

Grossmont College CalWORKs

# A CULTURE OF *Caring*

NEWSLETTER

SPRING SEMESTER 2018  
ISSUE I

## What is CalWORKs?



California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids, CalWORKs is a program that helps families in poverty go to school. CalWORKs partners with the County of San Diego, to provide academic guidance, social service support and work-place training to students who have faced hardships such as: single parenthood, domestic violence, post-traumatic stress, disability, and resettlement.

CalWORKs Programs design and mission is to support the most effective long-term anti-poverty strategy in existence....education.

# Caring In Action

## Stories From Around Campus and the Community

**H**appy Spring Semester from CalWORKs. We want to welcome you to the culture of caring inaugural newsletter. CalWORKs has been on the Grossmont Campus, for almost 20 years dedicated to improving the lives of our students and their families, our campus and community. In 2017, CalWORKs served over 600 students speaking over 23 languages. While the population of the program is very diverse, the one trait that unifies all CalWORKs Students is their determination to succeed despite many barriers. As we came together to create this newsletter, counselors and staff found it difficult to fully explain just how incredible our students are and all the challenges they overcome! We finally decided we were to close our students stories to fully do them justice. Enter Amanda, a journalism graduate student who kindly agreed to interview a CalWORKs Student and myself. I hope Amanda's article and recap of the year's activities gives you window into our incredible students, their children, our staff and activities. Lastly, a big thank you to our students, Mario Chacon, Gerardette Nutt, CalWORKs Counselors and our incredible staff.

Please stop by the CalWORKs Office in building 60, we are confident you will see why we call our department the Culture of Caring. I wish you a wonderful semester.

Shukran, Grazie, Asante Sana, Murakoze, Merci,  
—Gabrielle Gosselin, Program Coordinator



### Words from a CalWORKs Child As shared by a moved CalWORKs Counselor

7-year-old Sarah, sat patiently with her mother on the kids chair while we worked on academic education plan. While the counselor was putting the final touches on the plan, the counselor asked Sarah, how she was feeling about her Mom going to school. She told the counselor, "My Mom is studying just like me, I am happy." The counselor asked her how she was doing living in a new country. She started to cry, and told her with tears rolling down her face; "I am thankful to be here, but I miss my home so much. No one should ever have to leave their country! It is not a good choice but sometimes we must go. I miss my Grandma every day. My mom goes to school, I want her to see that. She would be so proud."

### Giving Back to our Community

Thanksgiving 2017, CalWORKs Students participated in the Basket Brigade which served over 150 families at Grossmont College and in the community. CalWORKs collected donations and created lovely baskets of food to ensure a happy holiday was had by all!



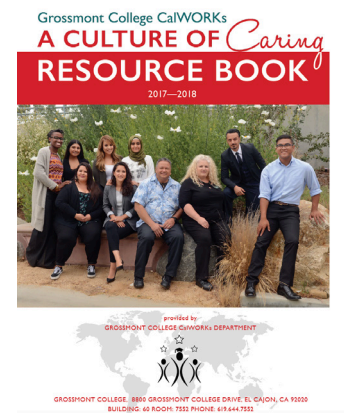
### Giving to our Students

Snow was falling on Saturday, Dec 16, when 300 CalWORKs Families came together to celebrate the holidays at Grossmont College. Everyone came together to learn new things, and play in the snow while waiting for Santa Claus. A warm turkey dinner was enjoyed by all while joy and laughter filled the air. A huge thanks to Vanessa Duron and Gerardette Nutt for putting together this event.



### Community Resource Book

In 2017, CalWORKs was happy to release a resource book. The book was born out of our interest in serving all of the Grossmont College Community. We often hear about students dropping out of Grossmont College due to basic need shortages such as: food, housing, transportation, childcare, medical and dental care. The book was created to help students find support in the community so that they could stay in school. Resource books were delivered around the campus to help faculty and staff serve students. Should you find your department in need of one-please don't hesitate to ask. A big thank you to Finley Cazzorla and Uhmbaya Laury for their diligence in creating this book.



### "Why My Cup?"

CalWORKs Student authors a book

This year, CalWORKs Student, Uhmbaya Laury released a book. Uhmbaya book is an emotional journey through her childhood. It is searing, honest and hard hitting. It is being used as teaching text for social work courses at two colleges in San Diego. Congratulations Uhmbaya! It is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Why-My-Cup-Overcame-Growing-ebook/dp/B01MG8SY18>.



# A Welfare Parent's Student Story

Grossmont College's CalWORKs office is a beehive of chatter and activity. Preparations are in full swing to cater a holiday feast to 200 families. Bikes festooned with ribbons are stashed in all spare spaces throughout the halls and offices.

"These families get to have a sit-down meal and not stress about buying gifts," Giuleana tells me.

The Grossmont office serves some 600 students who speak over 23 different languages, providing support for refugees, immigrants, domestic violence survivors, first-generation college students, former foster youth, and those enduring homelessness. Giuleana was one of those students.

"I got pregnant at 17," she says ruefully. "The lifestyle I was living was horrible. I knew I needed to get out to give my son the lifestyle he deserved." When the father

of her child gave her an ultimatum – "pick college or me" – she left, moved in with her mom, and applied for cash aid.

"I was ashamed. As a Mexican child, the stigma is, you feel like you're being weak, lazy. But I needed an income for my child."

When Giuleana got on assistance, it became obvious that the county did not trust her. "They thought I was hiding my baby's father," she says, disgusted.

She describes how county inspectors questioned the way she stored her baby's clothes (plastic containers were an easy way to keep things tidy, but they insinuated that Giuleana packed them that way to more easily shuttle the baby to his "real" home). They pointed out a pair of Giuleana's boots and tried to link them to a male presence.

"When I hear some of our students' stories of obtaining cash assistance, it sounds like they are criminals on parole," says Gabrielle Gosselin, CalWORKs Program Coordinator. "People on cash aid often experience the same stripping of their rights as former felons. Did you know that people on cash aid can have their homes entered, searched, underwear and sock drawers rifled through with no warning?" she asks me incredulously.

"In my experience, the country, county, and even college campuses will talk about ethnicity, orientation, and religion, but poverty is rarely discussed, even though it touches every marginalized group. Poverty is a shameful subject, even taboo. I am so grateful our campus has administrators that have opened the doors for these types of conversations. It is only through these conversations that the stigma and shame of poverty can be diminished."

Once her son turned two, Giuleana was required to perform 25 hours of an "activity" per week.

"The activity they push is work, any kind of work." Giuleana says. "They made me perform a job search with no thought given to whether this job would support my son once their subsidy ended." She originally planned on attending a trade school, but her older brother had encouraged her to check into attending college, and she decided to go to Grossmont.

Giuleana was told by county workers that she was not allowed to attend school while on cash aid – but she knew, instinctively, that this was wrong. She started as a Nursing major.

"It was what my parents wanted me to be," she says glumly. But soon thereafter, her son was diagnosed with a speech impairment, and she needed to take him to therapy sessions. This was an added stressor, on top of already missing classes for various county appointments to continue receiving aid.

Forced to withdraw from several classes, she was disqualified from the Nursing program.

During this difficult time, Giuleana happened to run

into a friend from high school. "She told me, 'I'm on CalWORKs. There's this office you go to.' She was using terms I knew nothing about."

Giuleana checked out the Grossmont College CalWORKs office.

"I was greeted with love, like being greeted by family," she says. "The staff would say: 'Let's not talk about school just yet. How are you?' They were my coaches and my friends; they got me through my worst times on earth."

"Engagement is the most important foundation for my relationship with a student," says Gabrielle. "If we don't engage, how does the student feel safe? It sets the stage for all of our other work, academic, mentoring, etc. I need a student to feel safe enough to say the hard stuff so we can put resources in place

to help them be successful. "What does equity look like? Understanding what everyone's bringing to the table," says Gabrielle. "We see what they're doing well and empower them accordingly."

Gabrielle and the CalWORKs staff do their best to serve and inform the Grossmont College community. They consistently receive new referrals, people who have encountered dead-ends and

rejection elsewhere.

"We want them to know they're not alone and we're proud to serve them," says Gabrielle. "It is a labor of love."

People are coming to school hungry. "You have to hold on to your humility when you come in asking for a cup of noodles because you're starving," Gabrielle says.

The CalWORKs office works in partnership with the county, but as an independent entity. It allows them to better support the students that seek help.

Gerardette Nutt, CalWORKs Program Specialist, told Giuleana about her rights. "I learned that the county was not allowed to tell me that I couldn't

**"I didn't know my rights. Now, I'm not afraid of anything."**

go to school.”

The county sometimes discourages people from going to school so they can avoid paying for books, transportation, childcare, and all the services that accompany education.

“Gerardette advocates for us in ways that no one in the county does,” Giuleana declares. “She literally called my county worker’s supervisor and asked, ‘Why are you telling her she can’t go to school?!’”

Giuleana switched her major to Criminal Justice, and her grades improved. “I was proud. It made me feel successful.”

Especially helpful was the role CalWORKs took on to help Giuleana in navigating county regulations and paperwork. They served as a liaison, transmitting necessary updates and keeping careful records in case any questions arose.

“When I first came in, I told Gabrielle, I’m so done,” Giuleana says. “Being criticized. Being discouraged.” She felt irrevocably shut down by all the difficult interactions with the county.

She was astounded at the support she received, and shocked that it took her so long to find out about the program. “Most professors don’t even know about these programs,” she says.

“I didn’t know my rights. Now, I’m not afraid of anything.”

“Gabrielle saved me,” Giuleana says. “I am so appreciative of her. Without her, I wouldn’t be where I’m at.”

She is in awe of the passion and resilience of the CalWORKs staff. “The counselors – I’m speechless,” she sputters, shaking her head. “How exhausting for them to hear all these stories about all the hardships so many of us have endured. And they still greet people with a smile of their faces, every day.”

In the Fall of 2017, Giuleana entered San Diego State University in their Criminal Justice program. She remembers the day she received her acceptance e-mail. She was eating with her son.

“I was so excited. I literally screamed,” she says happily. “It’s a miracle.”

“If I made it, you can do it too.”

Compared to that first discouraging year of vocational study-style education at Grossmont, Giuleana feels like she won the lottery. “Going to school, getting financial aid, a work-study grant that they can’t take away – I’m doing this!” she grins, pumping her fists in the air like a cheerleader.

“I graduated from cash aid,” she jokes.

But in all seriousness, she sees the pressure put on needy families to only pursue vocational training as a big problem. “All these barriers!” she cries passionately. “Having to fulfill all those requirements for the county, just to do the minimum and just stop and risk not being able to support your family at the end!”

She hopes to put her education in Criminal Justice to good use, to heal a system she sees as faulty. She’s now even thinking about law school.

“I want to change the justice system,” she says earnestly. “A lot of women get criminalized. Students get criminalized. I see it as a challenge. These are our families, our students, getting abused left and right, even by their own families. You’re setting us up for failure, for a struggle. What you want us to be, a stereotype?”

The stereotype of the “Welfare Queen” living a life of ease and luxury is ridiculous, Giuleana contends. “Give me, give me, give me,” she mocks, making grabby-hands. “I get \$569.00 per month to support my son and myself in San Diego County. I am not interested in luxury, I just want enough to survive and I will work hard do the rest.”

She remembers how she felt in family court – being obliged to justify why she wanted full custody of

her child.

“I cried in front of the judge,” she recalls, her eyes welling up.

“We’re not money-hungry! We’re not here to milk the system. We’re hungry to make a future for our families. We are making a leap of faith that we are going to be okay.”

Her son walked the stage with her at her Grossmont graduation.

“Without him I wouldn’t be here,” she says proudly. “He saw me at my weakest and encouraged me. He was my motivation. He was the one I would look at and think, ‘I need to do this.’”

“I’m the proudest mom of them all. Life’s hard with him, but I would never change it. Getting on assistance. Walking into Grossmont. Meeting the people I’ve met.

What we go through makes us stronger. What everyone goes through matters.”

“Our students are more than their transcripts,” says Gabrielle.

“I’m more than a number,” Giuleana agrees. “I don’t

want to be a statistic. ‘That welfare mom that was on cash aid. That number that failed.’

“A 3.1 GPA got me into State!” she crows, jabbing a triumphant finger. “Education is power. That’s what people don’t understand. I discovered that I’m powerful. I have power,” she declares.

What would Giuleana say to student parents who feel like they have no options?

“I just want you to know that you have the opportunity to do it!” she exclaims. “People need to understand: education gets you what you want. They shouldn’t have limits. You can get your PhD! You can do anything!”

“Come to school! It’s worth it! Trust me! Go to CalWORKs! It’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s okay. You won’t be on assistance forever. It’s a stepping stone. You’re stepping into the future.”

“CalWORKs gave me the opportunity to not give up on me when other programs did. They gave me the strength to believe in myself and in the future I deserved.”

“They didn’t just help me believe in life I never dreamed of, but they open up the doors to a future I never imagined.” ■

## “I graduated from cash aid,” she jokes.



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## Administration, Counselors and Student Staff



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**Bill Rapolla**  
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**Markus Berrien**  
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