

Hello everyone,

My name is Ana Soto, and I am the Program Director at NEWS, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Services. I feel privileged to be able to show appreciation to the community that has presented countless opportunities for me to grow. I was born and raised in Napa and want to continue to give back as much as possible. And as I do, I hope to inspire others to do the same.

The nomination process, had me think about why I choose to work at a nonprofit and it allowed me to reflect on how much I love that we can stay true to our missions, and that there is no motive other than our cause that continues to drive our decisions. Our missions are fully backed by our community and I love that about us. We represent the heart-work for all of our valley, and I find that extremely powerful and rewarding.

As Program Director, I have a unique role where I can see the programs with a bird's eye view while continuing to help with direct client services. I get to see magic every day and because of that, I constantly remind staff that I feel lucky to be working amongst people like them. I thoroughly enjoy being able to provide support when it's needed and watch staff soar when they're in their element. In this field, some days are harder than others, but every day is fulfilling. I get to see staff and survivors of abuse have "aha" moments and physically see a change of their posture when they become empowered, and that feeling is something I will never take for granted.

I want to thank my Executive Director, Tracy Lamb, for thinking of me when this opportunity arose, because an acknowledgement such as this one, only adds fuel my desire to be the best for staff, and means a lot more to me than anyone might know. As I began to process more of what this award means, I realized that this is much bigger than myself. I began to think about every piece of me that symbolically walked up here with me tonight, and I'd like to acknowledge those pieces of my identity that represent others who may be listening tonight.

This award is also for:

1. My 19 year old self and all other teen parents who feel scared and overwhelmed about how they're going to make it. 19 year old-self, we're doing pretty dang good.
2. For all of the single parents who are expected to work like they have no children, and expected to raise them like they don't have to work.
3. For the first-generation children having to work through completely different cultures to find their own identity, and having to become chameleons to be able to fit in where necessary.
4. To all DV survivors whose spirit has been broken and made to believe there's no way out. There is, and life is beautiful on the other side.
5. For the Latina women who show up where we need a seat at the table, and continue to speak up, even when you don't feel like you belong and are sometimes called intimidating or feisty. You're not intimidating or feisty, you're assertive and know how to set boundaries; and that's a good thing!

Lastly, I wouldn't feel right walking away before publicly acknowledging a few people who have helped me immensely along the way. To my parents who left everything they know in Mexico and came to this country with nothing but hope to give us the best opportunities possible. To my siblings, who have always had my back and constantly remind me who I am. And to my son, who has given me strength I never knew I had to always strive for the best. Thank you all for your unconditional love and support.