Zaida Agreda-Winn was surprised when she got the front desk job at the Moab Valley Multicultural Center.

In Bolivia, Agreda-Winn was an award-winning journalist with 10 years of experience, but in Moab in 2008, answering the phone in English was a challenge. Over the years, she became fluent in English and became more involved at the Multicultural Center.

Now Agreda-Winn is the program director at the Multicultural Center. She manages the Crisis Resource and Advocacy program for families facing language, cultural and other barriers as they deal with serious life circumstances. She also is in charge of translation and interpretation services, youth programming and cultural events.

Agreda-Winn is the principal medical translator and often helps clients of the center make medical appointments and talk to doctors. She also translates for the Grand County School District, the hospital and other organizations in town.

Agreda-Winn moved to Moab from Denver to be with her in-laws, when she was pregnant with her first child. Her husband, Jack Winn, was working in Wyoming and she did not have family in Denver, she said.

The Center's work is important for the community, Agreda-Winn said. She can see the difference it makes in people's lives.

"We can help other people to first ... communicate. Because I know how it is to be in a country that you don't speak the language because when I came to the U.S. I didn't speak the language," Agreda-Winn said. "It's very important, because if you don't speak the
language you feel afraid, and if you have somebody to help you get [over] this barrier then you feel more comfortable and you can have a better life.”

“Every single one of us, we do work hard and for the best of the community. I think we do a lot of good things for the community, to have a better place to live,” she added.

Agreda-Winn said she loves all the work she does for the center and finds the Crisis Resource and Advocacy especially gratifying.

“[It’s] really important to me because you are able to help people in different situations in life,” she said. “It is always good to see people come in a crisis situation and we help them and then you see them later, a few weeks or months later, and they have a better life or maybe a better situation and you say, well, I contributed a little bit to that. Families come to the U.S. and don’t really speak the language and the kids are having trouble in school and we go and help them. Sometimes you are the interpreter, some other times the advocate. You help them to go through the system and figure it out and don’t feel so lost in the end.”

The center has recently been involved in helping a young woman get back on her feet after her children were taken away by the state, Agreda-Winn said.

“She didn’t have a house to stay in or rent or a job or anything and now she has a job. She just got a house and she’s going to have her kids with her. And that makes you feel like we did it. We reunited with family,” she said. “They are together now. She deserves it. She is working really hard for herself, for her kids.”

She said she used to receive nasty phone calls at the front desk, that has not happened recently.

Callers called her “Mexican” and said, “we don’t like people like you.”

Agreda-Winn said she is proud of where she comes from.

“[Due to] my accent, you can realize that English is not my first language,” she said. “But I believe that if somebody has an accent in any language, it is because that person speaks another language. And how many people can say that — that they speak two or more languages?”

“Although Zaida often stands just outside of the spotlight, she has been an integral part of the center since 2008,” said Multicultural Center Executive Director Rhiana Medina. “Zaida has rode out all of the growing pains of a new organization and contributed so much to what the Center is today. ... Zaida has taught all of us at MVMC a lot about the distinctive South American culture, and we all admire her big heart and dedication to her job. As an employee, Zaida is dependable, compassionate, and a real team player. She is also very
dedicated to her family, volunteering at her kids’ schools and helping her in-laws with whatever they need.”

Agreda-Winn first came to the U.S. for work. In 2005, she won an award for best television reporter in Bolivia. She was invited by the U.S. Consulate in Bolivia to report on a story in Cincinnati, Ohio, and given a six-month work visa for the two-week job. She finished the work and returned to Bolivia at a time of political and social unrest.

“As almost revolution,” she said. “It wasn't the best moment to be in my country at those times.”

She had never considered moving to the United States, but as the political situation grew more tense, Agreda-Winn decided to leave for as long as her work visa would allow.

In the U.S., she met her husband, Jack Winn.

“When it was time for me to come back to Bolivia, he proposed to me,” she said.

Now, the couple has two children, a second-grader and an eighth-grader.

She said she enjoys volunteering at her children’s schools and she also loves hiking with her three dogs and spending time with her family.

ByBy Rose Egelhoff

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