

EveryChild California is proud to recognize Amanda Guajardo of Family F.O.C.U.S. as the February 2019 recipient of the Circle of Excellence award.

The Circle of Excellence is awarded to a member of EveryChild California who has supported the Associations' endeavors and has shown outstanding leadership within the ECE community.

Amanda recently joined Family F.O.C.U.S. with over 25 years of experience in Early Childhood Education. She has served as a Mentor Teacher at the university level, Program Director for various Child Development Centers in California and Parent Educator at the local, state, and federal level ensuring quality of services to at-risk children and their families. Her passion for serving infants and young children with special needs is evident in her work as a developmental specialist, parent advocate, and trainer for professionals working with children with disabilities including various non-profit organizations throughout the Central Valley. She earned my bachelor's degree in Child Development at CSU, Fresno and completed graduate work in Special Education at San Francisco State University. She enjoys traveling to visit her children whenever possible. She is also an active member of the Women's Leadership Council in Visalia promoting literacy to young children in Tulare County. Thank you Amanda for all of your efforts on behalf of EveryChild California and the ECE Community.

**What has been most rewarding about your career in early education so far?**

It has always been my lifelong goal to manage at the highest level of an organization. In fact, when I began at the age of 20, and since then, I continue to feel rewarded each day with opportunities to learn how to think outside of the box and how to lead. Serving a diverse community in Central California provides opportunities to collaborate with other organizations on multiple issues and goals in a long-term commitment to ensure young families "get off to a good start" not only with their child's education but as active community members.

**If you could give advice to someone who is new in the administrative role, what would it be?**

Having served in various leadership positions, each role taught me many foundational truths about leadership. I learned not only from teaching staff but also from fellow administrators in the field. In my first professional jobs I faced difficulty. Personal challenges and grief I experienced became part of years of uncertainty about how I should spend my career. I knew very early on, that being a single parent would present many challenges. Becoming a parent educator provided me with the opportunity to support, inspire, and empower families at risk. Every single person I know who is at a point in their life where they have any measure of success or thriving will tell you that they have had challenges. What sets people like me apart is my resilience. By the time I was first hired by a state agency, I had worked as a home visitor, center-based teacher, and parent educator in many facets. I enjoyed some of my jobs and seasons more than others, but always appreciated the chances I had been given to showcase my abilities. I always strove to make the most of them. Even if I wished I were doing something different, I always committed myself to doing my work with excellence, knowing this was the best way to bring about new opportunities.

**What is your proudest accomplishment in your career?**

I'd like to think my proudest accomplishment in my career is yet to happen! The idea of looking forward to greater things is exciting. I have found, for better or for worse, teachers can change a child's life. Working with young children brings a tremendous amount of responsibility because you are working with young people at their most vulnerable time. I always tell people my work in this field is the best and most challenging work I have ever done. I am learning, despite the hard work, I find it exciting to be able to engage parents in the educational life of their young children and inspire the work of teachers in and out of the classroom. Continued opportunities to do this in creative ways would be a great accomplishment.