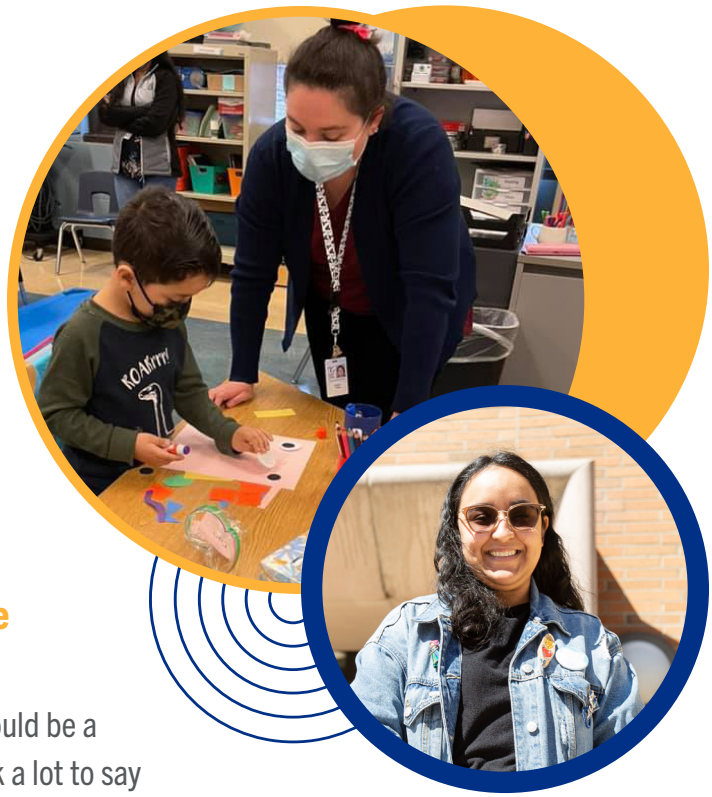
STORY OF IMPACT
ONE MOM'S JOURNEY AS A BRIGHTON PARK PARENT MENTOR



When the pandemic hit and the world shut down, Guadalupe had a difficult choice to make: continue her career at a local daycare or stay home with her son to facilitate his e-learning.

"I identified as an educator," Lupe said. "I never thought I would be a stay-at-home mom. So for me not being able to work…it took a lot to say 'I'm going to set my career aside and be home with [my son].'"

Lupe and her family moved to Brighton Park several years ago. She mostly kept to herself and focused on taking her son to and from school at Columbia Explorers Academy. Although warm and change-seeking by nature, Lupe didn't have intentions to get deeply involved in her Southwest Side community. She didn't know there was a place for her.

> "This is literally what I was meant to do, working with kids. It's my destiny.
>
> **LUPE**

Later in 2021, as kids started returning to school in person and the pandemic droned on, Lupe was approached by an acquaintance, the coordinator of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council's Parent Mentor Program. The opportunity filled every void the pandemic had opened: a volunteer position in the school, spending two hours a day helping out in a kindergarten classroom.

"To me, it was a no-brainer," Lupe said. "This is literally what I was meant to do, working with kids. It's my destiny." Lupe became a parent mentor in her son's old kindergarten classroom.

"Parent mentors are a second set of eyes, ears, and hands in the classroom," she said. "We do one-on-one work with kids who need it most. You want them to be able to feel comfortable. You want them to know that if they need it, they can ask for help."

This was the very work Lupe was trained to do, having earned an associate degree in early childhood education. She flowed so intuitively in the classroom that the teacher was often shocked Lupe knew what to do without direction.

Lupe said the most rewarding part of her role was seeing the kids grow and build confidence. She would often tell students, "I love what you did," when they accomplished a goal to make sure they know they were valued and cared for.

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