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School of Social Work

Immigration for Social Work Practitioners: Working with Immigrant Families in the Changing Landscape

Carlos Amador, MSW, is California Immigration Policy Center's Organizing Director, based in Los Angeles. He brings a wide-range of organizing and campaign skills from his years as a national immigrant youth leader. He was previously the Project Manager of the Dream Resource Center at the UCLA Labor Center, where he worked on issues impacting immigrant youth nationally. He is a former Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors for the United We Dream Network, and a founding Steering Committee member of the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance. Carlos was also a key member of the successful national campaign that won the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012. He also serves as a board member of the ACLU of Southern California.

Alisa Daubenspeck, JD, is a Managing Attorney at CARECEN. In this role, she has worked on immigration cases under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the U Visa for victims of crime, programs that serve hundreds of people each year. Ms. Daubenspeck has provided many trainings on immigration law to service providers and community members, and has provided professional trainings in connection with the LA County Bar Association, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the LAPD and the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office. In addition to her time at CARECEN, she has also worked as a Staff Attorney for Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles and a Supervising Attorney for the Immigration Center for Women and Children.

Joseph Garza, MSW, is a Clinical Therapist and Community Engagement Coordinator at Violence Intervention Program. He has worked in the mental health field for over 16 years providing mental health services to children, adolescents and their families within schools, homes and in the community. Garza has provided therapeutic services which included individual, dyad and family therapy using intervention and strategies focusing on cultural ancestral teachings and trauma-informed care practices. He also offers community outreach services within LASUD schools, local community events and staff workshops. Garza has also been selected as the lead for VIP-Community Mental Health Center to direct a new resilience-building program at VIP. This program is designed to provide training and skill-building opportunities on a variety of topics to include creating safe environments, communication for empowerment, emotion regulation in the workplace, boundary management and more.

Graciela Martinez, JD, has been a Deputy Public Defender with the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office for 24 years. Martinez has consulted with, advised and trained attorneys on the issues relating to criminal convictions and the resultant immigration penalties. Due to her wealth of knowledge and experience in the field, she is recognized as a national expert on the intersection between criminal and immigration law. As a guide for criminal defense attorneys, she generates and regularly updates written materials that effectively and simply communicate the interplay between criminal and immigration law. Her articles, practice advisories, guidelines and memorandum, provide the nearly 700 Los Angeles County deputy public defenders with the necessary tools to understand the complex immigration consequences that flow from involvement in the criminal justice system.

Nicole Mitchell, has been in the education field for 20 years, serving as a teacher, counselor and administrator. She is currently the coordinator for the L.A. Unified School Enrollment Placement & Assessment (S.E.P.A.) Center, Student Health and Human Services Division. Mitchell manages staff in assisting immigrant student and families, which includes students who are unaccompanied/accompanied youth and undocumented families. She is very passionate about collaborative efforts with district departments and community partners, which are meeting the needs of impacted students and families around social justice issues. Mitchell immigrated to the US with her family as a young child, and a former student of the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is also one of the leads on the LA Unified “We Are One” campaign, which offers information and education to students, families, staff and community members on their rights.

Dianey Murillo, is the Southern Regional Coordinator for the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA). Murillo’s leadership in the immigrant youth movement began when she joined the Inland Empire-Immigrant Youth Collective in 2013 and has been involved ever since. She now works with the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA) as the Southern California Regional Coordinator where she continues to organize and uplift new immigrant youth leadership. Empowering youth to become leaders in their communities to bring social, political, and economical change. Born in Zacatecas, Mexico and raised in the border town of Ciudad Juarez, she migrated to the United States with her sister and parents in 2002, and has resided in the Inland Empire for over 16 years. Murillo continues to advocate for immigrants and empowers the youths and communities by providing resources.

Aracely Navarro, is a Policy and Governmental Relations Manager at Children’s Partnership. Navarro has been working in the healthcare, policy and advocacy sector for over a decade and previously worked at the California Primary Care Association. At the California Primary Care Association, her work focused on advancing policies for the state’s community health centers and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations of the state of California. Now as the Policy and Government Relations Manager for the Children’s Partnership, she focuses on advancing the organization’s health equity agenda through the development and implementation of legislative and policy solutions in California and Washington, DC. She continues to advocate for the needs of the disadvantaged and understands the importance of providing healthcare and policies that positively impact the community.

Susana Parras, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker in the private practice sector, consultant and adjunct instructor. In 2010, Parras worked at the Family Services of Santa Monica where she became the Coordinator of the Mental Health Program for Elementary Schools, providing various services to students, teachers and families. In the spring of 2014, she became the first onsite Mental Health Counselor at El Rancho High School, at El Rancho Unified School District. Parras helped launch a full time mental health program for 9th to 12th grade students. She is currently working in her private practice in Inglewood, as well as teaching Critical Race Theory at the Department of Social Work at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Parras collaborated with the Latino Coalition for Healthier California, where she joined in developing social emotional support models/services to monthly legal clinics for immigration/undocumented families.

Cecilia Saco, MSW, began working with LA County in 1986 and has been with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) since 1996. Saco managed the LA County DCFS Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Unit, a countywide program which assists undocumented dependent children who have been victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation acquire immigration services and relief, from 1998 until her retirement in 2018 after 32 years of service to the County. Under Saco’s direction, the program has grown to become an independent DCFS unit with a staff of 12 Social Workers and

Eligibility workers. In addition, the SIJS model has become a nationally recognized best-practice model and Saco and her team have visited child welfare related agencies across the nation to train on the model.