

# Centro Goes Virtual

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## NEWSLETTER Summer/Fall 2020

Letter from our Executive Director

Our Dear Community,

While our building remains closed, Centro is just as busy. Virtual youth programming, online graduations, and through emergency relief, funding that distributed close to \$1.2 million dollars in rent and financial assistance - we are committed to this community.

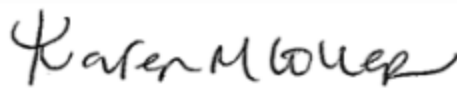
We miss seeing you, laughing with you, and gathering - in person. But we are committed to always continuing to plant seeds of hope so that our city and county can thrive. The future of Dane County is rooted in communities of color, young and old, people, who are the foundation of the next generation.

Through this newsletter we are excited to share with you beautiful stories of resilience and hope from Centro over the last few months, including welcoming our first Senior Social Work Manager for our Family Support Services Program Team (formerly known as General Support). Staff at Centro is now more important than ever and we are committed to providing a safe space for each member of our team to thrive. The trauma of blunt attacks on Black lives and the persistent inequities related to COVID for marginalized communities have been relentless.

This Fall we will not hold our regular annual celebration gala for the first time in thirty years. Instead we choose to pause at this time, to reflect and through community dialogue, we want to engage with you, so that this year we can start building the future together - a just and more equitable future that we can celebrate. Keep an eye out for more information coming in the next few weeks on how you can join us in this movement and conversation.

We hope you will continue to travel with us on this journey as we prioritize our humanity. You are part of the collective that is Centro.

**Karen Menendez Coller**  
**Executive Director**  
**Centro Hispano of Dane County**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Menendez Coller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

## Centro's Garden

Special thanks to **Blackhawk Church** for their partnership with Centro's Community Garden project this year. With the help of volunteer teams the garden was planted, tended, and harvested through the Spring and Summer. Volunteers navigated the challenges of social distancing and monitored and cared for the plants weekly. Produce from the garden will be harvested and donated to the community and used for community programs including a salsa-making course! *Volunteers are pictured below at the start of the season.*



## YOUTH PROGRAMS

## Escalera Program

Escalera was a success this Spring and Summer, as staff rose to the challenge and responded to the needs of youth and families during COVID-19. Determined to provide a space for social and emotional support, staff prioritized virtual experiential learning opportunities for youth even during this time of crisis. Although smaller than in previous years, a highlight was the summer graduation of seven Escalera students from the first ever virtual summer internship experience for youth at Centro. Each student was mentored and supported as they developed a specific summer project while also attending professional development workshops held each week, sessions on goal setting, networking (how to connect...to impact), evaluating job offers 101, and fun activities, including virtual cooking sessions. Students were also able to join Centro staff, attending the annual UnidosUS conference, for the first time, virtually.



Special thanks to *Down with Bikes* (pictured) *American Family Insurance*, *Madison Gas and Electric*, and *Wisconsin Center for Education and Research* for hosting interns virtually this year!

## Juventuras Summer Program

Our Juventuras virtual sessions for middle school students started in early July and because of popularity were extended through the end of August. All materials were free and safely delivered to the students' homes. Students and coordinators co-hosted creative clubs that focused on self-expression through photography, reading, creative writing, exercise, and dance, prioritizing student interests and creating a safe space for student voices to be heard.





WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Everything that seems an obstacle presents an opportunity for growth. These times have challenged us to reflect and work with the tools we have. Centro continues to offer workforce development and career pathway programs virtually and for the first time we also hosted virtual graduation ceremonies for program grads!

Our 12th Caminos Finance cohort moved to online classes in April. On May 14th, eleven people graduated from the program and celebrated their achievement virtually with family members, friends, partners, employers, and Centro staff. This graduation allowed families from different parts of the world such as Mexico and Colombia to share this special moment with their loved ones. With today's technology, there are no borders (at least in the virtual world) that can prevent us from being together in celebration. On July 24 our 17th Caminos CNA cohort graduated with 8 students. The celebration included special speakers as well as a performance by *Mariachi Corcel de Madison* featuring Centro [Re]Generacion co-facilitator Rafael Martinez Salas (see photo below!).

Achieving goals and pursuing professional development is a dream that has become a reality for our graduates. Congratulations!



## AGENCY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



For the past several years, our Agency Partners Habush Habush & Rottier and Stafford Rosenbaum LLP have worked with Centro to provide free legal assistance. Services are offered two Wednesdays per month by appointment and interpreting is provided. Clinics are now being offered virtually or by phone.

Thank you, Stafford Rosenbaum and Habush Habush & Rottier - We look forward to continuing to work together for the well-being of our families!

## FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

## **WELCOMING CELSA RODRIGUEZ TO THE CENTRO TEAM**



**Celsa Rodriguez, (pictured) joins the Centro team as its first Community Social Work Manager. She is focused on managing Centro's family services team which provides valuable resources to the community on a range of issues from basic needs, to employment, housing, immigration, healthcare, the criminal justice system and more.**

*I was born in Mexico City, Mexico and my family immigrated to San Antonio, TX when I was six years old. I have lived in the Madison area since 1999. Although I miss the warmth of the south and my family, I enjoy the change of the seasons in Madison. I'm fortunate to have two siblings that live here with their families and that I get to spend time with them.*

*I have been working with families for over 15 years in various capacities. As an undergraduate student I worked with the Madison PEOPLE program and College Access program. These programs provide support for first generation and low income students to help them get into college. Because of my experiences with these programs, I decided to pursue a Master's degree in social work where my focus shifted to working with Children with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities. During this time, I worked in two Maternal and Child Health programs as a social work intern: the LEND program at the Waisman Center and the Pediatric Pulmonary Center and the American Family Children's Hospital. I have been fortunate to have worked with some great families and learn so much from their experiences navigating healthcare systems, various school districts, and various community settings. These experiences provided learning opportunities for parents to develop advocacy skills needed as their children transitioned to adult long term care services. My hope, in this new role, is to support staff so that they can support youth and families in their growth as they navigate various systems throughout Dane County.*

Centro in the News

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the latest stories about Centro in the news.

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