

MEET THE 2021-2022 FELLOWS

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)

Luvia Quiñones, Health Policy Director



Luvia oversees the Immigrant Health Care Access Initiative at ICIRR and, in collaboration with ICIRR's members, develops ICIRR's health policy agenda. Before transitioning to this position, Luvia oversaw ICIRR's health and human services programs: the Immigrant Family Resource Program, W.I.C., SNAP, and In-Person Counselor Program.

Preceding ICIRR, Luvia worked at City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) under the Community Relations Department. There she played an integral role in creating and launching the new department. Luvia has a Master in Public Policy (M.P.P.) from the University of Chicago and a B.A. in International Studies from DePaul University. She is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and is an active community member in her parish, St. Sylvester. Currently, she serves as a board secretary of the Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (IAFCC).

Brandon Lee, Communication Director



Brandon Lee shapes the organization's message, serves as the main connection to news media, and oversees digital outreach. He joined ICIRR in 2019 to support the 2020 Census campaign. Previously, Brandon spent six non-consecutive years with Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago in various roles, including Communications Coordinator, AmeriCorps VISTA, and VISTA Leader. In addition, Brandon is a member of the Asian Giving Circle, serves on the Japanese American Citizens League - Chicago Chapter board, and serves on the McCutcheon Elementary Local School Council in Uptown, Chicago.

Edith Avila Olea, Policy Manager



Edith Avila Olea is an advocate committed to social justice and equitable policy solutions. Working closely with ICIRR members and partner organizations, Avila Olea focuses on policy research, state-level advocacy, education, and outreach around the issues of public charge, healthcare access, and social services.

Previously, Avila Olea served as the Justice and Peace Associate Director at the Catholic Diocese of Joliet and as the Parish Outreach

Coordinator at Catholic Charities in Joliet. Avila Olea holds a Master of Public Policy degree from DePaul University in Chicago and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Organizational Communication from Shorter University from Rome, Georgia. Avila Olea serves as the Vice President on the Board of Directors for the Spanish Community Center in Joliet. Avila Olea is proud to be an immigrant originally from Mexico.

ABOUT ICIRR

ICIRR is dedicated to promoting the rights of immigrants and refugees to full and equal participation in the civic, cultural, social, and political life of our diverse society. ICIRR's primary constituency in Chicago, Illinois, is Latino immigrants and refugees.

- Organizational Transformation: ICIRR will focus on strategic planning and creating an immigrant healthcare academy.

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)

Banke Ilori, Policy and Organizing Director



Banke Ilori is an attorney and community organizer from Nigeria with experience addressing inequities in marginalized communities. Banke obtained her master's degree in international development and policy from the University of Chicago and enjoys traveling.

DeJuan Bland, Organizer



Raised by his Aunt and extended family, DeJuan Bland was the first member of his family to graduate college. As a spoken word artist and youth minister, he sought employment with MOSES as an organization aligned with his values. With a brother who was recently released from incarceration, criminal justice reform is especially important to him, and he has led much of MOSES' work in this area. Prior to his employment with MOSES, he was tasked with writing and organizing a play for one of MOSES' events: he was able to complete this task with just a few days' notice and to execute a successful production. This experience led MOSES to engage DeJuan as a full-time organizer, and he has been with the organization for five years.

Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director



Ponsella became Executive Director of MOSES in 2004 after developing and demonstrating her skills as an organizer. A Black woman raised by a social worker in Detroit, Ponsella's lived experience reflects the communities MOSES serves. She considers organizing a calling, giving her strength to continue leading in a challenging profession. Her vision is of an equitable region where Black residents and marginalized people have the resources they need to self-determine. Ponsella's career includes work overseas in the U.K. and South Africa. Her visits to South Africa in the 1990s and early 2000s were eye-opening, causing her to realize that the U.S. was not far ahead of South Africa in terms of racial equity. The anger she felt fueled her hunger to engage more deeply in her work and was a formative experience in her career as an organizer and leader of MOSES.

ABOUT MOSES

MOSES is a community organizing nonprofit serving residents of Detroit, Michigan, and its surrounding metropolitan region. They support the development of strong grassroots leaders and facilitate campaigns to address social justice issues.

- Organizational Transformation: MOSES will identify and implement practices that support the organization's strategic development, focusing on staff recruitment and leadership development, coupled with knowledge management.

The Afiya Center (TAC)

Michelle Rigdon-Anderson, Policy Associate



Michelle Rigdon-Anderson, a dedicated community advocate, uses life experiences to eradicate H.I.V. stigma and challenge oppressive laws that creates barriers for Black Womxn and girls. As the policy associate for The Afiya Center, Michelle works to drive TAC's policy priorities and makes it make sense to the folx on the ground that we serve. Michelle also helps lead the charge to champion state legislation and local policies that allow for Black womxn to achieve full reproductive freedom. Before joining The Afiya Center, Michelle graduated with an A.A.S in Substance Abuse Counseling and served as Counselor 1, H.I.V. Educator for clients and staff, and First A.I.D.

Instructor at a judicial drug treatment facility womxn's program in Wilmer, Texas. In 2011, Michelle became the first openly HIV-positive woman to ever run and win a national pageant title. Michelle serves as a National Ambassador for Greater Than AIDS Empowerment Campaign and the Black AIDS Institute in her spare time.

Marsha Jones, Co-Founder, and Executive Director



Marsha Jones, a Texas native, is co-founder and executive director of The Afiya Center, the only reproductive justice organization in North Texas founded and directed by Black womxn. She is a national grassroots organizer, community mobilizer, professional speaker, and health educator with a commitment to transforming womxn and girls' lives. Marsha has pledged to the development of leadership and engagement of activism among womxn by challenging harmful systemic and political constructs to advance the economic, health, and safety of womxn and girls. Marsha holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and is a graduate of the Black AIDS Institute's African American H.I.V. University (Science and Community Mobilizing Fellowship Program) and Tyndale Theology School. Marsha has served on various boards and capacities as an act of service to honor Black womxn.

Ebony Johnson, Volunteer Coordinator



Ebony Johnson joined The Afiya Center as a volunteer, transitioned to a policy intern, and currently works as the volunteer coordinator, where she plays a pivotal role in building the TAC membership base. Ebony believes in creating a space for policy-driven actions that invoke change, especially in marginalized communities. Inspired by the work she was doing at TAC, Ebony changed her major and, in 2019, earned her B.S. degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on social services. Understanding the intricate nuances of Black womxn and how their experiences are often overlooked, Ebony's passion for the work is fueled by the fact that she knows to break down the deeply rooted systems of oppression that continue to suffocate Black womxn, she needed to have a seat at the table.

ABOUT The Afiya Center

Located in Dallas, Texas, The Afiya Center's mission is to serve Black women and girls by transforming their relationship with their sexual and reproductive health by addressing the consequences of reproduction oppression.

- Organizational Transformation: The Afiya Center will focus on its internal organizational structure and development, including knowledge management.