SUMMER 2020

Western Avenue COMMUNITY CENTER

The Center Connection

Serving the community since 1926

A message from the Board President

Greetings from Western Avenue Community Center.

I sincerely hope that everyone is staying safe and holding up during these challenging times. There is an old saying you likely have heard before, "Life is a journey that must be traveled no matter how bad the roads and accommodations" Oliver Goldsmith. I bet many of you reading our first newsletter in quite some time may agree, the road is rather bumpy right now and has more than a few potholes to navigate around. With a pandemic that has put the world on edge and the social unrest in our country, we are all wondering when will the ride get much smoother?

For Western Avenue Community Center, which has served the west side Bloomington neighborhoods now for 94 years, the past couple of years have challenged us with a level of uncertainty and if not for the strong support from the community, our journey may have come to an end. We found a way to continue serving the community and are looking forward to some exciting things happening at Western Avenue.

Our existing programs that support the Hispanic community are active and we hope to get our seniors back in the building once we clear more of the hurdles from the coronavirus. I am personally excited about the renewal of our youth programming starting with a "teen club" two nights per week. Our intention was to start out with 20 teens and after the first night it grew to over 30 kids in the building. It's clear the shelter order had an impact on the kids, and they were anxious to get in the gym and play basketball. Many thanks to Second Presbyterian Church for providing the kids a hot meal when they are with us. We have plans to offer "life skills" discussions and are currently working on a program with Heartland Community College for teen girls to explore options that will broaden their opportunities.

Goldsmith noted accommodations on life's journey. If you can imagine a place that is welcoming for all who enter, it is Western Avenue. The facility, after being rebuilt in 1983 after a fire, is ready for some updates. We are excited to begin "dreaming" about several initiatives to improve the use of our facility that include improvements to the gymnasium, restrooms, and kitchen. These improvements can only be achieved through the support of our generous donors.

I will close with saying how proud I am of our dedicated staff and board of directors for all they do to make this journey worthwhile no matter what challenge we are faced with. You will realize this when reading our newsletter and how we continued to serve our clients while closed during the shelter in place order from March 18 to June 8. When you have been around as long as we have, you learn how to adjust and keep moving forward.

I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and visit our website which will soon be revamped to help the public navigate and learn more about what you can personally do to volunteer or make a donation.

Continue To Be Safe,
Michael Jones, Board President



Board of Directors

Mike Jones, President
Denny Steele, Secretary
Jeff Gendron, Treasurer
Fernando Cornejo
Toni Farrington
Cheris Larson
Mike Manahan
Michelle Mancias
Mike McKnight
John Schoening
Kerry Urquizo
Jeffery Woodard

MEET THE STAFF

These individuals keep The Center moving forward



CHARLA CULLEN
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Charla holds a B.S. from Illinois State University and a CBA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has been connected to The Center since 1980. Charla has held the Executive Director position 3 times, from 1980-1999, 2007-2010, and now in 2020. Her passion for The Center always brought her back and her willingness to assist in The Center's endeavors make us confident that we continue to be a place of trust in the heart of the west side and the greater McLean County community.

BRIAN TROWER
FINANCE DIRECTOR



Brian has been the Finance Director at The Center since 2019. Prior to taking this role, he served on the Board of Directors for over 20 years. Brian received a B.S. in Economics and Marketing from Illinois State University. Through his commitment to WACC, Brian ensures all the finances are taken care of so that we can continue to serve our community.



SOCORRO ALVAREZ
HISPANIC OUTREACH DIRECTOR

Socorro has worked at WACC for 28 years. Her commitment towards the Hispanic population (first in the pre-school program and now as a director) has allowed her to serve the community through a variety of services offered by The Center and other entities in Bloomington-Normal.



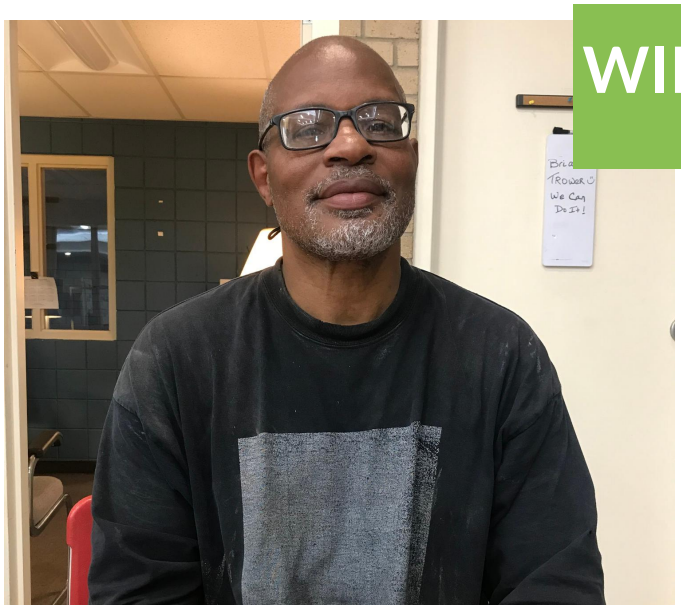
SAUL PULIDO
INTERPRETATION COORDINATOR

Saul is a strong asset to the team and to the community. His trajectory of over 15 years at WACC demonstrates his willingness to serve the community. He started as a volunteer, but his will and passion led him to the director role.

LIZ ACEVEDO-ALSTRUM
HISPANIC OUTREACH COUNSELOR



Liz started at The Center in 1998 after the need for free counseling in Spanish was identified. Her understanding of the community make her a strong advocate for their well being. Through her part-time employment (and sometimes pro-bono services), she's able to enrich the lives of many. She holds an M.S. in Counseling from Illinois State University.



WILLIAM "JUNIOR" HOSEA
COORDINATOR

Junior, as he is known, has the record for the longest time at WACC. Many will recall him training at The Center and going on to be a Golden Gloves and Professional Boxer. He also trained with the U.S. Olympic team in Russia. Junior does not shy away from anything and can be counted on to take on whatever needs to be done at The Center. We are blessed to have him as part of our team.



KENDRICK CARR
TEEN CLUB DIRECTOR

Kendrick is one of the newest members of the team. He started in June but he has always had a connection to The Center. After spending afternoons at WACC during his high school days, he went to the University of Illinois at Springfield where he obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Education. He has come back to the place that saw him grow to lead a group of teens through a variety of recreational and life skills activities.

ORMAN JONES
TEEN CLUB ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

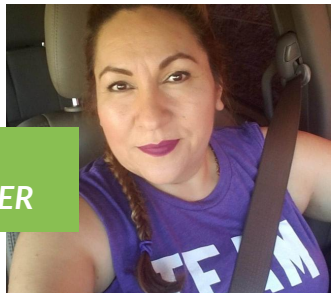
Orman is a graduate of Illinois State University where he obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Kinesiology. He is excited to join Kendrick this summer in assisting with the teen club. Orman will also be coaching fitness classes for our seniors.





JEREMY BUTLER
PAGODA MARTIAL ARTS PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

Dr. Jeremy Butler has been the Martial Arts Program leader since 2014. He is a 4th degree black belt in the Pagoda Martial Arts System and holds a PhD in Kinesiology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He works as a professor at Judson University in Elgin, IL and is remotely supervising a senior student to keep this valuable program going.



BLANCA TORRES
WERQ PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

Blanca Torres has been the WERQ program leader for over 3 years. The program stemmed out of the Hispanic Outreach Program after clients showed interest for a space to dance and exercise. Blanca fosters a caring and comfortable space where members of the community can exercise their worries away.



ROSE BEVERLY
RECEPTIONIST

Rose holds an impressive background of social service due to her tenure of 28 years of teaching at Heartland Head Start. After that, Rose joined WACC and has been a member of the team for about 20 years working as a Receptionist and aide to the Senior Program and After School Program. Her commitment to The Center and community can be seen through her helping others.

MARTHA SALDAÑA
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Martha has been working at WACC since 2019. Her bilingual skills are very helpful to staff and many of our clients. She is dedicated to making things run smoothly and enjoys engaging with community members and guiding them through the resources that we offer. She is originally from Mexico where she completed her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting.

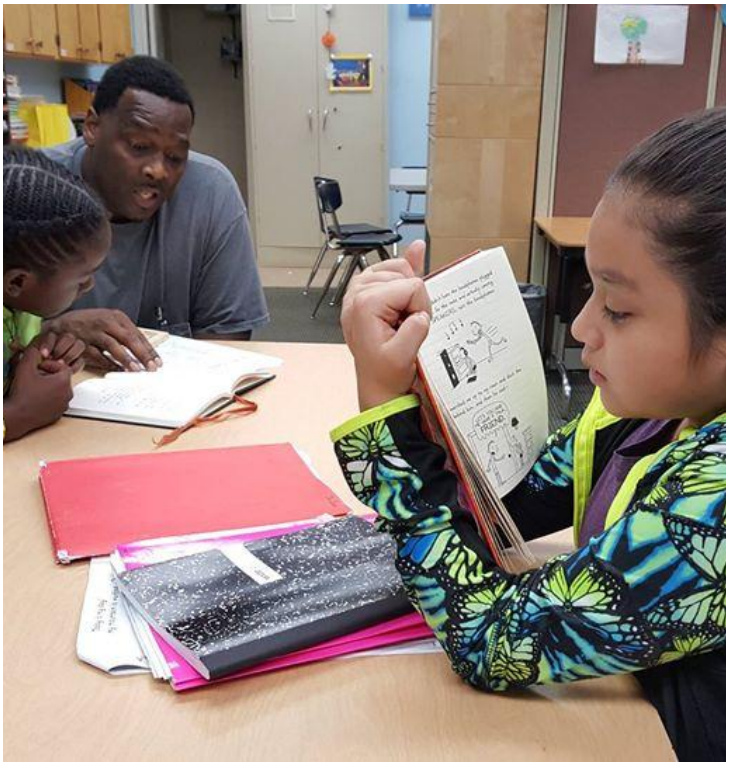




JUAN GALVÁN
CUSTODIAN

We are thankful to Juan for keeping our building clean and safe for our clients since 2017. Thanks to him, we are able to enjoy a welcoming space with the members of our community.

BEFORE COVID-19 HAPPENED...



OUR AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

During the 2019-2020 school year, The Center held its After School Program, from September through March, which was hosted in the Eastview Christian Church Bloomington facility. We had to suspend the program because of the coronavirus, but we are confident that the 38 children that were served during the 7 months the program ran were positively impacted by our volunteers' commitment and care.

As always, our children convened in prayer, were assisted with homework help, enjoyed reading time, and played or danced during the enrichment segment of the program; but more importantly, they were served snacks that kept their energy running for hours!

We are in the process of evaluating our After School Program, so keep an eye out for news!

OUR SENIOR ACTIVITIES

Our seniors got together for several events including Valentine's Day Dance, fitness classes, and monthly Bingo. Their potlucks after Bingo filled the environment with joy and motivation to keep moving forward. We are all excited to host them again soon, but as always, we will put our clients' health and safety first.



DONATE TODAY!

Our work is only possible because of donations from community partners and members.
Thank you for your generosity and commitment to making a difference in the lives of so many.

CONTINUING OUR WORK ... FROM HOME

SOCORRO'S STORY

During the quarantine months, Socorro Alvarez reached over 60 people over the phone, via email, and Facebook messenger to assist them with the filing of immigration forms, complete unemployment benefits applications, refer people to food pantries, help a young lady with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and organized communication with 8-10 families to help in the efforts of the Wesley United Methodist Church to distribute diapers. Along with her passion for helping others, Socorro took the extra time at home to cook delicious meals for her children.

SAUL'S STORY

With the courts closed due to the pandemic, Saul Pulido was not able to provide interpretation/ translation services in the courts. However, with the rise of the Zoom platform, he provided services to Carle BroMenn Medical Center and District 87 in several online meetings interpreting in Spanish for families. After work, Saul enjoyed relaxing afternoons with his family.



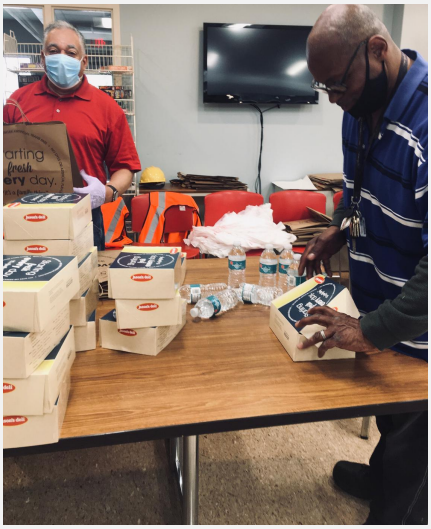
LIZ'S STORY

Liz Acevedo-Alstrum continued her commitment for the well-being of the Hispanic community in McLean County. Her 25 clients looked for the same services: stress, anxiety, depression, and relationship problems. However, she was happy to note that the newly found family time was well spent. After Liz provided ideas on how to better take advantage of the free time, families shared with her how much more appreciative they were of each other and how they were bonding more after playing board games and talking. As a mental health professional, Liz recognized that she needed to avoid "compassion fatigue" and continued establishing boundaries with her clients. In her free time, Liz spent quality time with family and safely connected with friends.

LENDING A HAND DURING COVID-19







While most of the world sheltered at home during this coronavirus pandemic, Western Avenue Community Center did what they're known for: lending a hand to those in need. During the months of April though June, WACC distributed over 11,000 grab and go meals through the "Feeding Bloomington-Normal and Beyond Program" sponsored by United Way of McLean County. For 9 weeks, volunteers from Eastview Christian Church and Second Presbyterian Church distributed 275 meals each day Monday through Friday and over 450 bags/boxes of groceries to provide food assistance for our neighbors. A line of cars circled the building each day and were met with a supportive message showing care and understanding for many who were out of work due to the pandemic. We are continuing this work with the Emergency Grocery Program through the help of a grant from Mid Central Community Action. Families can contact Socorro Alvarez to obtain a form to fill out and provide her with a grocery list that can be picked up at Walmart.

Building benches and dreams





WACC's Heroes



It is no secret that for a long time, WACC's gymnasium had not shared the joy to others of sitting down and watching the young and the old enjoy a great basketball game or dance. Now, thanks to our heroes, Junior and Kendrick, we can all sit back and enjoy! Junior and Kendrick took the initiative of buying wood to build benches and bleachers that can be utilized during our many events. Their selfless act speaks truth to their willingness to help out the community, even during a pandemic. Let's continue this amazing work! There are many things that still need to be fixed including the backboards and score clock, so help us take the next step to make the gym better.







Junior Hosea has been involved at The Center since 1976. He has been a familiar face to many as he opens the building, ensures all the food and water is ready to go, mows the lawn, and assists in a variety of our activities. This commitment to WACC has won Junior the trust and admiration from staff and community. Kendrick Carr has been involved at The Center since his high school days, when he won the Earle B. Johnson, Jr. Scholarship from WACC to attend college. Today, Kendrick is the Director of the Teen Club and works closely with Assistant Director Orman Jones. We welcome both with excitement and look forward to all that they will do for The Center!

WE ARE OPEN!

"Open to all and closed to none"

VISIT US >

OUR SERVICES

As we return to the new normal, help us maintain the State of Illinois guidelines to safely serve you. Please schedule an appointment with one of our staff and we'll gladly welcome you back.

Address:
600 N Western Ave
Bloomington, IL 61701

Hours:
Monday - Friday
9am to 5pm

Phone:
(309) 829-4807

Website:
www.westernavenuecc.org

Hispanic Outreach Program
Interpretation & Translation
Senior Programs
Teen Club

WACC is known for our assistance to the minority and immigrant populations of McLean County since 1926.



WHAT'S NEXT >

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR...

As the state continues to slowly reopen and with God's will, we will continue to provide our notable services like Bingo, fitness classes, and much more!





HAPPENING NOW >

TEEN CLUB

The Teen Club is on its way as 30 teens come together to The Center to enjoy 3 hours of fun and entertainment. Kendrick Carr, Teen Club Director, has led teens in recreational activities since June 17. The teens enjoy much needed interaction with others. Our teens are able to enjoy a delicious, warm meal prepared and donated by none other than Chef Gerald Safford from Second Presbyterian Church and transported to our building by Junior Hosea. The program meets every Wednesday & Thursday from 5pm to 8pm.

DONATE TODAY

With your help, we are able to move forward with our services

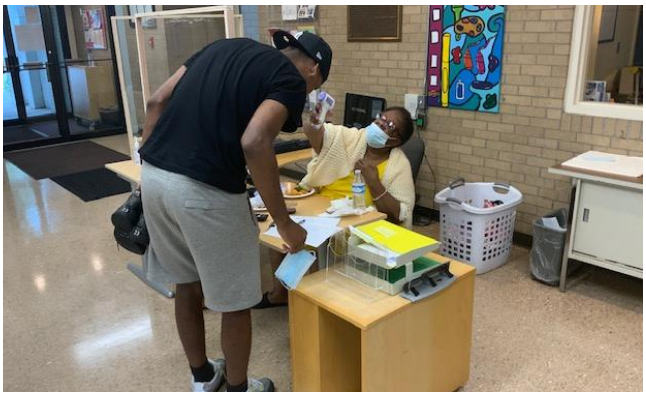


Tie-dye is back! Our teen girls enjoy a great afternoon showing their creative side.

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much"
-- Helen Keller



Thanks to a designated donation, we can now enjoy a cool gym!



Rose taking the temperature of one of our Teen Club participants and providing him with a mask.

I wish to make a donation

$ ____ enclosed O Check O Cash

Designated to:

O Hispanic Outreach Program
O Senior Program
O Teen Club
O As needed
O Other _____

For online donations, please visit:
westernavenuecc.org/donations.htm
and click on the "Donate to WACC" button.

Name:

_____

Address:

_____

Email:

_____

Phone:

_____

Please return this form to:
Western Avenue Community Center
600 N Western Ave
Bloomington, IL 61701

THANK YOU TO OUR CURRENT AND FUTURE DONORS! WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT, WACC WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO LEND A HAND TO SO MANY. WE WILL CONTINUE TO STRIVE TO BE GOOD SAMARITANS IN THIS COMMUNITY.

Ready to make an impact in the lives of families and children? Consider making a donation at westernavenuecc.org/donations.htm. May God provide you and yours with much more!



"Serving individuals and families by opening doors of hope and love through our faith in Jesus Christ"

Western Avenue Community Center
600 N Western Ave.
Bloomington, IL 61701