

## EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH: Sonia Garcia



Sonia Garcia has been an intensive case manager for Supportive Assistance to Individuals and Families (SAIF) for four years.

Sonia Garcia is passionate about helping others and it shows throughout her career. She currently serves as an intensive case manager for New Community's Supportive Assistance to Individuals and Families (SAIF) program.

SAIF is a two-year program that serves families who have received public assistance for four years or more and are approaching the limit of their benefits. Intensive case managers meet with their associates and help connect them to resources such as housing, job training programs and permanent employment.

"My favorite part of my job is advocating. I love to advocate," Garcia said. "I love to call other agencies. I love to get new information, be open to giving information and receiving information."

Garcia has had many associates become successful during her four years working at SAIF. Program

Director Jackie Andrews said Garcia makes a difference in the lives of her associates and her coworkers, sometimes tidying up work spaces and providing snacks.

"I conduct yearly program surveys from clients. The questions are general but several mentioned how she helped them," Andrews said. "She's very caring, conscientious and focused. And she accepts criticism and training."

Garcia is constantly looking to grow professionally. She started working in the school system as a lunch food manager. She worked her way up, serving as a personal aide for special education children, a teacher's aide, a teacher's assistant and a substitute teacher. She moved on and worked for five years for a substance abuse program, for both inpatient and outpatient clients.

She decided to work for SAIF to get back to intensive case management, which she had some experience with, and the mission of New Community resonated with her.

"I wanted to see what it was like to work for New Community because I had heard so much about New Community and I had looked them up on the internet," Garcia said. "They help people. That's the key word for me."

Garcia enjoys motivating clients. She said she has had clients who have earned their GED, some who have secured good jobs and others who have attended college. She has helped others get themselves out of bad situations, including one woman experiencing domestic violence who she referred to a safe house.

Garcia graduated from Essex County College in 2006 with an associate's degree in early childhood education. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) from Rutgers University in 2010.

Garcia has been a survivor of endometrial cancer for 19 years. She lost both her parents to cancer. Her mother died from breast cancer and her father from lung cancer. She participated in the Making Strides of Newark Breast Cancer Walk in October with colleagues from New Community.

She is a resident of Essex County and has a 29-year-old daughter and a granddaughter who will turn 1 in August. Family is very important to Garcia and she loves spending time with her daughter and granddaughter. Also in her spare time, Garcia likes to shop and work out at the gym.

Garcia has strong faith, putting God first in her life.

"I always put God first no matter what. My faith wavers sometimes so I tell myself, let your faith be bigger than your fear," she said. "I just ask God to continue to keep me healthy, continue to let me wake up every morning so that I can come to work and do the things that I need to do. And just continue to live life."