



Center for Nonviolence

Impact Story December 17, 2020

Friends and Supporters,

There's nothing more rewarding than finding out how the work we do has impacted our clients long after their time with us. Over the years, we've served literally thousands of individuals and families trying to break free from violence, and it's impossible to know how all of their lives have turned out. But many of the people we've served are so thankful for the Center and the difference we've made in their lives that they want everyone to know about who we are and what we have to offer. Raul Perez, a former Youth Support Program participant, is one of those people.

This summer, Raul, an artist and graphic designer, was one of five muralists selected for Art This Way's "Utopian Mural Project" celebrating diversity and inclusion. This year's project spotlighted several community-serving organizations, including CfN. When Raul submitted



his proposal for the CfN mural, we had no idea that it was his deep, personal connection to us that led him to enter the competition. After he was selected as a finalist, it was an exciting and validating moment for us to learn about his ties to the organization. Raul was gracious enough to share his story with us, and now, as we wrap up 2020 and head into our 40th year, we want to share his story with you.

Born in Jalisco, Mexico, Raul was just 10 years old when he came to the United States. Like many people who come to the U.S., Raul's family was in search of a better life. His father had been a migrant worker in the U.S. since the 1980s and would send money back home to Raul's mother. In 1996, as immigration laws made it difficult for migrant workers and their

families to travel back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico, Raul's family decided it was time for them to join his father permanently, and the Perez family settled in Fort Wayne.

As Raul entered his teens, his parents hit a rocky patch in their relationship. "My parents were going through some tough times," he shared, "and my siblings and I would come to CfN while my mother attended classes or support groups." What Raul remembers most about those times is the feeling of safety and security that being at the Center gave him. Even something as simple as receiving a hot meal and getting help with homework had a lasting impact on Raul. That same feeling of safety and security was something his mother experienced as well. In recalling conversations he's had with his mother, Raul said, "As for my mom, she often tells me she would go there mainly to listen. She was afraid to tell her stories because she was afraid of being judged, but she said listening to others gave her comfort and hope. My mother has always been brave, in my opinion, but I think those couple of years she attended made her confidence go up and reassured her that she was on the right path."

There is no doubt in Raul's mind that CfN impacted his life in immeasurable ways. As he described how our services changed things for him and his family, Raul stated, "Even though I was just a kid, seeing my parents struggle took its toll. My parents did their best to shield me from most of their worries, [but] I still felt their pain and had to witness a lot of what they went through on top of what I was going through. After [receiving] help from CfN, and [witnessing] my mom's own personal growth, the impact is tremendous. Seeing my mother now and how happy she is really puts things into perspective. Seeing her just go about her day and being happy brings a random smile to my face. The fear is no longer there."

Raul doesn't credit this life changing transformation to a single individual but rather to everyone he and his family encountered at the Center. "I'd like to thank everyone involved," he said, "because everyone played a different role and helped to make a difference in one way or another. We all strive to be strong and independent, but the truth is we don't become that on our own. No one does it alone in this world, and asking for help is just part of growth."

We are as thankful to Raul and his family as they are to us. His story serves as proof that our vision of creating homes, communities and a world free from violence and oppression is not a lofty, idealistic goal, but a realistic and achievable one. And as we enter this season of giving, we hope that you'll partner with us in that vision so that young people like Raul and their families can receive the kind of help and healing that only CfN can provide.

Wishing you a safe & healthy holiday season
And a peaceful New Year

- The Team at the Center for Nonviolence