

Interviewee: Hilda Ramírez

Interviewers: Jonathan Scully, Ysander Figueroa, Frank Flynn

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Abstract: Hilda Ramirez was born in the Dominican Republic in 1964 and later moved to New York City. Hilda has earned three academic degrees from the following universities: Bay State College, Lesley University, and Harvard University. In this interview, Hilda speaks about the challenges in her life and about her dual identity as a Latina and as an American woman. She credits the support of her family for her personal success. At the time of the interview, Hilda served as Executive Director of the Worcester Youth Center. In this position, she helped improved the lives of many disadvantaged children and youth in Worcester. Currently, she is Assistant Director of the Latino Education Institute (LEI) at Worcester State University.

JS: My name is Jonathan Scully and I am here with Ysander Figueroa and Frank Flynn. We are here at the Worcester Youth Center to collect oral histories about the lives of women in Worcester. Based on the goals of the National Convention of Women's Rights that took place in Worcester in 1850, we would like to learn more about the topic of education and Latino youth. Thank you very much for helping us with this project.

FF: We are doing a project with you... I called you on the phone and you mentioned that you wanted to speak about Latino students and their struggles in education. We would like to know if we can include this project on the website of the "The Women's Oral Project" that we are contributing to, and if that is OK with you.

HR: Yes

FF: Thank you

JS: Miss, what is your full name?

HR: Hilda Ramírez

JS: Were you born in the United States or in a different country?

HR: In a different country, in the Dominican Republic.

JS: How was the transition from that country to the United States?

HR: Difficult.

JS: Difficult.... Why?

HR: Because I grew up in a small town in the Dominican Republic and then I moved to New York, a very big city. It a transition from a small town to a big city is always difficult for a child, I was ten years old. I was so scared. New schools, new friends, and adapting.... So, it was quite intimidating.

JS: What is your date of birth?

HR: January 8th, [19]'64.

JS: Why did you move to Worcester?

HR: I went to college in Boston and while I was in school I met someone and eventually... we became a couple. And I moved here for that person.

JS: Did you attend Boston University?

HR: Yes, I attended three universities, yes.

JS: Three universities?

HR: Yes, yes, different.

JS: Yes, which ones?

HR: First, I went to a small private school, called Bay State College, where I studied tourism. After that, a university—I attended Lesley University where I studied Business Administration. And then I attended Harvard where I studied Education—Administration and Education.

YF: I want to ask you a question. This... The person whom you met here in Boston... was he Hispanic?

HR: No, American. Anglo-Saxon from Canada. We are not together anymore! So please do not ask me too much about it! [Laughs.]

JS: Do you have any children?

HR: No, I don't have any children.

JS: What year did you graduate?

HR: From where?

JS: Oh yea, three, three universities. [Laughs.]

JS: From Bay State College.

HR: In '85.

JS: And also from Boston University?

HR: Lesley University?

JS: Oh, Lesley. Yes.

HR: Oh, Lesley... OK Lesley I graduated in.... Oh, I graduated from Lesley in '94.

JS: What sources of support have been most important to you, in your education or in your life in general?

HR: Sources of support for me?

JS: Yes...

HR: My family...

JS: Your family, yes.

HR: Yes, of course, my family. They are always there. When anything happens we always get together, we talk, we share, and they are always there for me. They help me solve any problem. Likewise, I also support them.

JS: What was it like to grow up as a Latina child or a Latina woman?

HR: How was it...? Please repeat?

JS: How was it like to grow up as a Latina child or a Latina woman?

HR: Growing up. OK. I know no other way because I am just... It was very good. It was... I love being a Latina. I am proud of who I am. I love our food, our music. The focus on family..., on religion, it was very important, Catholic. And my parents are older people who taught us a lot of responsibilities. They taught us... they have... they just celebrated fifty years of marriage.

So, they taught us many virtues, many good things, such as tolerance, respect. So, all of these things are something that I find important. I have an emergency all, sorry.

JS: That's OK.

[Hilda takes the call. The interview resumes.]

JS: Do you continue to practice your Latin culture or have you assimilated to American culture?

HR: No, I think I know how to live in two cultures. So, I do not live in one or the other but in both. I have a new identity as a *Latina American*. So, that doesn't—you do not hold back on your culture nor [do] you accept the other. So, you learn to live in the two cultures.

JS: OK...

YF: Do you understand?

JS: More or less, no.

HR: This is pretty high-level stuff...

JS: You can say it in English.

HR: OK. So, I consider myself bicultural, so that's a new identity. I don't give up something or become something, it is a new identity that you...you know—as a bicultural child you learn how to live in both but you adopt your own. So examples of that might be... that the education of this country forms me, right? And shapes me. But then I have, I have my country, the Dominican Republic as something that I focus on a lot and I know a lot about. I've self-educated myself on because that is a part of where I came from and culture is in my household every day. So, just because I've been framed and shaped in one culture doesn't mean that I give up the other. It just means that I create a new identity. So that's hard. I'm sure you can relate to this yourself though?

JS: Yeah. I was adopted from South Korea and sometimes I had or I have experienced with... What I am trying to say... I've experienced racism and discrimination. I have no opportunity to express my culture because I can't and I'm ashamed, and my parents are American. So, I express my American culture.

HR: That's very different for you. But I am very proud of who I am, who my parents are.... So I guess in English, I'll say to you so that you can understand better but... you know, that happens a lot to different people, but for me I am very proud of being Latina and that is who I am, I am not an American, I am a Latina. Ah... However, I respect living in this country, I love the principles of this country and that's why I live here. Ah, you know. I consider a lot of the elements of this country to be really part of who I am, too. And so I am very comfortable with it

because I'm in an environment where that's celebrated constantly. You know. It's something that, you know, we eat Latino food at home a lot and we listen to Latino music and sometimes it is an overdose, you know... and it is! And it's a criticism sometimes because, you know, we live it so much and that's why it has been so hard. And I'll say it in English and then I can tell you in Spanish because it will be a hard thing for me because it's more of a political side of me that... that it is why it is so difficult that schools in dealing with kids and Latino kids because there is a certain way to educate in the American culture and Latino kids come with a lot of that passion and a lot of that native language and all of that. So, it is hard to balance the two when you are trying to shape a mind and so that is part of the criticism and the challenge at the same time.

HR: So, in Spanish. I am... very proud to be a Latina. That comes from my parents celebrating what it means to be Latina, the food, the religion, the music... you know. It is something that you grow up knowing who you are, having an appropriate identity that celebrates who you are. Sometimes the challenge is that many people do not understand why Latinos are so Latinos.

JS: Yes.

HR: Well, because we love who we are, right? I think this country offers lots of.... America offers many great things that we adopt. So, we live with two identities.

JS: It is great that you have two identities. But for me..., I do not know much about my culture of South Korea and I only have one identity, and that is American. And sometimes I have to express my South Korean culture but I do not know how. My only identity is American. So, it is often very difficult, but... It's OK.

JS: Next question... In Worcester, Do you remember an event that affected you in a certain way?

HR: An event?

JS: Yes, an event in Worcester. In the past?

HR: I don't understand.

JS: For me, I remember in 1999...

HR: (reading)... In Worcester, do you remember an event...? Oh, okay... that affected me in a certain way... a fire... oh OK.

JR: Remember? Yes? Do you have an event? You remember?

HR: That affected me in a certain way... in Worcester...

JS: Or in another country.

HR: September 11th! It's unique that...for me it affected me a lot. Right? And when we talk about September 11, we talk about an event that did...that deeply hurts your American identity, right? Because it was something—a very personal attack. Then, for Latinos, like Americans, we felt it, and it impacted you and changed the world. So, for me it is the only one I can think of... in Worcester...nothing happens in Worcester. This town is very... [laughs]... very boring. Nothing happens here. I am hoping for big things. But maybe in Boston....

JS: Yes, in Boston?

HR: Maybe in Boston, the events that happened to me... hmm... I cannot think of anything good... events... I don't know if... maybe I am looking for something big and you guys something small... I don't know.... But I cannot think about anything.... I am the type of person that adapts easily to all the environments because I have travelled a lot. Then, for me, nothing is a big deal..., you know.... Yes, if someone is fighting where I am, I'll choose another path. I grew up in a big city, so, for me nothing is...

JS: Yes, only... The environment, it affected you?

HR: Exactly.

JS: My last question is, do you visit the Dominican Republic often?

HR: Yes, my parents are retired there.

JS: In the winter or...?

HR: Yes, all year, yes, yes.

JS: Do you vacation?

HR: I am always going because my parents are retired there. They left the United States after they retired. Then I am always going there... well I like to go in the winter, but it's always nice in the summer. I go when I have time.

JS: Are your parents in the Dominican Republic?

HR: They are retired. But they come visit here a lot.

JS: So they're retired?

HR: Mom...

JS: Okay, thank you, *señora*.

FF: These next questions are about your job. Where do you work?

HR: I work at the Worcester Youth Center.

FF: What is your title and what are your responsibilities in the job?

HR: My title is the Executive Director, and my responsibilities are to make sure that we have plenty of resources, that the facility is running well, that, that, that all the youth are developing positively towards the mission here at the Center. To make sure we have sufficient resources to do everything.

FF: When did you start working outside the home? And what types of jobs have you had?

HR: Outside the home... at the age of 14. I have always been working. What types of jobs? At 16 I started working for a corporation, John Hancock, in Boston. That was my first professional job, when I graduated high school and there I was a manager, a manager, of the department. And I also traveled a lot around the world planning conferences and international symposiums. So in that position, that was what I did. And then I left to go study education at Harvard. I wanted a change. So then when I changed, when I finished at Harvard I started and developed an academy of Latin dance... called "Ritmos Academy," here in Worcester. So, I took five years to develop my own business, and three years ago I began to work here.

FF: I know that you work with children outside their studies, but what do you teach them so that they can improve?

HR: Well, one thing we try to do here for the youth is to emphasize the importance of education. So, that's job number one. They need to turn around and find their passion in education. At some point, that link was broken in all of them. They left school, they do not believe in education, they believe that there can get away without an education, but it is very difficult because they would be limited. There are not jobs if you do not have the skills. Then, the first thing we try to do is to bring them here, even if all they do is play basketball or anything else, [then] it is talking about plans for the future, for education and a job. So we try to guide them in that direction.

YF: And what gives you the motivation to help these kids?

HR: For me it is because I see the way of the urban communities, the neighborhoods sometimes are bad, there are many gangs, there is a lot of violent activity, all of it. Then, what can they hope for in that community? So I do not want to say that it's because you are poor that you cannot aspire to be something better. Then for me, it is a way—education is a way to leave poverty behind. Then I believe that it is important to help them, and to support them to enter into education without leaving it.

YF: Now I have a question that is not in our script. I am a student, I still... I am still studying. I think... I was born in Puerto Rico and I moved to Worcester at age 6, and I... I was in a similar neighborhood like those students that are in a bad one, and there were gangs and all that but, in your opinion, what did I do differently from them? Because I don't understand why they don't get out. Is it a lack of motivation or that their parents do not teach them what they need to do? What do you think?

HR: Exactly. I grew up in a similar neighborhood. And I also completed my education. I believe that the difference is what happens at home, sometimes. If you do not have two parents who would tell you "this is what you have to do" and who would guide you, then your path is broken. Many of our youth, unfortunately, do not have parents; live in foster homes, where perhaps they do not understand who they are. It's difficult for a young person. Also sometimes they have single parents who find it difficult to raise and support teenagers. To supervise them when they are working. For example, both of my parents worked very long hours. And they found it very difficult to make sure all of us... all six of us... were doing the right thing. So, that happens even to young people who have parents at home. You know.... When you live in these tough neighborhoods, you need to be aware of everything, of everything your kids are doing. And today with our technology, it's good and bad. Because, for example, it's good in that they feel that we have contact and we can get information daily very easily. It's bad because with the technology the youth can use it to hurt one another, and it is much faster. So if you want to send a text to a person that says... you know, "Do you want to do something?"...well it affects us a lot. And instead of helping, it has a negative effect.... Does that answer it?

YF: Yeah. Alright.

FF: Now I have questions about the Latino kids. Do you believe that Latino kids are at a disadvantage if English is not their native language?

HR: Not all Latinos...there are many Latino youth that do not speak Spanish. [Laughs]. Ysander! No, no, no, I just said... you're very good. So, the question is clearly important in that not all Latinos speak Spanish. There are many Latinos who speak only English. But, they identify as Latino because their parents are Latinos, because at home they eat our food. So, for me, Latino is a culture, it's not a language. Yes, it is link to the language, but unfortunately many have lost it. But... I'm sorry, the question..., does that answer it?

YF: The question is, you...do you believe...?

HR: Who is at a disadvantage if English is not their native language?

HF: Hmm.

HR: OK. So there are other children who do feel at a disadvantage because they have not learned English in school. So, it becomes difficult for them, but I do not mean to say that for

us.... In Europe, every kid speaks five languages and language is seen as an asset. if you speak five languages, well, you are better, because you can work in...in different places. In this county, unfortunately, sometimes it can be a disadvantage, when it should not be. It should be an advantage, like... for example, you are learning English because you want to know another language. Well, the kids, the Latinos, some want to learn one, two, or three languages. What happens in our schools, sometimes, is that they do not know how to see this as something positive, if it is not negative sometimes. Do you understand?

YF: Yes, yes.

HR: So no, it should not be negative. To learn another language is positive.

YF: Your identities.

HR: Right. I hope you got that, right?

YF: Yea, I mean, yeah...

HR: Kind of?

YF: Yeah. Yeah.

HR: Do you want me to have it in English, and not in Spanish?

YF: Yeah.

HR: Ok. And I'm very passionate about this, because this is a pet peeve of mine.

YF: Actually, its better that I could understand...

HR: Right, right. So, the pet peeve is that there's the notion that because you're Latino, you don't understand English, and that there's a huge, a bigger percentage, if you look at data, is kids that grew up here, second, third generation, that don't even speak Spanish, right? So, being Latino does not...unfortunately, it's not equated or connected to just language, it's a culture that comes with a lot of different things. So, but that there is also another group of kids, that come (sic) from different countries, like when I was ten, or when he came from Puerto Rico maybe... maybe not so much from Puerto Rico, but even so, in Puerto Rico, they teach Spanish only in schools... that you don't know the English language. I learned English in six months. You know? But, but, you know, I had a good teacher, I had a good system in school that knew how to do that, and it wasn't just a language. It's like, that's all it is, a language is just... and I know for you guys, it's harder because you're older, right? You're older, and so you're afraid to pronounce and all of that, and that makes it harder, but when you're younger, you're fearless. Like skiing, you're gonna try it, because you're young, and if you fall, it's not such a hard fall,

and... language is like that when you're young. You get it – I mean, I came with an education, it's just translating that. So the way that I feel is that unfortunately, the way that our education system is structured, that our kids... it's already a deficit that you come in with, without, you know, without knowing the language, instead of... it's an asset. You have one language, a native language, and you're trying to acquire a second, so that will make you a bilingual person, or bicultural. So in here, unfortunately, that's not... it's not a good thing, because it's associated with a lot of stigma around, you know, "you don't know English, so you can't compete for jobs," and, you know, for all of these things. And I just came from – you know, this is a side note – I just came from visiting Israel, and in Israel, they have these centers that they call these "Ulpan" and they're language centers. And what they do is, like, it's for families that come to Israel and of course, Israel has a lot of resources, and these are centers that are funded publicly, but then there's a little bit of private from the participants, and you get immersed in six months, into the culture. So, the Hebrew culture. You walk out of there, you know Hebrew, you know everything you need to know about getting a job or about being, you know, in Israel, you get. Voting, all the things you get in six months. And you walk out of there, and you're ready to be a citizen of Israel. I wish we had that.

YF: Right, right.

HR: And somehow, and I'm one of those people that thinks that if participants have to pay for it, so be it, they have to pay for it. But then that gives you equal access.

YF: It will pay off in the end, yeah.

HR: But... so that's the political answer. But... [Laughs].

YF: Oh. No, I understand that.

HR: Now you guys get it? And know why I was jumping?

FF: I had an idea, but just... I'm just... I'm not... I try, but I'm not the best at Spanish.

HR: Yeah. No, no, no, that's fine. So, you wanna ask me the next question?

YF: Yeah...

HR: And I'll try to do it in both, because I want you guys to benefit from... the essence of it, you know?

YF: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

HR: But I think you guys are doing a great job.

YF: Thank you... let's see what I've got.... All right, I'll do this one. Do you think that there should be more after school programs to help Latino kids? As well as whichever other kid needs more help?

HR: Yes, it's a big problem now that there aren't sufficient resources to help students. In the schools, there are lots of kids. The teachers don't have time to help the ones that don't get it, like math and sciences, for example. This is an example of what a teacher is teaching. If a kid doesn't get it, it's difficult, because they don't have time to...to stay after school and review. So, I believe that Centro [Las Américas], even a place like ours, we have a homework lab, and we have a math tutor because it's important that we support them after school. Many people need this help. Not everyone learns the same way. So, there should be lots of help, and not just for Latino kids, but for whichever student needs it, but it would be good that...because the Latino kids aren't doing well in school, so how great if there were special programs....

YF: Yes, good.

HR: Yes.

YF: All right...Do you have any more questions?

FF: You can ask the one on... the teacher one.

YF: Oh yeah... Do you think that the white teachers favor white students over Latino students sometimes?

HR: No, not all teachers. There are many teachers that... it depends on how the teacher was taught, right? If you went to a good school that taught you to be teach a child to learn by himself, then, you're a good teacher. You can have whichever kid, and you can teach him. If the teacher comes and doesn't know how to teach well, then, like all humans, he's going to go with what's easiest, right? So, the most difficult things are going to be the hardest for them to do. I think that this is what happens. Not that... "OK, I'm only gonna teach you." So, did you get that in Spanish?

YF: Yeah, well, I mean...

HR: That is all about what your comfort zone is. But if you're taught how to teach kids to be critical thinkers and learn for themselves, then you're gonna do it for everyone. But then if you're not taught those skills, on how to teach that way, then you're gonna be, like, teaching, and you're gonna go towards somebody that responds to you right away, because you connect with them.

YF: Exactly.

HR: And I think that that's really what goes on, I don't think it's a conscious.... I think we're all humans, you know? I tend to...if I see a room and I see a Latino, like, you see, he walked in, I connected with him. It's because we have language, we have different things... it's not that I disrespect you. I connected with him a little bit more because he's part of my culture, and we have a set of norms that we understand, and it's that personality that kicks in, and so you're like, "Oh, I feel at home", you know? Whereas with somebody else, I might... I don't know your personality, I don't know your personality. I don't know if I'm going to be able to joke, and...you know. So, you're more reserved until you meet, and then you're like "Oh, OK!"

JS: Right, more comfortable, right.

YF: Yeah, I understand what you mean by more than, like...we were talking about the language and everything. It's kind of like the whole culture aspect.

HR: It is.

YF: So I understand that more now than I...

HR: Yeah, and I think that has nothing to do with personal choices, or...it's more about your comfort levels when you're doing something, and that some people are gonna get it, and some people are not gonna get it, and that...but I think also the one thing, though, on the negative side that I think sometimes happens is assumptions.

YF: Yeah.

HR: Right? That we all make as adults.

JS: Judgments, right.

HR: Yeah, and then that's what hurts us. It's those assumptions.

YF: I guess I'll just pull some of this stuff...it's kind of simple... What are some of the positive and negative experiences that you've had in your work?

HR: OK, positive experiences in my work? So, I'm going to talk about John Hancock, a corporation, and after, I'll talk about here, because they're two different things. But, in John Hancock, the positive was that at a time when I turned twenty-one in college, like all of you, doors were opened to me to do very positive things, like traveling around the world. So, I went to organize a conference in Berlin, Germany at the age of twenty-one. After that, I was in Japan, in Bali, Indonesia, Singapore, all around Asia, rather young at the age of twenty-five, thirty, I was doing all this work, quite positive. So, I loved it. It's a good experience. The person in John Hancock, my director, took me under his wing, and taught me, "This is what we have to do, this is what we have to do", so I learned a lot at a very young age. And so it was quite positive. The negative is that sometimes it was a world of many...of men, many men. You know. And I, a

woman, and a Latina. So all around there was never anybody like me... I was always the only one. And that, at times, some... it's good because you learn to be quite independent, to figure it out on your own, like, independent, but at times, it's lonely. You learn how to just be by yourself, and that's why I haven't gotten married, I just know how to be by myself, because you learn, you've had so many years of, "You've gotta figure it out on your own." And so, that's the positive, and the negative is being alone, and...and all that. Here, in the Youth Center, the positive is, that every day you're seeing all these kids and making something better. For example, in this room, the GEDs, that are about to finish..., you know every kid and say, "OK, this kid has finished here, so he can go to college, he can work, he can do something positive." So, daily we're seeing the results of our work. So, it's really good... a good experience because that's what I want to do with my life... to make sure that we're making a difference, for the... for, hopefully, the kids who don't have these opportunities. The negative sometimes is that for example, here in this city, they always associate Latino and African-American kids, or whatever, "Oh, these are gang members. Come on. We don't want to see them, we don't want them." So, in one way or the other, it's negative, because every kid has his story. Perhaps they make mistakes, but they're human beings, and you have to help them. I know this, but at times, it's difficult for them, to leave this...this mix. That if you look a certain way then you are doing something negative. So, that's sometimes is the...the bad. But, we work every day to make it better.

YF: Yes. In this work, do you experience burnout? Like, do you have burnouts? Do you know what a burnout is?

HR: Yeah, yeah. And I'll speak to this in English, and I'll say...

JS: What do you mean by burnout?

HR: Well, because of stress, and...

YF: How they dropped...

JS: Oh, oh, OK, burnout. I was trying to... OK.

HR: Interestingly enough, and I'll say it in English, and then remind me to say it in Spanish. We don't have a lot of turnover by staff here, because the staff that I try to hire are people that love what they're doing, that are in this because they understand the youth, because they know that to make a difference, they have to give of themselves, right? So there's not a lot of turnover. I get burnt out, and you know, it's a stressful job. Why? Because you're constantly trying to change behaviors, right? So they're not bad kids, you just have to redirect behavior all the time.

YF: And that takes a lot.

HR: That takes a lot of energy, it's not like a...it's not even like a school where you have a structure that you have to follow. You know, you have "walk down the hallway in a line" or "you only have so many minutes for lunch" or... In here, it is... you're modeling what you want to see all the time, so, you know, "I want good language, I want good behavior, we need to push, we need to push you. What are you doing now?" That is...it's like a parent of 700 kids. And so, it's a lot of work.

YF: I could see how that could definitely become stressful, yeah. But it's worth it.

HR: Yeah. So, do I say it in Spanish? Or...?

YF: If you want. I think that's good. Because then we have to translate it. This is basically what I... what I've been doing. Kate had to turn me around, like, the way I was and stuff, so...

HR: Right. And it's a lot of work. And I give her a lot of credit. And I know Kate. She's got the patience of a saint. So I could see how she could do that. You have to have a lot of patience. You have to believe in the person first. If you don't believe in the person, there's no way, because how could you, you know? So, I believe in all these kids. And I'm OK that sometimes they tell me, "I'm out on the streets selling drugs." And I'm not gonna judge them, I'm gonna say, "Well, that's not a good choice. How can I sit with you and show you the other side? Let's have that conversation." Because if I tool them out, "Oh, you're selling drugs, you're..."—No, you have to have the hard conversations with them. Yes, you can get quick money, but it's short term. And here's where you're gonna go, but have you thought about the long way?

YF: Right, show them a different path.

HR: Right.

YF: And it takes longer to get there, but...

HR: Right, but, ultimately, it's a huge thing. And we have those conversations with them, and sometimes you think that they're not listening, but they are. They're listening, and they're like, "OK." Every day they have to get up and make a choice of their..., you know, in their own lives. That's their choice, I'm not gonna make it for them. But hopefully...you know the ones who are ready to make that change, because they're here. They come in. They show up. And they, you know...and so...it's interesting... interesting work. But I think that it's great that you guys are doing this, and...

YF: Yeah, it's definitely educational, definitely worth it.

HR: Yeah, no, to get out into the community, and...

FF: Yeah, exactly, just... because I'm from Worcester. I live in Worcester. I've lived in Tatnuck Square all my life. It's where... It's just kinda...

[Tape ended here]

Post-interview follow-up questions:

JS, FF, YF: Since our last interview we would like to know what have you done to help a child or some of the children with their studies?

HR: Yes, Since our last interview until now I have done something for our students. Yes. I have done a lot. Every day we work with different kids at the center, to help them with their education. So, we have talks with some of the kids that are in school, the parents are going to move out of state and the young man doesn't want to leave. So, we then discuss what would be his strategy to stay and to continue his education. We talk with young people that are doing very well in school, who are going to graduate this year, and [who will] celebrate their graduation. We have also done a lot with an art program that we have. We wish to finish a program and celebrate all what the kids have done during the entire year. We have done a lot with the youth in the area so that they can present their own oral histories in front of a group of people who support the center.

YF: And are these students doing what you are telling them to do?

HR: Yes, they are improving their lives. Sometimes we don't need to meddle too much. We do not tell them what they need to do, but we give them options so that they can make their own choices. So, we are not here to decide what they need to do, but to guide them in the right path.

YF: Like my mother Kate did with me.

HR: Exactly. We are not parents.