

of Passaic County, Inc.

Assisting families in obtaining quality child care that is available, accessible and affordable

FALL 2017



A Message from the Executive Director of 4CS of Passaic County

Coleen Porcher

“The first five years have so much to do with how the next 80 turn out.”

— Bill Gates, Sr., Father of Bill Gates



Hello everyone, and welcome to 4CS of Passaic County, Inc.'s first, all-agency newsletter. It will be delivered electronically four times a year. The newsletter will have stories about the clients, the employees, the board of directors, and news that's relevant in the field, plus upcoming events. We developed it because we believe we have a great story to tell about our work in the

community, the many children and families that benefit now from our services, and those whose lives have been transformed in the past.

Since 1971, we have connected families to high quality providers of early care and education and helped them secure financial assistance for that care (including before- and after-care, or summer camp, or all three). When parents or caregivers, such as grandparents-as-parents or foster parents, know that their children are in good care, they can work or go school with peace of mind.

Our agency serves a critical role as an economic engine in the region, ensuring that providers receive payments caring for children from low- and moderate income families. The larger employers with whom we have connected express appreciation that families have a resource to cover the cost of child care and route families to that care, which reduces absenteeism and supplements their other employee benefit programs.

Unfortunately, many companies and small businesses are unaware that we exist or that there is a program that helps families struggling to cover the cost of child care. Last year, more than \$25 million was disbursed. Here is a link to our website that provides more information: <https://www.4cspassaic.org/financial-assistance/>

WHY THIS MATTERS TO ME

When I came to 4CS, about a year after Congress passed the reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block (CCDBG) grant, I did so because I want to have deeper impact on those in need. I had long worked with other educational nonprofits or schools in the primary/secondary and higher education arenas as well as on social justice causes.

In coming to 4CS, I have come full circle. As a young girl growing up in the Caribbean, with a very civically engaged great-grandmother, the late Iolyn Fouché, I

Continued on page 3

A Desperate Teen Found Her Future Through 4CS' Compassionate Staff

‘She gave me this look that said it was safe to talk to her’



This is a story of perseverance, hope, and, most importantly, how well the system works when compassionate people are there to help.

Zulma S. was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Jersey City. When she was only 16, a 35-year-old man she knew raped her. From the start, she decided that she would keep and love her child but her community left her few choices. “Coming from a Hispanic culture it was clear – if someone impregnates you, they don’t look at it as rape. You go live with him. For him, it’s either take care of her or go to jail.”

For almost two long years, Zulma and her son stayed with the man, moving to Florida, Delaware and other places while he abused alcohol and drugs. “I tried leaving but I had no place to go and I ended up going back to him,” she recalls.

Finally, desperate and scared, she fled to a shelter and then begged her mother, who lived in Paterson, NJ, to take her and her son in. Her mother agreed, but she had a job that couldn’t support them all and she told Zulma

she needed to get assistance through social services.

Zulma went to 4CS of Passaic County, Inc., to find daycare for her son and the financial help to pay for it, so she could get a job. It wasn’t easy for her. “I was feeling lost. I had a sense of worthlessness; that nothing is going to get better. I thought how disgusting it was that I have to go through this,” she remembers. She walked in, tears in her eyes, and met Rosa LaLuz, the receptionist. “She gave me this look that said it was safe to talk to her. I explained that Social Services gave me these papers. She said, ‘OK, calm down. This is what’s going on.’ She explained everything to me, step by step—what they were asking for and why they were asking for it.”

Ms. LaLuz told Zulma that everything would be fine. She told her, “It’s going to be OK. It’s just the beginning.” Those words, she says, “stuck with me forever.”

Ms. LaLuz connected Zulma with a case manager who helped her find close, affordable

Continued on page 2

Table of contents

A Desperate Teen Found Her Future Through 4CS' Compassionate Staff

A Message from the Executive Director of 4CS of Passaic County

Employee Spotlight: ROSIE PEREZ

L.E.A.P. – Paramus Public School District (Bergen County)


Education Inequality Starts Early Disparities in learning begin even earlier than you think.

Beth Marmolejos: Passionate, Community-Minded Trustee

Employee **Spotlight:**

ROSIE PEREZ

25 Years of Making a Difference



When Rosie Perez started working at 4CS of Passaic County, Inc. 25 years ago, she didn't have a child but believed in the mission.

"I knew that we helped mothers, and I felt good about it but I wasn't a mom yet and I didn't understand what that meant," she recalls.

That all changed three years later when her son, Angel, was born and she needed 4C'S help. Rosie was born and raised in Paterson. Her parents were Puerto Rican immigrants, and she was the eldest of four children. She graduated from East Side High School and studied business at Passaic County Community College. She attended a computer school and learned to be a data-entry operator and went to work for Midlantic Bank. When the bank merged and moved the department to Pennsauken, she decided to look for another job in the Paterson area and found work at 4CS.

When Angel was born, 4CS helped her find high quality care for him in a child-care center, after being on a waiting list. She used the subsidy 4CS administers to help pay for the care for two years. Fortunately for her, her mother also was around to help and lives nearby.

"It made me understand what people go through, the sacrifices the moms make to have a child. You don't get all that is involved with child care until you experience it yourself," she says.

Rosie, now an assistant coordinator in the Fiscal Department, spends her work time these days helping providers enter their information into the online portal they need to so they can get paid. "Everything is on the Internet these days and a lot of the providers still don't have computers. We try to walk them through the portal and express how important it is for them to use it. They need a lot of training to go into the portal and check their transactions. They sometimes get frustrated," she says. But, that is why 4C'S staff are here ... to give them any and all technical assistance they need, so that they can get paid for the children in their care.

4CS has changed since her early days with the agency. "We always had this mission to accomplish to provide quality and affordable child care to the clients. Now we have more funding and more abilities to do this well," she says. The population has changed also—with increasing numbers of Arabs, Bengalis and other immigrants. "When I started it was mostly African American and Hispanic. Now we have a mix of people but they all want people who can speak their language," she says. Right now, there is no waiting list to receive financial assistance with child care, as there was in the early 1990's when her son was small. Today, if a parent or family qualifies, they can get assistance right away, which makes a huge difference, especially for people just coming into the program.

Why has she stayed at 4CS for a quarter of a century? On a personal note, her co-workers are like family ("We see the births of our children, marriages, death and we share our experiences.") And for her, the mission and the ability for the agency to help more people "feels good. You see the parents who walk in through the door. They are in need of child care so they can work or go to school. We make a real difference."

A Desperate Teen Found Her Future

Continued from page 1

quality daycare. "She approached me in a human way without making me feel ashamed to be there. She wasn't rude when she asked for documents. She explained how daycare worked and that this would be good for me and I could get a job. That was my first milestone," she recalls.

The Way Up

Zulma had three part-time jobs, working for Blockbuster video, Pathmark stores and KB toys. Each time she changed, added or lost a job, she went back to 4CS to update her status. "Every time I went, Ms. LaLuz was there. I was always afraid that changes would impact my childcare subsidy or food stamps and I was now supporting my mom as well," she recalls.

Ms. LaLuz pushed her to go back to school (she had obtained her high school diploma from an online high school). Ms. LaLuz told her about Passaic County Community College in Paterson and, after a few years, Zulma thought "maybe I could do this." She enrolled but the first semester was rough and she failed her classes. She had to learn to read and write properly all over again but by the second semester,

she received all A's and B's. She decided to pursue a career in social work. "I knew I wanted to help other people. I saw Ms. LaLuz and others and I wanted to be like them and help other girls like me," she says.

She completed her associate's degree and went on to obtain a bachelor's degree from the School of Social Work at Rutgers University in Newark. Today, she works for a social-service agency helping with family services. She also is working on completing her master's degree in social work. Her son is now completing his junior year in high school and is interested in a career as an engineer, working and starting out at Passaic County Community College.

Zulma wants to encourage other young women to "not be afraid to go to 4CS for help. They are not there to hinder you but to boost you and help you get to the next milestone. They help you parent your child in a safe environment and build your life so someday you don't need that assistance and can leave it for the next person who will need it. They are very welcoming. They want to help you and show you the way."



Beth Marmolejos: Passionate, Community-Minded Trustee

Beth Marmolejos has a full plate, professionally, personally, and in community service. But a chance meeting with a manager of 4CS of Passaic County, Inc. convinced her she had room for one more activity—being on the non-profit's Board of Directors.

Ms. Marmolejos is employed by Anthem in New York City as an Executive Advisor IT Account Management. She serves on numerous boards, including being Vice Chair of the Passaic County Workforce Investment Board, Chair of the Passaic County Disability Community, a member of the Steering Committee of the Hispanic Federation's Latina Philanthropy Council, a member of the Latino Network Coalition Corporate Advisory Board, and Public Policy Officer of the Greater Wayne Area American Association of University Women.

Born in the Dominican Republic, where her single mother was the secretary to two of the country's presidents, she came to the United States in 1986. Originally, her plan was to visit with her older sisters but red tape caused her to extend her stay and then she attended Bergen County Community College. She went on to receive her bachelor's degree in accounting and her master's degree in finance from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

In addition to her career, which has included increasingly responsible positions at Medco Health Solutions (now Express Scripts) and Empire

Blue Cross Blue Shield (now Anthem), she hosts a television show for Hispanic students and business professionals on Spanish-language Telemundo and has earned her Black Belt in Taekwondo.

Ms. Marolejos is the mother of a 16-year-old son, Matthew, who is autistic. Her experience as the parent of a special-needs child spurred her involvement with the disabilities community as well as her interest in early childcare.

"When he was a child, he was kicked out of daycare. It resonated with me that 4CS helps place all children, including autistic children, in appropriate environments," she says.

Ms. Marolejos had been approached by 4CS CEO Coleen Stevens Porcher about joining the Board, but was hesitant because of her other commitments. But she and her husband attended an event earlier this year and started a conversation with Mariela Perez, Manager, Parent Services at 4CS. Ms. Marolejos and her husband offered Ms. Perez a ride home "and when I heard her talking so passionately about 4CS and how it helped children, it really resonated with me," she says. "I feel if we start providing the right set-up and care for our children, that will be the basis for them to really flourish and become productive members of society."

As for the future, she wants to do even more. "I'm still trying to find my calling and the role where I will make a big impact."

A Message from the Executive Director Continued from page 1

attended rallies with her and watched her host meetings in the backyard with local leaders from all walks of life pushing for universal primary education. This is no small feat for a resource-stretched developing country with competing, urgent needs. But she felt that it was the only way families that were poor could have an opportunity to escape poverty and have a better life.

Icyllyn was also well known for taking young girls in that had been cast out because they had become pregnant. There was often some young woman staying with us for a time, while Icyllyn appealed to her family to forgive her transgression and take her back in. Many of those young girls ended up naming her godmother to their children and she became nicknamed Goddy. Our home was filled with children, and I remember dreaming of having a huge family of adopted children from many ethnic groups, which essentially reflected our own family.

As a freshman in college, I discovered that a singer named Josephine Baker had already executed my idea. I smile sometimes now when I think about those days as a little girl when I really thought it was possible to have 24 children representing all parts of the globe. And yet, ironically, I recently realized that while I did not have my Josephine Baker-like family, my work allows the amazing staff and me at 4CS to make a difference in the lives of families that reflect the rainbow of the human family, who speak different languages, and who are U.S. citizens or come from many different countries.

As staff at 4CS, all of us feel deeply gratified that we have an impact through our work, whether it's helping a provider or parent trying to figure out how to navigate the new electronic child-care system or understanding the benefits of participating in the State of New Jersey's

quality rating system, Grow New Jersey Kids (a program geared toward enhancing quality for all, but particularly for children ages 0 to 5). At other times, it is guiding parents about the various types of facilities and what is considered high quality. There is a real sense of mission and commitment to making the community better and giving everyone the tools they need to make the decisions that they need about their families at a time of major shifts and because of the new CCDBG regulation.

The CCDBG has created a sea change in early childhood education because of the roll-out of family-friendly policies, the raising of the bar on what constitutes high quality and where resources will be expended to support and encourage quality. Like all good federal policies, some challenges have been unearthed in the implementation. Quality is expensive and many providers, both child-care centers and family child-care providers, are challenged in meeting some of the requirements, particularly as it relates to facilities. We will need everyone's input in investment to make this work—the business community, state administrators, and state legislators and the families who are using the services and who are most affected. Working together, we can improve the child-care system.

"The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to."

— Marian Wright Edelman, Founder of Children's Defense Fund

Early Childcare in the News

Delaying Child's Starting Age for School a Tough Call for Parents

By Christina A. Samuels
August 29, 2017

Reprinted from Education Week

To start kindergarten, or not to start kindergarten?

Many parents wrestle with that question if their children are turning 5 years old close to when the new school year starts. And new research suggesting that older kindergartners have an edge over their younger classmates has the potential to add more fuel to an already complex debate.

In most states, children must be 5 years old by late summer or fall in order to enroll in kindergarten. For children whose birthdays fall right around a state's cutoff date, that means starting school as a newly-minted 5-year-old—or even as a 4-year-old. Children born after the cutoff, on the other hand, would start kindergarten at nearly 6.

Borrowing a term and a practice from college athletics, some parents about 7 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls in fall 2010, according to previous research—are choosing to “redshirt” their children. The practice is more

prevalent among the summer-born boys of college-educated parents; while the same research shows that 12 percent of this group was held back overall, college-educated parents held their boys back at a rate of about 20 percent.

The new research on kindergartners, published as a working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a nonprofit organization, found that children who are older when they start kindergarten have a measurable advantage compared to their younger classmates over the long term. They have higher test scores later in their academic careers, are more likely to attend college, and are less likely to spend time in the juvenile justice system. But there's a danger in trying to fit an individual child into a statistical analysis, one of the study's authors cautions.

Krzysztof Karbownik, a postdoctoral research fellow at Northwestern University, said the study, which has yet to go through peer review, should not be taken as a green light to hold a child out of school for a year.

[Continue Reading at edweek.org](#)

Education Inequality Starts Early Disparities In Learning Begin Even Earlier Than You Think.

By Sara Mead, Opinion Contributor
July 27, 2017

Reprinted from US News and World Report

Upper-middle-class American professionals spend a lot on their children's education and development. That fact – hardly news to anyone who has spent time with such parents – has gotten a lot of media attention lately, thanks to a new book by Brookings scholar Richard Reeves and a David Brooks column. Reeves' contention – that affluent professionals' investments in their kids serve to entrench a system of education-based privilege that makes it very hard for children from less advantaged backgrounds to advance up the socioeconomic ladder – has spurred heated debates on mainstream and social media. These debates, however, often overlook just how early disparities in learning begin. Abundant research also shows that children's earliest learning experiences and outcomes also vary considerably based on their parents' incomes and education. The famous Hart and Risley study shows that children of professional parents are exposed to 30 million more words before age three than children from families in poverty, with significant consequences for language and cognitive development. Middle-class children are also more likely to be read to or exposed to educational and cultural opportunities, such as museums, zoos and libraries, than children in poverty.

As a result, by the time they enter kindergarten, children from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds are already far behind their peers in the highest quartile of socioeconomic status on measures of early reading and math skills. High-quality early childhood education programs can prevent or mitigate these disparities, but our current early care and education arrangements often exacerbate them instead. With 65 percent of mothers of young children working, most families need some type of child care for their children while mom is at work, but families' ability to access quality care varies based on income.

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L.E.A.P. – Paramus Public School District (Bergen County)

Reprinted from the New Jersey School Boards Association

Paramus Public School's Life Skills Education Achievement Program (L.E.A.P.) is innovative in its small business concept units and its aspirations to improve and develop meaningful education experiences for students with multiple abilities. Students in the L.E.A.P. program have created a number of small businesses in order to develop real world, daily-living and job skills. Examples include a “Floral and Favors” business, where students create centerpieces, floral arrangements and favors for events. Students take orders, price items according to a pre-established budget, fill the order and make arrangements for delivery. Mentorship opportunities with local business are available, giving students the chance to apply their learned knowledge.

Another example of a community-based small business involvement is a mentorship with Oradell Animal Hospital, where students help support the hospital by making dog biscuits. Students also bag these treats and sell them during the holiday season, donating the profits as a community service project. The L.E.A.P. program also provides opportunities for students to learn office skills such as clerical/computer skills, filing, creating PowerPoint presentations, designing pamphlets and business cards, and data processing.

The goal of L.E.A.P. is to enable students to develop daily living skills that are essential for adult independent living, as well as allow them to meet their full potential as contributing members of society.