



Prof. Jessyca Perez assists Miriuxi



***"Literacy is the foundation for any career."***

***Yanelly Cordero, Prof. English at MDC & Founder of Pages for All Ages***

## Little authors, big imaginations

Lisette Flores, RCMA Area Coordinator, picked up a newsletter while at Miami Dade College (MDC). "I read about this program [Pages for All Ages] and I knew it was something for our after school children at RCMA."

Pages for All Ages is an eight week after school program where children are paired with college students to write, illustrate, and put together a book. They get together once a week for a couple of hours or so, one-on-one.

The program begins by reading and identifying the parts of a book together. With assistance and guidance from their mentor, the children learn to create an outline. By the third week, they start writing and drawing their story.

Pablo is 9 years old and proudly displayed his drawing. "I like the details in my book", he said. "I like doing all the pictures and the writing!"

College student and volunteer, Angela Fleurant explained, "The kids have to do it, because that's their book. We don't do the work. We are like a support system."

The program started in 2012 and was the idea of Professor Yanelly Cordero of MDC. She reasoned that by granting college students the responsibility as mentors to help school children with basic reading and writing skills, that it might in turn stimulate the collegians to improve their own classroom performance. She was right. What evolved was an excellent volunteer program forming part of the college service-learning opportunity, targeting community-identi-

fied needs while helping students to meet academic, social, and civic learning goals.

Fleurant continued, "I'm studying to be a nurse and I'm not sure if I want to be in pediatrics. This gives me the chance to be with kids and engage constructively."

The stories that the children write are beautiful. Most are about role model champions, where the child is part of the story. Miriuxi's story for example is about her being a "Hero Cop", while Pablo's story is about being a "Superhero".

Taimy, another college volunteer, chimed-in, "I came back. I'm in psychology and I'm here volunteering this year because I enjoyed it so much. I like helping them create their stories. It's really fun. It's a great experience for the kids, because they get to be with college students and they see themselves going to college. It's inspiring. I never thought I would be looked up to."

Many of the children dedicate their book to relatives or loved-ones who are far away. You can tell that their book is an emotional creation. "This is a feel good thing, we are not therapists," said psychology Professor Jessyca Perez at MDC. "The child writes to the level they are at in their language. We want to build their self-esteem, their self-confidence as a student."

All agree that the best part of this program is the 'Graduation Ceremony' where the college students, the parents, and the children are proud of the accomplishment and their journey together. ▶▶

► The college students see the reward of working with children and increasing their own skill set. The parents see their child's interest grow in reading and writing and the flourishing of imagination. The children call themselves authors and receive honors for their accomplishments.

To date, the award-winning program has seen more than 400 volunteers from the fields of math, engineering, nursing, social studies, and more.

The media regularly features RCMA students involved with Pages for All Ages. This winter, Miami's local CBS channel and Telemundo 51 both broadcast their story.



## RCMA national math champions

The kids did it again. Wimauma Academy and Immokalee Community School won 1st and 2nd place in this year's Matific competition. Kindergarten students worked late into the day and one even fell asleep working next to their computer. Milton, who barely spoke English, knocked it out of the park. As Juana Brown, Director of Charter Schools, explains, "It's an example to the quality of work in both campuses."

*Matific is an online mathematics teaching resource for schools that develops mathematical excellence and problem-solving skills through playful interaction and games.*



## RCMA Lipman Family Farms golf classic

The 20th annual Lipman Family Farms Golf Classic presented by Food and Supply Source occurred on May 4, 2019. Eighty golfers came out to Naples Heritage Golf and Country Club to compete in the 18-hole scramble. At the end of the day the foursome from Sallee Promotions took home this year's championship! RCMA is so grateful to the 37 sponsors who made the event possible and helped RCMA raise \$74,622 to support its mission of opening doors to opportunity for the low-income, rural population of Florida. We are already excited for next year's tournament! Mark your calendars for May 9, 2020!



## Wish Farms strawberry picking challenge

With over 2,500 attendees, this year's Strawberry Picking Challenge was presented by Monte Package Company and raised over \$90,000. Our sincere thanks goes to Wish Farms and their sponsors who have made this fun and exciting event possible. In six years, the Strawberry Picking Challenge has raised over \$518,000 for the children of RCMA. Thank you! We look forward to celebrating next year's event!

# Children's week at Tallahassee

## Highlights



T. Granger, Chiles III, B. Mainster, K. Chiles, L. Villanueva

### Mainster receives prestigious Chiles award

This Award is presented each year to a Floridian whose leadership is recognized for promoting policies and programs that improve the lives of Florida's children and their families.

More than 400 people attended the very special evening affair honoring our own legend, Barbara Mainster (center photo above). She was presented with this year's Chiles Advocacy Award.

Barbara's powerful public service over 40 years, drove the organization's vision and transformed RCMA into Florida's largest non-profit child care service and education center for migrant and rural low-income children.



Lourdes Villanueva introduced Barbara as,

**"the woman, the mother, the leader and the advocate, leading by example."**



March 24th saw Children's Week kickoff this year. Thousands of parents, children, policy makers, professionals, and community leaders take the opportunity to share knowledge and information about children's issues across the state. The event brings together advocates delivering the message that every child in Florida should be healthy, ready to learn, and able to achieve their full potential.

Five exceptional RCMA students from the Leadership Academy were selected to meet and greet legislators at our State's Capitol. Juana Brown, Director of Charter Schools, did a great job mentoring and preparing our young leaders to advocate for issues concerning them and their community.

The students came out of their civic experience triumphantly. Each voiced their concerns about bills proposed concerning Education, Health and Immigration issues and thanked their Legislators for their efforts.

Joshua expressed his concern over immigration issues and highlighted his achievements at school to Legislator V. Torres, "I want to be a family or criminal lawyer." Joshua is a top student and is paving his path to success. "I am going next year to Lennard High School."



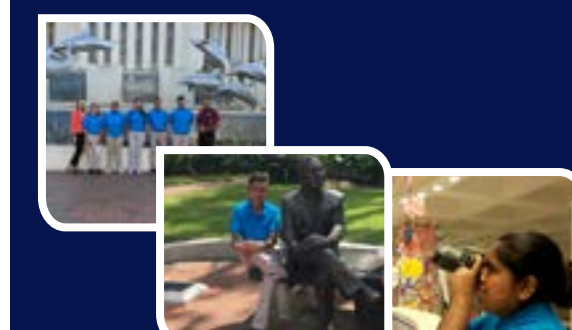
They have a collegian program. You graduate with a High School diploma and an Associate's Degree."

Jennifer expressed to the Legislator her gratitude for receiving a Step Up For Students scholarship, "My mom works cleaning houses, because of that she can't pay for me to go to Christo Ray [a private high school]. So, thanks to the Step Up For Students scholarship, I get a better education."

**"When you succeed at RCMA, you create an attitude amongst lawmakers that we must do more, so more children will have the opportunity that you have."** Senator Darryl E. Rouson, FL District 19.



The students toured Florida State University Campus (FSU) and the Museum of Florida History. Bryan, Joshua, Jennifer, Areli, Nathalie.



# A second chance for college, *the RCMA way*

by S. Mahoney.

The T.E.A.C.H. program works with over 60 colleges, universities, vocational technical schools, and community-based training institutions throughout the state.

Veronica Fonseca, a dedicated caregiver at the Immokalee RCMA childcare center sat with several other caregivers on a bench under a tree. I knew of Veronica's story from a college news article and I was meeting this group to understand their history and passion for the work.

Pursuing an uncertain career in criminal justice, Veronica had lost her financial aid in 2016. "After my first year of college I stopped receiving help, and I stopped school for a year" said Fonseca. "I had prior experience working at daycare centers so I applied for a job at RCMA."

Her initial thought was to gain further hands-on experience in a field of study she realized she enjoyed with the hope of enrolling back into college in the future. Veronica continued, "The more I worked here, the more I wanted a career in Education." To her surprise she was offered a second chance by the center's resource specialist to attend college and earn an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. With a gleaming smile across her face, she said, "I didn't know about the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship and I am now back at Florida SouthWestern State College furthering my education."



Paula, Veronica, Rosa & Beatriz

Since 1998, the Office of Early Learning has awarded approximately 37,000 T.E.A.C.H. scholarships and RCMA has facilitated the enrollment process for their staff. Earlier when I spoke with Ana Neuhauser, RCMA Program Coordinator, she told me, "We gather everyone's scholarship application papers and we coordinate the rest with the Office of Early Learning."

The Child Development Associate (CDA) program is granted to aides or teachers who meet the requirements of the Council for Professional Recognition. "At RCMA, those completing successfully the CDA is easily over 80%" said Neuhauser. "We provide study time to our staff and other perks along the way."

Veronica's second chance to attend college is a blessing, but she is not alone. Sitting next to her is Rosa, a caregiv-

er at RCMA for almost 30 years who said, "I like to set an example for my kids. It took me 12 years to get my AA! I always took one class, maybe two and then I went up north and when I came back I would take another class or two..."

Rosa's story is compelling as she explains how she would seasonally travel with other migrants to pick the harvests. "I would pack-up with my kids and go to South Carolina, then to Tennessee and I would return here." She continued, "Or I would leave from here and go to Georgia, then to S. Carolina, to Tennessee, then go back to Georgia and then return here and work at RCMA. This is when I was a mom, an employee [RCMA] here, and a farm-worker up north. That's why it took me 12 years!"

Smiling, Rosa continued recounting her story of picking crops in other states, "The children would recognize me and run up to me and the parents would look at me confused at first because I was no longer the teacher or the caregiver, I was one of them in another state, picking crops."

Rosa graduated with an AA degree and recalls how proud her grown up children were on graduation day. She points to the second door across from us, "My children were there in that classroom and you too Veronica!" All laugh and giggle.

What makes RCMA so special? "They give us the opportunity to grow as a person, preparing us, you feel welcome" said Paula who is enrolled at Florida Gulf Coast University. The ladies nod in agreement. Beatriz is sitting next to Rosa and has been a longtime caregiver at the center and explains "For me, I was 19 and I wanted to go back to school, but I felt I had to give up the idea. Then I found a job at RCMA." Thanks to the support, Beatriz has obtained her Associates degree and is now working towards her Bachelor's degree. "I too, take a little time, but I love going to college. I want to be ready for the kids, because education never stops."



Two RCMA Centers participate in a study by FSU's Autism Institute

## Screening communication delays in infants

The Florida State University (FSU) Early Screener Assessment Communications Disorders (ESAC) pilot program, developed by Dr. Wetherby, is being coordinated with RCMA and Early Steps (Florida's early intervention agency) to assist children with developmental needs. The program investigates whether some early communications delays may indicate Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The earlier those delays are detected and treated, even before speech begins, the better the long-term outcomes may be for both speech and any ASD.

Celebrating, nurturing, and supporting a child's developmental milestones, from six weeks of age and beyond, is at the heart of RCMA's mission.

The ESAC pilot program began at RCMA Glades and Immokalee centers in 2016. "At that time I think FSU needed 3,000 kids ages 9 months to 24 months old" said Shawne Thomas, RCMA's Inclusion Specialist. "They needed the kids and they were also interested in the migrant population."

Children with suspected delays are tested through an initial 10 broad questions about commu-

nication delays following with 20 autism-specific questions as indicated. The tool is designed to jump-start early intervention services and by-pass present assessments that may not detect communication delays in non-verbal infants and toddlers.

"It all got started because of the relationship we have with the Early Steps providers in the area. That had a lot to do with it because I could call and say I have this kid that seems OK but had a flag or two in the ESAC screener... and services would start" said Sherrie Elrod, RCMA Early Childhood Specialist.



Since its inception at these RCMA centers, the ESAC screener has been able to detect possible communication delays in 31 children with six of those being referred to early intervention services.

One of the six referrals was 18-month-old Yareli. She passed her normal screening tests, but the ESAC screener indicated problem areas. The RCMA team implemented simple daily strategies that encouraged the infant to learn and overcome her barriers within 8 months. Today she is thriving in a typical VPK classroom, learning and playing with classmates.

Another of the six, Jeremy, was tricky. He seemed to respond well to basic commands; he made some eye contact, yet mom and the caregivers at RCMA were cautious. "Something was a bit off, yet very normal given his age," said Mrs. Stapleton, Jeremy's caregiver. "He was less than a year old and doing pretty much regular baby things."

Jeremy was passing traditional assessment tests with no concerns for communication delays but the ESAC tool, and its questionnaire, indicated otherwise. He was referred to the early in-



tervention program. "The older he got, the more it became obvious that he had a delay" said Elrod.

Jeremy just turned three years old and after two years of intervention, he is now thriving and his communication is growing. He is able to make three-word phrases and has more eye contact. Mom is happy with his progress, "I am thankful that it was detected early and for the support he has received at RCMA."

The pilot program has helped these RCMA centers identify children with needs that may not have been identified through standard assessments. "It's about creating positive early learning experiences that are crucial for having a better chance later to succeed in school, the workplace, and the community" adds Thomas.



Redlands Christian Migrant Association

402 West Main Street

Immokalee, FL 34142

(800) 282-6540

[www.rcma.org](http://www.rcma.org)

RCMA is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization.  
We gladly accept your charitable contributions.  
Please find self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed.



## Isabel Garcia, RCMA's Executive Director

Earlier this year, the RCMA Board of Directors announced Isabel Garcia as the organization's new Executive Director. Born in the United States to a family of migrant farmworkers, Garcia grew up travelling seasonally from harvest to harvest. During her senior year at Hardee Senior High in Florida, Garcia joined RCMA as an after school teacher. A graduate of the University of South Florida, she became the leader of the RCMA childcare center in 1993. Advancing through the organization, she assumed the Associate Executive Director position in 2012. Garcia has led, coached, and mentored at various centers and implemented statewide training in leadership, child development, family services, and health. Her record of accomplishments fully embraces the RCMA ideal that determination and perseverance provided in good early childhood education opens doors to opportunities beyond the crib.

---

Steadfast vigilance, *"Always keeping a pulse in our communities, adapting to the changes, strengthening and expanding where we need to. I ask to hear from each of our centers, take the time to celebrate our successes, and capture what we do well. Our reputation is a measure of our success."*Garcia, Spring 2019



402 West Main Street

Immokalee, FL 34142

(800) 282-6540

[www.rcma.org](http://www.rcma.org)