



Cinthia Saenz

Meet Cinthia. Life wasn't easy, coming to Gunnison as an undocumented young woman from Mexico. Still, starting with her hair-cutting business and her role as community babysitter, people in the immigrant community knew her as confidante, advisor, friend. "I was even listed as the emergency contact for many Latino kids!"

Everyone knew that if you needed help, you could turn to her at any time of day or night. One day, Ellen Pedersen of the Multicultural Resource Center at the Gunnison County Department of Health and Human Services called and asked her to volunteer as a liaison and interpreter for the MRC. So, she came to know the many resources available to people and began connecting people to these resources – even building bridges between nervous immigrants and law enforcement officers. "And I'm the kind of person who isn't afraid to ask questions or to speak up. I knew that many immigrants were shy or afraid to do that, so I became a kind of voice for people in the dark," she says. She spoke up at City Council meetings and thanks to her many personal connections, always had a large crowd of people with her.

Ultimately, she was hired by Gunnison Valley Health as the first Bilingual Patient Navigator, in part because of her close personal ties with scores of people in her community and the trust they held for her. There are new policies and new cultural sensitivities at GVH these days, thanks to her leadership. And now, she says, her son has begun cutting hair for men and boys: "Imagine the difference that he is going to make! Because building trust is the first step for action."