

Revel

for a Cause

An annual benefit for Neighborhood House

Thursday, October 7, 2021

In-person or virtual event

Register for in-person or virtual tickets
and bid on auction items at

www.neighb.org/Revel2021

Auction opens October 1



Neighborhood House™
179 Robie Street East
St. Paul, MN 55107



August/September 2021
neighb.org



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Asking for help was hard for Juana. “We didn’t feel good [about reaching out to Neighborhood House] because we weren’t used to needing help,” she says, explaining that her husband, Francisco, had always provided for their family. But during the pandemic he had lost his job and couldn’t find work. When they had nowhere else to turn, they turned to Neighborhood House.

At first, Juana and Francisco needed help getting enough groceries for themselves and their four children. They started using the food market to get the food their family needed. But as the pandemic continued, their needs changed. Still unable to find work due to the shutdown, Francisco moved back to Mexico to look for a job so he could try to support his family.

But without her husband, Juana and her children faced new challenges. Firstly, Juana is a full-time caregiver to her children, two of whom have muscular dystrophy. Her eldest son, Francisco Jr., is in a more advanced stage of the disease and requires therapy three times a day and care throughout the night. Without the income to pay for a nursing assistant, this job falls on Juana, leaving her unable to work. In addition, her husband speaks more English and always did the paperwork, interacted with the children’s doctors, and handled their finances.

Without her husband, and because of her family’s level of need and the barriers they faced, Juana needed help managing her family’s life and caring for her children.



Persevering for her children

Sarah, a family coach in our Family Centers program, met with Juana to see how they could work together to reach her goals. Speaking fluent Spanish, Sarah was able to help uncover the different ways that Neighborhood House could support Juana’s family. After connecting with the food markets, they started finding ways to make Francisco’s life a little easier.

Growing up in Mexico, when Francisco was two and a half years old, his parents noticed that he often fell. They took him to the doctor where they explained he had flat feet and that orthopedic shoes would help. But after he continued to fall, Juana and Francisco Sr. knew there was something more going on. After moving to Minnesota, they took Francisco to Shriners Children’s where he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. “They told us ... over time his body is going to go. His bones are going to weaken, his feet are going to deform,” Juana remembers. “And, well, I don’t know, we couldn’t believe it. It was too heavy for us. And I always felt bad, I was always crying.”

The genetic disease causes progressive weakness in the hips, shoulders, arms, and legs. Eventually, walking is impossible. For Francisco, his progression was quicker than others. Juana says, “He would drag himself out of bed to go to the living room where we were. He was about 7 years old and he was dragging himself.”

Now 18, Francisco has struggled as the disease continues to progress. He has had to adapt to fully rely on others, but because his brain doesn’t deteriorate the way his body does, mentally he feels fully capable of being an adult. “The only thing he can move are his little fingers and can hardly move the button on his electric chair anymore,” says Juana. And emotionally, he’s found it hard without his dad around. “Even though he is bigger he sometimes tells me, ‘Mom, I want my dad.’”

Things have not been easy for Juana either. Suddenly raising her children, providing their care, and maintaining her home alone has been a difficult transition. But she’s put in time and effort working with Sarah to get her children what they need, and she’s determined to keep doing the best she can for her family. She explains, “I have to be fine, get ahead, and be positive for them.”



Juana and her four children smile for the camera

One of Juana’s recent accomplishments was working with Sarah to find physical therapists to help Francisco. They showed Juana how to provide his therapy and adjusted his wheelchair to better fit his body and abilities. “It’s like they brought him out. It was a good idea because he [usually] does not want to get out of bed — he is just there,” Juana says. After the therapists’ visit, Francisco drove around the house in his wheelchair. “We sat down to eat and he approached the table and there we were joking ... He was happy. He started to drive around and he drove better.”

The partnership between Juana and Sarah has not only helped Juana provide for her family, but has helped her meet her own needs. Because Juana provides full-time care, and with her husband out of the country, it’s hard to rely on or expand her support system. “It’s difficult to have friends ... Sometimes with Sarah ... I try to see her as a friend,” Juana says, explaining that beyond connecting her with resources, Sarah has been a shoulder to lean on and someone she can talk to. “I don’t know if angels exist. I don’t think they exist here on earth but Sarah is pretty close.”

Today, Juana and Sarah continue to work together to find more social and financial stability for the family.

Juana’s youngest son, 4-year-old Ameyaltzin, recently joined the preschool program at Neighborhood House where Juana’s niece, Yatzil is enrolled. Never having been in a classroom setting before, Ameyaltzin was cautious and unsure of what to do with himself. But his cousin and the friendly teachers made the transition easier. “He follows the routine now with the other children, smiles often, and seems to be happy to be in school,” says Val, his preschool instructor. “He carefully wrote his name the other day, copying each letter that I had written for him. And he seemed proud of himself when he finished.”