

A Mighty Voice for the Hispanic Community – “It’s in my heart.”

Since coming to the United States from her home in Puerto Rico in 2002, Maite (pronounced “Mighty”) Arroyo-Torres has used her voice to help others find their place in our local communities. Currently serving as a Certified Medical Interpreter for the West Piedmont Health District, Arroyo-Torres’s primary goal is to help the Hispanic community. “Sometimes they come here, and they have nobody to help them,” she said.

It can be a big job. When she first arrived in this area, the only Hispanic people here were from Mexico, she said. Now, the population is growing to include people from Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala, Columbia, and Mexico – even Cuba. Her job is to help Spanish speakers with little or no English language skills navigate the services of the health district, and to make referrals and share resources with those who need it.

“They are coming to make a better life for themselves and their families,” Arroyo-Torres said, noting that they may be fleeing gangs, be victims of some form of abuse, or have limited or no opportunities in their home countries. And because many of the countries mentioned above do not teach English, they may arrive at a great disadvantage. “Sometimes they get here with nothing,” she said. “They need food, they need clothes, they need medications. It can be very comforting to find someone who can help them.”

Arroyo-Torres had a similar position with Bassett Family Practice and Ridgeway Family Practice for 10 years, where she served as a Certified Medical Interpreter and Community Health Worker. That paved the way for her to join the staff at WPHD as a contractor this past June. She works in the Henry-Martinsville Health Department’s clinics and is on call to assist at the other district health departments (Franklin and Patrick counties) as needed. In addition to interpreting, she also prepares translations for print materials for the health department and works part-time for Piedmont Community Services as Behavioral Health Interpreter.

The biggest need for the Hispanic community other than interpreting, is for jobs, she said. Most companies do not have a Spanish interpreter on staff, making employment a significant challenge. Also, those without citizenship have great difficulty finding work, she noted. Part of her job is helping newcomers get the immunizations they need when applying for immigration.

Arroyo-Torres feels fortunate to be from Puerto Rico, which is a territory of the United States, meaning she is a US citizen from birth. “I am blessed in having the citizenship, so why can’t I help other people who don’t have the resources?”

“I am here to interpret and translate. I am here to be their voices. I want them to know there is a person here that is going to be fighting for them,” she said.

Arroyo-Torres works Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. If you need her help, call the HM Health Department at 276-638-2311 call and ask for Maite.

10/7/2024