Spring 2019 Staff Member Spotlight: Anel Arriola

Please tell us about your background and how you progressed into your position in ASU's Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

Anel: I was born in Mexico City and my family immigrated to the US when I was 3-years-old. I moved to the US when I was 10-years-old, and lived in Stockton, California, with my family until I was 18, but actually stopped attending school when I was in 8th grade, and stayed home and took care of my siblings. Having only been in the country a few years, I struggled with the English language but that eventually improved because my dad, who did not speak English, would take me to our Home Owners Association meetings and I would translate for him. At that time, I still used an English-Spanish dictionary and usually needed more information from people to comprehend what they were saying. He eventually became more involved and, through his justice-oriented personality and desire to make big changes to our community, I would attend the meetings and read the HOA by-laws and translate those for him. I did this for about 4 years and through that, my English improved and he was able to get all new roof tops within our HOA! When I was 17, I started working toward my GED and learned about community college, what it was and the financial help available so I could attend.

During my second semester in college, my family relocated to Somerton, Arizona, which was very challenging for me to process. I wanted to major in mathematics and computer science but it was difficult for me to find the exact program at any community college so I stopped going to school at that point and took a one-month trip to Mexico to think about how I wanted to move forward with my life, education, and career. I came back from Mexico and enrolled in Arizona Western College to complete my general studies courses. My parents kept their seasonal positions at a winery in California so I was responsible for my siblings while they were away for their jobs. I would schedule my courses around my sibling’s school schedule in order to take care of them and the household. After finishing at AWC I moved to the Phoenix area to continue my education at ASU. I originally focused on psychology but eventually changed to International Business with a focus in Global Business in Leadership and International Management. That degree allowed me to travel to Mexico and earn my International Business Certificate.

I graduated with my undergraduate degree on a Wednesday in December of 2009 and the next day I had an interview here at the College of Nursing and Health Innovation with Dr. Colleen Keller and Allison Williams on the Madres para Salud project. I was hired as a Research Technician, which led to additional research and support positions, including my current position as the Project Manager on Dr. Rebecca Lee’s Sustainability via Active Garden Education research. I am also earning a Master of Arts in Creative Enterprise and Cultural Leadership at the Herberger Institute of Arts and Design. That is, outside of work, I am an artist and throughout the years, I’ve wanted to pair both my work experience along with art.

Tell us about the SAGE research program and your position. What about this work inspires you?

Anel: I am currently the Project Manager of SAGE, which is about increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity in children 3 – 5 years old. We work with early care and education centers in the area to teach healthy habits through a garden-based physical activity and nutrition program. I am responsible for establishing and overseeing our collaborations with the community. This includes early care and education centers, school boards, and participants. I also oversee staff and students who work on SAGE. I am very inspired by collaborative work and feel you can touch so many more people when working with community partners and organizations...especially the ones that are so diverse a collaboration seems impossible but sometimes have the most impact. I am motivated in my work because in the end,
the research allows you to see what needs are not being met and how it effects the community. If you are not able to see what is effecting the community, there is no way to prove to policy makers and community leaders what changes are needed.

**What made you decide to pursue your master’s degree?**

**Anel:** I met a woman named Judy Butzine during my undergraduate degree who does a lot of art and social justice work in the community. She took me to an art-based workshop that she used to hold at a shelter for immigrant children to help translate to the children. It was my first time seeing the real impact that art has on others. I was able to see the power of the art process through multiple art exercises that she led, which allowed them to incorporate their culture, family, and memories, which led to them sharing stories and opening up about their past. She actually connected me with that original position here at ASU. My applied project focus is on the oral tradition of storytelling. I would like to eventually create a storytelling archive that includes stories about culture, heritage, and traditions of different people who immigrate to the US. As part of my applied project, I am establishing a collaboration with a local organization. The purpose of my applied project is to co-create a storytelling archive that is focused on their work, vision and mission.

**What are your interests and hobbies outside of work?**

**Anel:** I am heavily involved in the arts and have had the privilege of sharing my art through various collaborative art shows as well as solo art shows, and murals in the Phoenix area. I enjoy painting, writing poetry, and storytelling in the community. I started storytelling at open mic events, which helped me in my work as, in general, I am a shy person and this has helped me build the confidence to present in front of community partners and leaders. The first time I accepted to participate in an official storytelling event, I did not realize that the other storytellers were multiple, high-level community people in the arts world and professional storytellers. One of my stories was featured in NPR and that same year my story about immigrating to the US was rated best by the Arizona Republic. I have become much more comfortable and personable, which adds depth to my SAGE position and builds positive relationships with collaborators and participants.