

Andrea's Reflection

Submitted by Andrea Mendez-Perez, Director of I-RISE S. Jersey office

When I look back to the beginning of my journey in this field, I always return to September 2019, my first day at RCHP as a MSW student. I was nervous because internships can set the tone for your future, opening opportunities or sometimes closing them. I worried about whether I would fit within a faith-based agency when that was not my background, or whether the environment would feel right for me. But then I met Jean and everything shifted. **Jean was the very first person I met at RCHP that day, and from that moment she became a steady presence in my life.** She became so much more than a supervisor, mentor, or colleague. She became one of the few people I have ever considered truly inspirational.

From 2019 to 2021 Jean taught me quietly, consistently, by example what it means to serve others with both strength and empathy. Her compassion was steady and unwavering, something she offered generously and without hesitation. **To Jean, clients were never case numbers or stories to be managed;** they were human beings that deserved a kind and warm support. Jean made that commitment every day through early mornings, late nights, and every moment in between, never because she had to, but because she believed people deserved nothing less.



What I learned from her still guides me. She taught me that showing up matters, that listening matters, and that belief in someone's healing can be a source of strength for them long before they find that belief in themselves. **Jean believed in me long before I fully believed in myself.** She trusted me with opportunities before I trusted myself, gently pushing me to grow, to step forward, and to become someone who could carry this work with integrity. She helped me develop confidence that ultimately shaped my path. So much of the way I lead today, and the way I care for the people I serve, is inspired directly by her.

What I want people to know is that Jean's work came from a place of deep sincerity. She carried her compassion gently but with great purpose. **She made people feel safe in a world that had not always been kind to them,** and she did it in a way that felt natural, never forced, always genuine. Jean changed lives, including mine. And my

deepest hope is that people understand the truth of who she was: a woman whose love in action became a lifeline, whose presence became a refuge, and whose legacy continues to ripple through every life she touched. Her impact didn't end with her clients. It lives in those of us who were lucky enough to learn from her, myself included, and it shapes the way we carry this work forward in her honor.