD Initiative's Equity Leaders Action Network (ELAN) fellowship, where she and other leaders across the nation worked together to identify, address and take action on issues of inequity based on race, ethnicity, language and culture in our early childhood state systems. Sandy also represents The Ounce on the Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) national campaign and is a Steering Committee member for PIF-Illinois coalition.

### **Aimee Hilado (Advocacy & Public Policy Workgroup Co-leader)**

Aimee Hilado, PhD, LCSW is an academic, researcher, and clinician specializing in refugee and immigrant mental health. She founded the RefugeeOne Wellness Program, a mental health program for refugees and asylum-seekers and continues to coordinate mental health professionals and immigrant-/refugee-serving organizations through her work on the Illinois Refugee Mental Health (ILRMH) Task Force and the Chicago is With You (CWY) Task Force. In the Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition (ICTC) Refugee and Immigrant Subcommittee, Dr. Hilado serves as the Co-Chair of the Policy Work group, disseminating relevant refugee-focused information and ensuring the unique needs of refugee children, youth and families are reflected across the RIC initiatives.

### **Sahar Al-Najjar**

Sahar Al-Najjar, PhD Candidate in clinical psychology at Illinois Institute of Technology, is a licensed therapist in practicing areas of mental health and sexual assault advocacy. Sahar is a counselor at Arab

American Family Services which is a nonprofit social service agency founded in 2001, provides caring, compassionate assistance to (South Suburban) Chicagoland residents, with special sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic needs of Arab Americans. AAFS offers support in the areas of public benefits, immigration, domestic violence, mental health, and elderly services and sponsors outreach programs to build healthier families and communities. Sahar also provides integrative trauma centered counseling services through her fellowship at Loyola Hospital in the department of Psychosocial oncology."

### **Rocio Velazquez Kato**

Rocio Velazquez Kato is the Immigration Policy Analyst at the Latino Policy Forum. She is a licensed attorney with a background in immigration law. Rocio previously worked at the DePaul Legal Clinic and participated in the Clinic's Asylum and Immigration Clinic during law school. Rocio volunteered with ProBAR's South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation project in Harlingen, Texas, helping unaccompanied minors. Rocio facilitates the involvement of the Form's immigration allies in public decision making and intentional advocacy on immigration-related issues at the local, state, and federal levels. Rocio also provides workshops for school administrators, students, and parents, regarding immigration policy, its impact on academic success, mental health, and how to ensure all in Illinois succeed, regardless of their place of birth. Rocio holds a J.D. and a Master's Degree in International Public Service from DePaul University.

### **Susie Mazaheri**

Susie Mazaheri, M. Ed., LCSW is a clinical social worker who completed a 30-year career in school social work with an emphasis on crisis intervention and support services to children with special needs and their families. Provision of casework, outreach and mental health services on local initiatives and within Red Cross-national disaster team responses has been facilitated by her Spanish and Farsi interpreting services. Serving as an advocate for the Young Center for Immigrant Children to support youth in federal immigration detention has been an additional volunteer focus. Currently, Susie provides casework, consultation, advocacy and interpreting services to immigrant and refugee families across varied settings including schools, Red Cross shelters, mental health and medical centers, family service agencies and refugee programs in the Chicago area.

### **Erika Mendez**

Erika Mendez is the Early Childhood Education Policy Analyst at the Latino Policy Forum. The Latino Policy Forum fosters Latino participation in statewide public policy discussions. We seek to inform, influence, and lead the public policy debate in the areas of early childhood and bilingual education. Over the course of the past year, the undocumented Latino community has faced many challenges attributed to the role surveillance and heightened scrutiny in the current immigration climate. This has deterred many families from: accessing governmental services, interacting with social networks, and interacting with children in enrichment opportunities. This is of particular importance because children are often have an acute awareness of the risks associated with immigration status and witness immigration raids, making it challenging to cope with any other health or wellness issues. The Forum aims to bring awareness to the mental health of Latino communities experiencing trauma.

### **Luis Narvaez**

Luis Narváez is a Doctoral student at National Louis University and the EL Post-Secondary Manager at the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Office of Language and Cultural Education. In his daily work, Luis collaborates internally with his office's Community Relations Representative, Refugee Supports, and Newcomer Services teams to ensure that both immigrant students as well as their families are receiving adequate services while enrolled at CPS. He's also the manager of the CPS DREAM Fund Scholarship and provides regular training to stakeholders around the Illinois DREAM Act. Externally he is constantly collaborating with the CPS Office of School Counseling and Postsecondary Advising, the Office of Early Childhood Education, the Office of Diverse Learners, Supports and Services, and the Office of Social and Emotional Learning.

### **Catherine DeCarlo Santiago**

Catherine DeCarlo Santiago is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor in Psychology at Loyola University Chicago. Her work includes evaluation and dissemination of trauma-informed services in schools (e.g., Bounce Back) among diverse populations including immigrant children. She partners with school and community stakeholders to examine effectiveness, implementation, and sustainability of community interventions among underserved populations. In addition, she has conducted a longitudinal study examining stress and coping among Mexican-origin immigrant families. With recent funding, her team is expanding this work to examine mental health and family functioning post-election in efforts to inform policy change. Finally, she has partnered with RIC and the CCR to evaluate the effects of You Are Not Alone professional development trainings on recipients' satisfaction, attitudes, knowledge and behavior.

### **Jose Marco Paredes**

Jose Marco-Paredes is the Latino Policy Forum's Senior Policy & Communications Analyst. Among his responsibilities, Jose focuses in advancing the organization's Early Childhood's policy agenda at a city level. He also leads the Education Acuerdo, an advocacy work group of ECE community leaders that serve Latinos and other immigrant communities. Prior to the Forum, Jose worked as a political reporter in his home country, Spain.

### **Dana Rusch**

Dana Rusch is a licensed clinical psychologist and an assistant clinical professor at UIC in the Department of Psychiatry at the Institute for Juvenile Research (IJR). She is also a member of the Community Engagement and Collaboration Core for UIC's Center for Clinical and Translational Science. Her work focuses on building university-community-policy partnerships to address the mental health needs of immigrant and refugee children and families. She has an interest in developing family mental health advocacy interventions to support community-based organizations in mental health promotion. She directs an Immigrant Family Mental Health Advocacy program at IJR that focuses on direct clinical services, community-engaged research, and advancing policy. In addition to ICTC-RIC, she serves on the Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health's leadership and the UIC Provost's Task Force on Immigration Issues and APA's Division 27 Immigration Issues Special Interest Group.

**Nicole St. Jean**

Dr. Nicole St. Jean is a clinical psychologist and research associate in the Mental Health Services and Policy Program at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. At Northwestern, she serves as the Clinical Director for the Center for Child Trauma Assessment, Services, and Interventions, where she provides directorial and clinical oversight to the Center's activities in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice, and culturally responsive practices. She is also the Director of the Kovler Child Trauma Center, a community treatment center in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). The Kovler Center specializes in providing comprehensive psychosocial and therapeutic services for refugee and immigrant youth and families impacted by war, displacement and resettlement, family separation, and torture. Dr. St. Jean has been in the field of complex trauma for over 15 years and dedicates her time to direct clinical practice with youth and families from historically oppressed and under-resourced communities and providing training and consultation across multidisciplinary settings including law firms, juvenile justice settings, schools, and with students.

**Hoyam Tanon**

At Chicago Counseling & Training, we provide high-quality, compassionate services to Arab and African immigrants, refugees, and other under-served communities so that they can thrive and prosper in their new society. We are a group of diverse therapists who specialize in post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic violence, families in crisis, learning disorders, and severe emotional and behavioral disorders. We work with children, adolescents, families, and communities; we also provide professional referrals. Our staff are fluent in Arabic, French, Georgian, Russian and English. We accept Medicaid, Sliding fee scale and private insurances.