



Growing Up Southside

-- Larry Ramos, Executive Director

In this special edition of the newsletter, each staff member will share their personal and professional journeys to higher education. Growing up on the southside of Hutchinson, KS, Larry Ramos always felt like he lived in two very different worlds as a Mexican-American. His predominantly Latino neighborhood had all his friends and family where traditions were learned and practiced including his love for Tejano music and homemade Mexican food such as frijoles, arroz, tortillas, tostadas, tacos, and enchiladas.

His parents instilled a deep sense of pride in the Mexican-American culture where grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were always respected and often greeted with a kiss on the cheek. While his family would have most likely been considered low income, he took for granted just how hard his parents worked to pay the bills and everything they had given to him and his four siblings.

His father, with only a ninth-grade education, was not only smart but intuitive. He fixed things around the house, repaired the family car, and worked for the same heating and air conditioning company as the lead installer for 35 years.

Ramos' mother, a stay at home parent until all of her children reached middle school, worked as a sales representative for Sears until she retired. His parents' loyalty to the family and their jobs had a lasting impact on Ramos and is likely the reason he has worked for only two organizations since graduating with a psychology degree from Kansas State University in 1983.

Religion has played a huge role in Ramos' life. Being raised Catholic, religious ceremonies like baptisms, first communions, and confirmations were treated as holidays by his extended family and in many ways, those ceremonies felt like miniature Christmases.

A good religious education was extremely important to his parents, so instead of sending their children to the public school right across the street, all the Ramos kids went to Catholic school. Hardly any of Ramos' neighborhood friends went to the Catholic school. Most could not afford the cost of private school tuition.

In Catholic school, Ramos learned that he had to fit in with kids from the north end of Hutchinson who were mostly white and affluent. On his first day of school, one of the students threw a racial slur at him. While not in his nature to retaliate, Ramos felt he had to make a point of standing up for himself for fear

of being bullied for the rest of the year, if not longer. In the end, he made many friends and earned his peers' respect by his ability to get along with others. Ramos also flourished in sports, following in his older brothers' footsteps. He lettered in basketball, tennis, and track while making above-average grades.

When graduation came around and nearly all of his classmates were planning to go to college, he did the same. It may have been a completely different story had he attended the public schools as most of his neighborhood friends did not go to college after high school.

Fast forward 40 years and Ramos feels blessed to have had the opportunity of being reared in the Mexican-American neighborhood and going to private school. Both worlds created numerous adventures for him including furthering his education, associating with wonderful mentors and colleagues he met through Wichita State and the TRIO programs, having lifelong friends, and treasuring his family.

When he goes back to the old neighborhood he is still seen as the same person and fondly remembers the days of his youth with a bit of nostalgia and reverence. He's now a husband, father, and soon to be a grandfather. Ramos is looking forward to many new adventures while respecting his past.



Starting from Ground Zero in TRIO

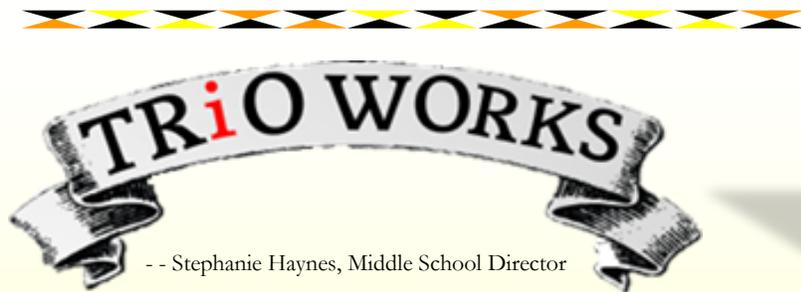
-- Myron Richard, Program Educational Advisor-Mentoring/Career Coordinator

the Physical Plant Warehouse and then for postal services. It was there that Richard decided to take classes which would open the door to even greater opportunities.

Richard was weary at first about returning to school as an adult-learner, having to juggle parental responsibilities, full-time employment, college costs, and time restraints but despite the many challenges and setbacks, he overcame adversity, training himself to be resilient and developing a growth mindset.

In 2005, Richard earned a bachelor's degree and in 2006, he joined the TRIO Talent Search staff. Richard has been working as the program educational advisor-mentoring/career coordinator for 16 years. Most recently, he decided to go back to school and earn a Master's in Educational Counseling. Richard is a true testament that it is never too late to rise up even if you have to start from ground zero.

Richard began his journey at Wichita State University in 1995 as a landscaper, which gave him the opportunity to meet new people and establish relationships within the campus community. Richard worked for multiple departments on the WSU campus, including landscaping, working in



-- Stephanie Haynes, Middle School Director



Stephanie Haynes began her career with TRIO Talent Search in June 2000 as an educational development assistant (EDA). As an EDA, she worked with students at the Urban League; Towne East; Towne West; Allision Middle School; and North, Southeast, and West high schools, assisting over 300 students with their college goals.

Stephanie was later promoted to be a director for the program, working solely with middle school students, hiring and supervising tutors, overseeing the After School Tutoring Program, and coordinating the Summer Enrichment Program.

Stephanie's journey with TRIO Talent Search has only continued to flourish. In 2006, she was promoted to be the middle school director and continues to serve in that capacity, assisting over 300 middle school students at Brooks, Gordon Parks, and Mayberry. She provides students with the tools needed to be successful today, tomorrow, and in the future.

Her Story of Refuge

-- Mani Souriya, Associate Director/Statistician

Mani Souriya remembers the stories told by her parents about their family's journey. It all started with the Vietnam War. During the uprising of communism in Laos, Souriya's father, Kapkeo, was forced to flee the country due to his military affiliation and opposition to communism. This meant leaving his wife, Sisana, and six kids behind.

Her parents planned to reunite in Thailand but since no one could be trusted, they were forced to develop a secret code. They tore a dollar bill (Laos currency) in half so that each of them would have a piece of it. That way, when her father was ready to arrange for his wife and kids to cross the Mekong River by boat, his subordinate could present Kapkeo's half of the money to Sisana, so that she would know that it came from her husband and therefore the subordinate could be trusted, giving Sisana the green light to travel with the unknown man.

Once Souriya's father was reunited with her mother and siblings, they stayed at the Thailand refugee camp for a little over a year. During that time, they lost a son but were blessed with twin daughters Mani and Kao, born a few months after their brother's death. Eight months after the twins were born, her parents made the decision to take the kids to America where there would be permanent refuge for the family.

In America, they found refuge, but they also encountered racism at work and at school. Souriya recalls the earliest memory of racism when a kid from her school yelled at her and her sister, "Go back to where you came from!"

The family faced many obstacles through the years including poverty. Despite the struggles, Souriya earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and then a Master of Education in Counseling. She is an alumna of TRIO Student Support Services and the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. She is currently the associate director/statistician for the TRIO Talent Search Program at Wichita State. She is grateful for the opportunity to work for the Talent Search program where she can utilize her skills and continue to develop professionally while influencing the lives of other under-represented students. Souriya understands the value of education and knows that the golden ticket to the American dream is to excel in school and work hard. Each day, she is reminded of how fortunate she is that her family found refuge in America.

Baby Mani



Refugee camp in Thailand



Kapkeo and Sisana Souriya living the American Dream



Never Too Late to Do Better

-- Sharon K. Robertson, Administrative Specialist

Growing up in Northeast Wichita was considered growing up in the “hood,” meaning that the neighborhood was looked down upon by those who didn’t know any better and expected it to be crime-ridden, dangerous, and low-class. Robertson spent most of her childhood dispelling the belief that her neighborhood was not as it seemed. Yes, around the corner could be trouble, but on her street, most neighbors greeted each other by name, helped one another without expecting anything in return, and valued respect, good manners, and education.

As a black girl, attending a predominantly white school, she encountered racism — subtle at times and downright bold at others. Those moments taught her to know her own self-worth and value education. Ignorance is not bliss. It is simply ignorant and can be contagious if left unchecked.

Robertson did not know at the time, but those theater arts trips she took with her elementary school to the Nutcracker and symphonies at Century II were a privilege that not every child experiences. Children from low-income households were not usually exposed to those type of opportunities, which is why she didn’t realize that she was missing opportunities right at her front door.

Robertson lived across the street from Fairmount Towers where Upward Bound was housed in the summer. Though she had visited a friend who was staying there in the dormitory, she didn’t know at the time that she too was qualified to be in TRIO. Unfortunately, she thought that the program was only for the 4.0 honor roll students like her friend. It would be 15 years after high school graduation before she connected with TRIO again, enrolling in college as a non-traditional student. She learned about TRIO and its benefits while trying to balance a full-time job, homelife, being a caregiver to a parent with Alzheimer/dementia and managing her own health issues.

After working minimum wage jobs for over 30 years where she often felt overworked, underpaid, discriminated against, and passed over for promotions, she recalled what her influencers had advised. Her 6th grade teacher Raymond Welch had said, “do more than just work fast food, hanging out the window saying, *Hi, Welcome to McDonald’s how can I help you?*” Her Aunt Lottie had said, “All of my kids have been to college. If you get

a chance, go and get your education to better your life.” Aunt Lottie and her siblings grew up in the small town of Checotah, Oklahoma with little education. Lottie was determined that the next generation would do better.

One of Robertson’s biggest influences was Regina Bell, the secretary at College Hill Elementary School. She greeted the students every day with a smile and made them feel welcome no matter what kind of day she was having.

Those experiences and advice prompted Robertson to enroll in vocational-technical school after high school to become a certified secretary. She later went on to earn an associate’s degree at Wichita State. She is currently a few credits shy from a bachelor’s degree in Psychology. Robertson serves as the administrative specialist for both TRIO Talent Search and TRIO Talent Search-South. She is an alumna of the TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers Program (EOC) and TRIO Student Support Services Program (SSS). She is also a former senior administrative assistant for the SSS program.

TRIO impacted her life by supporting her education with scholarships, book and technology loans, and personal support. As a professional, TRIO has given her travel opportunities for professional development, a higher paying job, and a network of people who genuinely care about the success of first generation, underrepresented students like herself.



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Following Her Intuition

-- Emily Roets-Estevez, Program Educational Advisor-Financial Literacy Coordinator

Life is full of decisions, from deciding what to wear each morning to choosing a college. It is a good idea to ask family, friends, and teachers for their advice since everyone has different experiences and perspectives. However, it can be easy to forget to consider what is best for one's self when there are so many other opinions to consider.

When Roets-Estevez was in high school, her teachers and family told her that she should go into engineering so that she could earn

lots of money. However, she wanted to learn Spanish to help English-language learners who were trying to get an education to achieve their dreams. The goal she set for herself was very broad and did not offer many high-paying careers, but she was confident that she was on the right path.

After graduation, she did not immediately find work that she enjoyed and that paid well. In fact, she worked for a clothing store in the mall for a while! However, she continuously volunteered in her community and looked for jobs where she could use Spanish to help people, including working as a receptionist for a community medical clinic, a paraeducator for English language learners in high

school, and a summer camp teacher for a refugee program. She slowly grew closer to her passion – helping those with linguistic and citizenship obstacles get equitable educational access.

Even as she realized her dream, the important people in Roets' life wanted her to choose something else. It was hard to tell her family and mentors “no” but because she did what she felt was right for her, she ended up working for TRIO Talent Search. Though she did not graduate with the title of engineer or doctor, by following her intuition and passions, she now gets to work with an amazing team and meet marvelous and unique students like those in the TRIO Talent Search Program!

From Refugee to the American Dream

-- Thip Phichith, Program Educational Advisor-ACT/SAT Coordinator

Phichith was born in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. She came to the United States in 1984, when she was just seven years old. During this time, from 1975-1991, the communists took over the country. After the communists conquered Laos, her father was sent to work in the rice field along with thousands of other men. Phichith's mother became a stay-at-home parent to take care of her and her brother.

Phichith's father was a physician assistant who was sent to work in the rice field while other Laotian men were being captured and placed in detention camps.

During the summer of 1981, the family made their first attempt to escape from Laos. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. The guards found out about their plans and ordered them to return home. Phichith's parents had to come up with an alternate escape plan.



It was a desperate flee to freedom for most people. Few were fortunate enough to hire others to help them escape, while many lost their lives during the tragedy.

Phichith's parents planned a second escape, paying someone to help them this time. Her uncle's family joined them and altogether there were a total of 11 people in a small canoe. They escaped secretly at night canoeing through the Mekong River. They did not take any personal items with them, all they took were the clothes they were wearing.

They managed to make it safely to shore and landed in Thailand. They were extremely fortunate that no one was hurt or killed. It was an extremely frightening situation for all of them, especially for Phichith's mother, since she was eight months pregnant at the time with her son.

When the family finally reached Thailand, they stayed in a refugee camp. It was far from what they expected. They all had to share a room with other families.

As if that weren't bad enough, they had to follow certain rules and were often moved to a different camp. It was tough not having their own freedom, or personal space.

They were not allowed to attend school and food was distributed only once a week. Sometimes if they were lucky, one of the parent's closest friends would offer \$10 or \$20 to help out. For the family to survive and have extra money, Phichith's parents had to sell gold.

Their lives were overly complicated. It was a painful experience, but through it all, they somehow managed to survive. They lived in the Thai concentration camp for at least three years. To Phichith, it seemed like an eternity.

After that, they were sent to the Philippines. There they were given the opportunity to learn English in school. Their lives were still unpleasantly rough as they learned to adjust to a new atmosphere.

Every morning, the water was turned on and people would line up with their buckets ready. They also had to line up to use the shower, which Phichith thought was ridiculous since it usually took a long time before it was her turn.

At times, there would be fights over water supplies. While staying there, Phichith and her two younger brothers were encouraged to join a nutritional program since their diets did not meet the guidelines, so every day they attended the program where they were served a variety of nutritious food. Phichith remembers loving the food there, especially the bottled 7-up. For them, that was the best treat ever since they never had 7-up before.

One year later, after her parents learned enough English and knew the expectations, they received an invitation to come to the U.S. They had relatives who lived in Kansas that were willing to sponsor them. They arrived in Wichita, KS in the fall of 1984.

It was like starting their lives all over again. Phichith had to adjust to the language and the American ways. It was tough the first years of school, trying to fit in with the other students.

After graduating from Southeast High School in 1997, she attended Butler Community College and earned an associate of arts degree. After that, she continued to pursue her education further by enrolling at WSU and received a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in business administration.

In September 2021, Phichith joined TRIO Talent Search as the program educational advisor/ACT-SAT coordinator. Prior to working with TRIO Talent Search, she was an academic advisor for the WSU TRIO Student Support Services Program which serves students on the college level.

Phichith is incredibly grateful to have been given the opportunity to work with such a wonderful staff at Talent Search. She has learned a lot and every day is a learning experience for her.





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Program Staff

Clockwise: Sharon K. Robertson, Administrative Specialist; **Mani Souriya**, Associate Director/Statistician; **Stephanie Haynes**, Middle School Director; **Myron Richard**, Program Educational Advisor/Mentoring-Career Coordinator; **Thip Phichith**, Program Educational Advisor/ACT-SAT Coordinator; **Larry Ramos**, Executive Director; and **Emily Roets-Estevez**, Program Educational Advisor/Financial Literacy Coordinator



The Talent Search staff is so proud of this year's graduates! The staff wishes them all the best in their future endeavors and hope that they will keep striving for excellence and the rich benefits of a higher education. Talent Search graduates are the testament that TRIO works!



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the TRIO Talent Search program is to identify, encourage, and assist low income and potential first generation college students to complete a secondary education, enroll in post-secondary education, and complete a post-secondary program.

EVENTS CALENDAR:

JUNE

- 3: TSS Open House
- 4: SAT Test
- 8: WSU Tech Tour
- 10: Guest Speaker—WSU Police Sgt
- 11: ACT Test
- 15: Mental Health Awareness Day
- 17: Reality You w/Merit Trust
- 17: ACT Registration Deadline
- 22: KS Cosmosphere/Hutchinson Tour
- 29: K-State Salina Tour

July

- 1: Track n' Field BBQ
- 4: Independence Day Holiday
- 6: Washburn Campus Visit
- 8: Talent Show/Awards Ceremony
- 11: OKC College Road Trip
- 12-15: KC College Road Trip
- 16: ACT Test

August

- 15: First Day of School (USD 259)

Notice of Nondiscrimination: Wichita State University does not discriminate in its employment practices, educational programs or activities on the basis of age (40 years or older), ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or status as a veteran. Retaliation against an individual filing or cooperating in a complaint process is also prohibited. Sexual misconduct, relationship violence and stalking are forms of sex discrimination and are prohibited under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. Complaints or concerns related to alleged discrimination may be directed to the Director of Equal Opportunity or the Title IX Coordinator, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260, telephone 316-978-3187.

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