**First 5 Riverside County
Champion for Children Award
2024 Recipient**

<u>**Nominee Profile: Helena Lopez**</u>

Helena Lopez is the CEO of A Greater Hope and has worked with the organization since 2002. Ms. Lopez' service to children in need began when she was just 10 years old when her mother opened three group homes for teenage foster youth. Ms. Lopez regularly spent time with the residents. Years later, she became a Case Manager at the Greater Hope Society group home, where she relished in work empowering foster youth.

Ms. Lopez attended Loyola Marymount University where she received her bachelor's degree in business and went on to receive a master's degree in business administration and a Juris Doctorate, specializing in real estate contracts. After law school, she worked in real estate law in San Francisco until she received a fateful phone call. Her mother needed her signature tenacity and leadership at her newest philanthropic endeavor, a foster family agency in Barstow called A Greater Hope. The County of San Bernardino Children and Family Services greatly needed an agency in that community as no other providers would travel to the High Desert communities of Barstow and Victorville at that time.

Demonstrating her characteristic compassion and care for others, Ms. Lopez told her mother "yes" and moved to Barstow where she used her expertise in management, contracts, research, and development and served as A Greater Hope's Executive Director for 17 years. In January of 2019, Lopez was appointed Chief Executive Officer of A Greater Hope.

A Greater Hope officially came to Riverside County in 2015 when Ms. Lopez launched the organization's new office in Banning. The location was strategic, as the cities of the San Gorgonio Pass area experience profound social and health inequities. From the Banning office, A Greater Hope provides foster care, adoption, supervised visitation and Live Scan services. While A Greater Hope serves all of Riverside County, Ms. Lopez focuses on combating the longstanding geographic bias, which leaves rural communities such as Banning, Beaumont and Bonnie Bell underserved and under-resourced. Under her leadership, A Greater Hope has become a trusted messenger in these communities, meeting clients where they are at, to change the trajectory of their lives, and has grown to five locations with multiple programs. Since 2002, more than 6,000 children have found loving homes at A Greater Hope.

In addition, First 5 Riverside County's commitment to centering race equity in comprehensive health and development is mirrored in Ms. Lopez' tireless work to ensure Black and Biracial youth in the child welfare system receive appropriate hair and skin care. She developed and openly shares a guide for naturally curly and textured hair care.

She also led the planning of a series of special events across the county to empower and educate child welfare staff, resource/foster parents, and caregivers to "nurture the unique hair care needs of foster children."

A recognized leader in the field of foster care, Ms. Lopez currently serves as the President of the California Alliance for Children and Family Services for 2021, a powerful collective of child welfare organizations. She served as the past President of the Inland Empire Alliance, a regional alliance of the California Alliance for Children and Family Services. She is currently the Co-Chair of the Association of Foster Family Agencies an association of agencies from across San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside and Los Angeles Counties.

Ms. Lopez is deeply admired at the A Greater Hope office for her unwavering commitment to families in need. For 22 years she has worked from early morning until late at night to serve High Desert children and families. Riverside County thanks Helena Lopez for her leadership.

Sources:

A Greater Hope website:

https://aghope.org/en/blog/ceo-named-most-inspirational-leader

Champion for Children nomination submittal:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1hudzUdPFilLVvpEXt7tsQfaErVhLWAZh