

COASTAL KIDS HOME CARE SOCIAL WORKER COUNSELS 15-YEAR-OLD WHO LOST MOTHER TO COVID-19 THEN LOSES HER OWN MOTHER TO COVID

SALINAS, CA, USA, March 17, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- WHAT: When Stephanie Gonzalez joined [Coastal Kids Home Care](#) (CK) in July of 2019, she knew her job as a social worker would require serious dedication but had no clue of the firestorm that awaited her. And, Gonzalez, 29, definitely didn't know she would have to continue putting on a brave face for the families she served – even after tragedy struck her own family.



Gonzalez is one of tens of thousands of social workers who have been on the front lines dealing with the ravages of the COVID-19 crisis. They provide hope in the midst of loss and find resources for those who have none. March is National Social Worker's month and marks the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coastal Kids is California's only provider of specialized pediatric home health services for medically fragile children. Their team of social workers, nurses and therapists provide critical care and support to children living with illness and disability and their families. They serve Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties.

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Margy Mayfield

Since COVID-19 hit, Gonzalez and her colleagues haven't stopped working. CK saw demand for pediatric palliative care triple because of the crisis. Hospitals were, and continue to be, a scary place for families with seriously ill children. Gonzalez and her colleagues helped clients identify financial resources, and made numerous adjustments, conducting therapy sessions via telehealth or even outdoors depending on a family's preference.

A self-described “people person,” Gonzalez loves interacting with parents and kids. COVID-19 made it hard to offer the same level of intimacy that so often helps stressed out families. Some families initially opted out of in-home visits. Other times Gonzalez felt like an alien donning gloves and a hazmat suit to minimize the risk of contaminating children already struggling with complex health problems.

One family Gonzalez helped was a mother and her 15-year-old son. After the mother told Gonzalez she had renal failure, she provided anticipatory grief counseling sessions for the boy with the goal of paving the way for a less arduous grieving process.

Then came a frantic text from the mother. She’d been admitted to the ICU after testing positive for COVID-19. She was being intubated and didn’t know what might happen. Could Gonzalez help prepare her son for the worst-case scenario? Could she be there for her son if she died? Gonzalez said of course she would help.

The boy’s mother died the next day.

Gonzalez met with the teenager at an outdoor picnic table where they played with slime and talked through his experiences. Their established rapport was a bonus. She was able to provide continuity of care and mercifully, the boy was saved the pain of re-explaining the history to a new counselor.

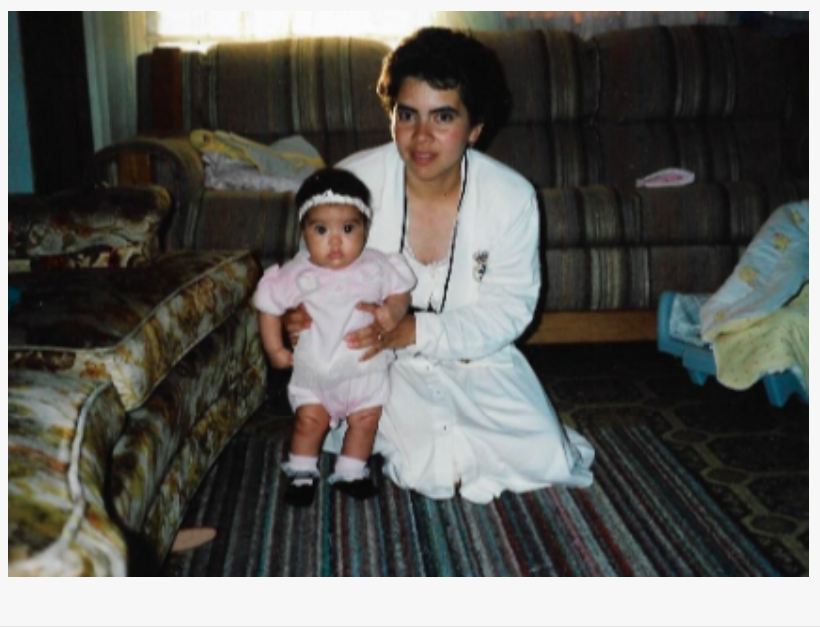
Then, in the blink of an eye Gonzalez was no longer the social worker; she was a daughter mired in her own loss.

In late December 2020, Gonzalez arrived at her mother’s home to find Ofelia, 57, unresponsive



on the floor. Gonzalez performed CPR and tried to keep her mother alive until an ambulance arrived. Feeling a sense of panic rising from within, she knew from working in emergency situations, she had to stay calm, had to relay the critical information to first responders.

The next time she met with her young teenage client, they were both motherless. Although Gonzalez's mother had initially suffered nine rare brain aneurysms, she ultimately died of COVID-related complications.



Within two weeks Gonzalez was back to work. "I didn't have the luxury to take much time off and we didn't know how soon my mother's medical bills would arrive," she said. Still reeling from her loss, she returned to serving others, including her teenage client. Building on their existing relationship was a benefit. So, in a bittersweet way, was their shared loss. "The one thing I saw with him was a lot of withdrawal," Gonzalez said. "So, knowing I was someone who also knew what it's like to lose a mom – and so recently – allowed us to reconnect."

"During the pandemic our social work team has worked tirelessly to ensure our pediatric patients and their families have the resources they need to stay safe and healthy," said Coastal Kids founder Margy Mayfield. "Many of our families are very isolated and the connection that social workers provide became a lifeline during COVID-19"

Other pertinent info:

Many CK parents who are taking care of children with lifelong disabilities experience anxiety and depression. "A lot of our families are Latino who, traditionally do not seek emotional support, so it's gratifying to be able to open a door that they've never considered," said Gonzalez. Providing this service at their home and in their primary language makes it more accessible.

After Gonzalez raced behind her mother's ambulance to the hospital, Ofelia was airlifted to San Jose Regional Hospital. She was not allowed to kiss or touch her mother. Gonzalez yelled 'I love you, Mom' as Ofelia was loaded into a waiting helicopter. "I didn't know if she was conscious, but I hoped she could hear me." Once at the hospital, because she'd tested COVID positive, physicians declined her case.

WHO TO INTERVIEW:

- Kelly Mullen Brown: Development Director

- Stephanie Gonzalez: Social Worker with Coastal Kids Home Care

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[About Coastal Kids Home Care](#)

Margy Mayfield co-founded Coastal Kids Home Care in June of 2005. After more than two decades as a pediatric nurse, Mayfield knew what children living with serious illness craved most – to simply be home. Children thrive when they can sleep in their own beds, eat their favorite foods and spend time with their friends. Mayfield's idea was simple but revolutionary. With an exclusive focus on pediatrics, Coastal Kids bring high-quality, compassionate home care to children with serious or life-limiting illness – all at a low cost to families and community healthcare dollars.

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