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Wednesday, September 20, 2023
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FORMER YOUTH IN CARE–TURNED-SOCIAL WORKER & ADVOCATE HONORED

CHICAGO, IL— Each day social workers help break down barriers that prevent people from living more fulfilling, enriched lives. They work on the individual level, helping people overcome personal crises like food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, or limited access to good health care. They also advocate on a systems level to ensure laws and policies are adopted so everyone can access such services.

In continuation of this year’s National Professional Social Work Month theme, “Social Work Breaks Barriers,” the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter (NASW-IL) is honoring the work of some exceptional Illinois social workers and individuals whose work promotes social justice and social change with and on behalf of the people and clients they serve.

One such exemplary Illinois social worker being honored this year is 2023 NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Emerging Social Work Leader awardee Leyda Garcia-Greenawalt. **Leyda M. Garcia-Greenawalt (she/they), LSW, MSW**, is a Civitas ChildLaw Fellow and third-year student at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Prior to law school, Leyda attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she obtained her BSW and MSW. As a student, she conducted and published research on the family policing system, intimate partner violence, and juvenile criminal legal system reform. Leyda also served as Undergraduate Representative for the NASW-Illinois Chapter. As a passionate advocate for youth in care, Leyda continues to work on legislative efforts to improve the welfare of youth in foster care. Currently, she is working with a team to ensure youth in care are guaranteed a right to counsel.

In support of their nomination of Leyda, Edward Vizcaino, Senior Consultant at Protiviti, wrote: “As an active employee with the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC), she has shown her dedication to promoting the well-being of children and families by advocating for their rights and providing expert guidance. Her engagement with NACC reflects her commitment to enhancing practice knowledge and the capacity of the social work profession to obtain resources and influence at a broader level.... Her dedication to advocacy, service, and leadership has made a lasting impact on the lives she’s touched.”

The NASW-Illinois Chapter is proud of the work of Leyda Garcia-Greenawalt and others like her who continue to break barriers in their communities and beyond. Leyda is one of four individuals being honored as this year’s NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Awardees. To learn more about the other statewide awardees, please visit the NASW-Illinois Chapter website (www.naswil.org) or contact NASW-IL Executive Director Joel Rubin at jrubin.naswil@socialworkers.org.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. The NASW-Illinois Chapter is one of the association's largest chapters and advocates for over 20,000 social workers in Illinois alone. NASW strives to advance social work careers, grow social work businesses, and protect the profession while seeking to also enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through advocacy.