

Alumni Spotlight: Rosa Cruz-Cordero



ROSA CRUZ-CORDERO

Rosa Cruz-Cordero's story begins in Guayanilla, Puerto Rico, and continues in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she was raised after moving to New York. Her journey has been shaped by culture, community, and a deep belief in service, values that would later align seamlessly with ASPIRA's mission.

While attending Clara Barton High School, Rosa encountered her first mentor, Cruz Sanchez, a leader who truly embodied ASPIRA's principles. Through her guidance, Rosa learned foundational leadership skills that would stay with her for life. Along the way, she was also uplifted by remarkable women such as Alice Cardona and Congressmember Nydia Velázquez, who believed in her potential, supported her growth, and offered opportunities that helped shape her future, even when she made mistakes.

Leadership, however, was first modeled for Rosa at home. Her father, José Cruz, was an activist in Puerto Rico whose organizing work continued when he moved to New York, helping bring the Schoenstatt Marian Movement from Germany to communities across New York, Puerto Rico, and Latin America. Another major influence was her aunt, Lygia Cruz Lugo, an educator and author who preserved the history and folk stories of Guayanilla through her writing, ensuring that future generations would remain connected to their roots.

Rosa joined ASPIRA in the 10th grade, alongside three close friends. What drew her in was simple but powerful: ASPIRA celebrated culture, history, leadership, and it was fun. Through ASPIRA, Rosa gained access to experiences she never imagined possible. One of her most impactful memories was participating in the Leadership Development Trip to Puerto Rico, where she deepened her understanding of the island's challenges while forming lifelong memories, including an unforgettable moment when her group got lost in El Yunque and had to find their way out by climbing down a waterfall.

Those experiences helped solidify Rosa's commitment to leadership rooted in service. The ASPIRA principles of Awareness, Analysis, and Action became the foundation of her work with inner-city youth, guiding her efforts to build self-awareness, leadership skills, and a sense of shared responsibility through community service.

Today, Rosa is a nonprofit management and leadership professional with over 20 years of experience directing college awareness and readiness programs in New York City public high schools. She is a graduate of the Baruch College School of Public and International Affairs, a Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP), and an alumna of the New York State Women in Government Mentoring Program.

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During her college years, Rosa worked under the leadership of Congressmember Nydia Velázquez as a Coordinator for the ATREVETE Voter Registration and Education Project, contributing to the registration of 150,000 new Puerto Rican and Latino voters in New York City.

Following a fulfilling career in education, Rosa was appointed Northeast Region Community Officer for the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration under Governor Alejandro García-Padilla, where she represented and advocated for Puerto Rico before state and federal agencies while supporting the stateside diaspora.

Reflecting on her journey, Rosa shares a lesson she wishes she had learned earlier: mistakes are not failures, they are lessons. To her, leadership means service, resilience, and creating opportunities for others. It is about listening, building bridges, and lifting others as you grow.

Outside of her professional work, Rosa finds joy in traveling, live music, and quiet moments by the beach. She's also a proud Star Wars fan, drawn to its political themes, with a shelf of action figures representing Puerto Rican and Latine actors, a reminder that representation matters everywhere.

Her message to ASPIRA students and alumni is simple but powerful:

“Do your best in everything you do, you never know who’s watching. You may be inspiring someone without even realizing it.”