



Education Story Cicero Moms Teach Importance of Early Ed

As a child, Sofia Gutierrez was told she wouldn't need an education beyond elementary school, so she never pursued it. But as she moved through life and became a parent to two curious children, she came to realize education wasn't frivolous, but a necessity. **Today, Sofia volunteers as a parent ambassador in Cicero, teaching local caregivers this life-changing lesson.**



"I think if my father's mentality was 'Yes, you're able to study or further your education,' I would've succeeded or gone further in life," Sofia said through a translator. "I wish I had that—someone telling me 'You can do more.'"

"This is why I focus on [education], in order to tell other community members...that their support means a lot in their child's life," she added.

“I like the unity of the group. I like that we're all close together. I feel as though we're a family.”

—Sofia Gutierrez, Parent Mentor

By going door-to-door and visiting local sites, Sofia and other parent ambassadors work together to inform families about the importance of early learning and share information about educational services available in their west-side community. They also host Café Conchas, or parent cafes, to create supportive relationships between parents and educate them about issues important to their children's learning.

The Cicero Neighborhood Network—a coalition of residents, schools, government leaders, social service providers and other stakeholders—brought this initiative to life. With support from United Way of Metro Chicago, Neighborhood Network partners work collaboratively to improve academic outcomes for Cicero students and meet their families' basic needs.

Local moms like Sofia drive this work.

"I like the unity of the group. I like that we're all close together. I feel as though we're a family," Sofia said. "We're all headed towards the same direction—to bring children to programs—and we all have something good to contribute. Together, we can make a difference." ■

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