



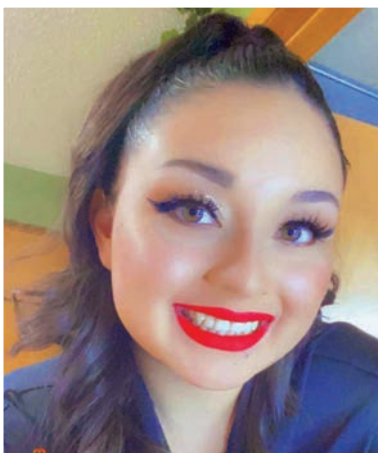
2021 Minnesota Head Start Heroes

Head Start Heroes is an annual event that honors members of the Minnesota Head Start community who overcome tremendous challenges and achieved personal and family success. These children, families, alumni and staff members have been selected by the Minnesota Head Start Association Scholarship and Awards Committee based on compelling, personal testimonies about their Head Start experience and how they were able to transform their lives. The Head Start Heroes epitomize how determination, fortitude and access to early learning and whole-family approaches can pave the way to lifelong success.

CATEGORY 1: STAFF MEMBER

Head Start alumni who has become involved in their local program as a staff member and demonstrates a passion for serving through advocacy, career growth, or being involved in Head Start, the community, or the state/national level that benefits Head Start families.

Lety Ambriz Orozco Tri-County Community Action Partnership



Lety attended Sauk Center HS as a child for 2 years as a newly transplanted child from Mexico.

Lety worked as a Family Services worker for 2 years, 4 months. She works as an interpreter for the Community Services program and the weatherization program at TCC. Lety was recommended for her position by a TCC employee because of what she observed Lety doing at her job at Coborn's, the local grocery store, based on her advocacy and assistance to the community.

Lety's passion for serving, developed through her life experiences. In addition to interpreting for TCC, she also assists at the area schools and police department. She teaches Quinceanera dances to the daughter who are coming of age in the community and creates events every year. She assists in other community projects as well.

Lety's story begins in her young childhood with a scorpion sting during her 1,000-mile trek across the Mexican desert to immigrate to the United States. As a three-year-old, this journey was long, often being carried by the men in their group when her legs grew weary. After entering the U.S. their journey took them to Melrose, MN to stay with family while they searched for housing for the family of 3, and another child on the way.

"As a child, I remember having the ride a little school bus to attend my Head Start class in a different town...I will never forget the day of my Head Start graduation. I stood in front of the cake and held my certificate high, as my mom took a picture of me. I was so happy. Later that same day, I spent the night at a jail lobby, as I waited for my dad to get out of jail."

Lety remembers her childhood, going to Kindergarten where she improved her English skills, many moves to different houses, her siblings attending Early Head Start and Head Start. Lety's mother was instrumental in making sure she and her siblings got an education. But these good memories were shadowed by sad memories of abuse, substance use, and continued incarceration, ending with another change of the family moving and Lety's mom leaving her dad.

As Lety became an adult, she applied for DACA, graduated from high school, obtained a job at Coborn's, and started her family. After three years of experience she applied at TCC and joined their team. Learning much about her own life in the process, she has grown much, forgiven family for bad choices, and much more. "My desire is to be someone to help and guide parents. I would like to be instrumental in stopping the cycle of poverty."



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CATEGORY 4: LOCAL ADVOCATE

A Head Start alumni who has demonstrated advocacy by becoming involved in their local program or community, such as Policy Council, their agency's Board of Directors, a parent committee / board at their public / private school, leadership in a local organization, etc.

Emily LeClaire

Tri-County Community Action Partnership



Emily is a single mother of four children, all of whom have participated in Head Start or Early Head Start. She came to Head Start in Crow Wing county through New Pathways, a homeless shelter / program. After separating from her husband, she was no longer able to afford rent on her income. This was a humbling time in her life, and it gave her the opportunity to serve other homeless families at the shelter. Being one of few with a vehicle, she gave rides to other families, as well as babysitting while they worked.

Enrolling all her children in Head Start and Early Head Start, she also enrolled in the prenatal program. Receiving visits at the shelter was helpful and appreciated, as it brought normalcy to this difficult and vulnerable time. Activities with the kids kept them all occupied and learning, spending quality time together. "Reassurance and acknowledgement from the staff meant a lot and made me feel valued."

Leaving the program for a short time due to work schedules, they re-enrolled. She became involved in their parent committee and was elected as the committee secretary. At the same time, she was elected to Policy Council, also serving there as secretary. She is now the chair of the parent committee, serves on Policy Council, is a parent representative to MHSA, and was elected to the MHSA Board of Directors.

"The more involved I got in HS program governance, the more passionate I have become about it... visiting the State Capitol last year with MHSA was a real eye-opening experience for me. This opportunity helped me realize that I wanted to advocate for Head Start, children, and those experiencing poverty on a higher level." She has since run for a seat on the local district school board. She may not have won the seat, but the 3,000+ votes surprised and encouraged her as she didn't have much time as a single parent to campaign.

Through the parent committee and Policy Council, she has learned to listen to the opinions of those around me, share information concisely and compromise at times to ensure the best results for all of the children and families we work to serve.