



IWS FAMILY
HEALTH



VOICES OF CARE

DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you for your unwavering support. Our team simply couldn't care for our patients with the depth and dedication we do without you by our side.

I am a physician and a mother of two, which means that I am dedicated to the whole health of children and families 24/7.

Our person-centered care model at IWS Family Health delivers high quality, seamlessly integrated physical, mental, and supportive health services. We're proud that everyone on our team invests time and energy—precious resources—to create new opportunities for the children and families who rely on us, ensuring they receive the care they need, when and how they need it.

We believe in a bright future for our children and families. One where they can thrive at home, school, and work.

Just like you, I worry about children, families, and communities who do not have easy access to health-

care, mental health support, and even food to put on their tables. *What will their future look like? How can a parent with a chronic illness care for themselves and their children when they're working three jobs to make ends meet? How will they be successful?*

It is why our providers choose to provide care each day and be on-call all night for our patients. **And it's why we believe so powerfully in the importance of integrated care.**

The deep connection between the medical, dental, behavioral health, and care coordination departments is the best way for us to show up for our children and families. Our team actively works together. We consult with and refer to each other, learning more about patients and expanding our own ability to care for the over 12,000 people we serve each year.

Our patients have the same hopes, dreams, and challenges that we all do. And they also struggle with not having enough money for housing, food, school clothes, transportation—making their day-to-day lives that much more complicated. We hear from patients

who want to control their diabetes but have trouble buying healthy food and medications and moms who want to escape violent partners but don't know how to afford rent.

Some of our patients' stories even make the news. One of our family practice providers and intake specialists just referred a parent and her child to our crisis counseling and long-term therapy after a tragic accident. Their family would not have gotten whole-person care without our integration.

Stories like theirs remind us that health is about the body, the mind, the community, and social and economic realities. **Thanks to your generosity, the IWS Family Health team provides hope, dignity, and tools to thrive in every part of life.**

I hope these stories of Voices of Care show you the difference your support makes.

With deepest gratitude,

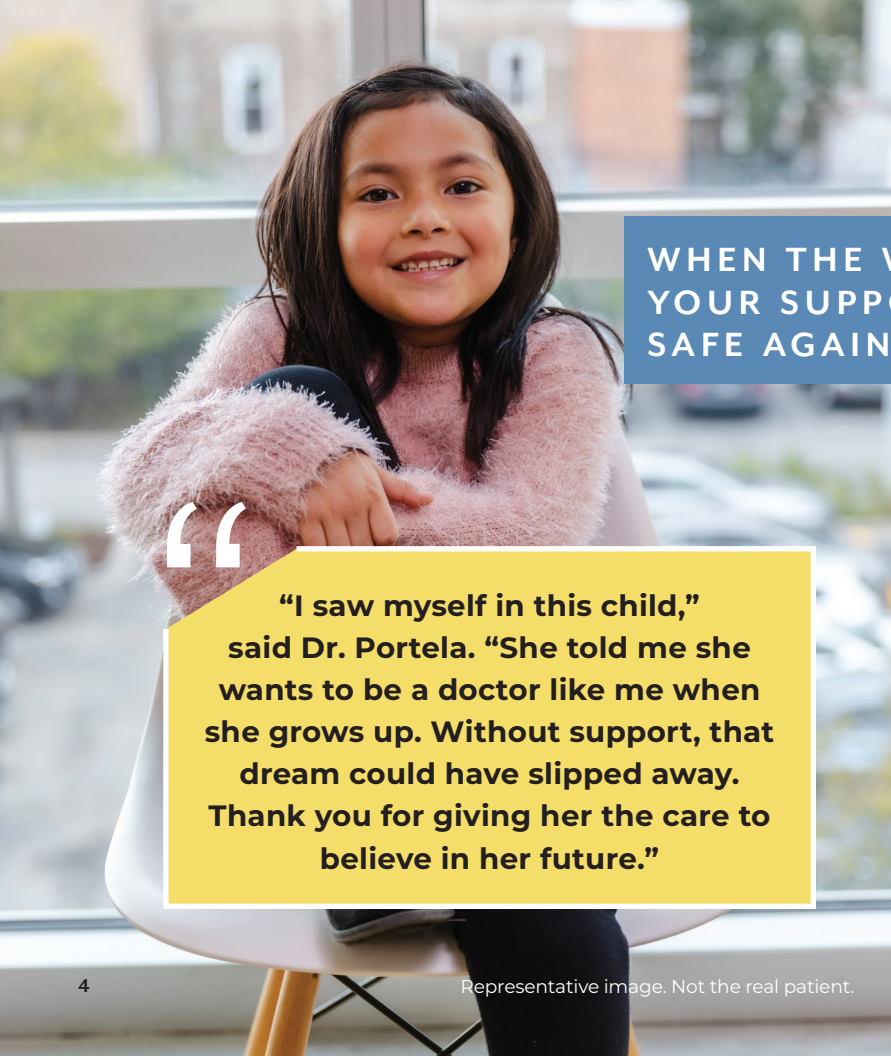
Tara Ioffe, MD
Medical Director & Interim Chief Medical Officer

Dr. Tara Ioffe
and family



Dr. Tara Ioffe
and patient





VOICES OF CARE: Eliana's Story

WHEN THE WORLD GETS TOO LOUD,
YOUR SUPPORT HELPS CHILDREN FEEL
SAFE AGAIN.

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**“I saw myself in this child,”
said Dr. Portela. “She told me she
wants to be a doctor like me when
she grows up. Without support, that
dream could have slipped away.
Thank you for giving her the care to
believe in her future.”**

Eight-year-old Eliana had always been a curious, high-achieving student. But as her school year shifted away from play-based learning toward test-focused instruction, everything began to change.

She started crying in class. She had trouble sleeping. Common sounds like a dog barking outside or a pen clicking nearby made it impossible for her to concentrate. She began telling classmates they were too loud or distracting, words that challenged her friendships and deepened her sense of isolation. Despite her strong academic performance, she couldn't complete tests and started dreading school.

At home, things were no easier. Eliana's mother was also caring for a toddler with his own special needs.

Dr. Portela, Pediatrician, ruled out both autism and ADHD—but she recognized that something serious was happening. She brought in **Dee Vidal Gonzalez, LCSW**, to conduct a more in-depth behavioral assessment.

“Eliana's mom was doing everything she could,” said Dr. Portela. “But when a child is internalizing this much, it takes a team to truly understand what's going on. Mom benefitted from talking with Dee to alleviate her self-doubt and to learn more about child development and delays.”

Dee found Eliana to be funny, socially aware, and emotionally insightful. When she introduced subtle background noise into their session using a sound machine, Eliana adjusted the volume and frequency until one of the sounds made her immediately cover her ears.

“Stop, stop, stop!” she said. Her distress at the noise she had just created was physical and undeniable. It was distressing and overwhelming.

What they uncovered.

It was a classic case of **Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS)**. SPS, often associated with the term *Highly Sensitive Person (HSP)*, is a personality trait characterized by heightened awareness and deeper processing of sensory input. Children with SPS are more reactive to sights, sounds, smells, textures, and even internal sensations like hunger or pain. This sensitivity can foster great empathy—but also lead to overwhelming anxiety in chaotic or noisy environments.

Eliana is hyper-focused. Her brain locks in so deeply that even subtle background noises flood her system. She'd tried noise-canceling headphones, but over-the-ear models were too tight and made her feel worse.

Her family, though loving and engaged, was stretched. Her father is an artist and musician. Her mother stays home full-time to manage the needs of both children. It was clear Eliana needed more than a diagnosis—she needed a plan that met her exactly where she was.

“Eliana needed tools—simple, supportive tools to help her body feel calm and her brain feel safe.” said Dr. Portela.

Together, Dr. Portela and Dee developed a comprehensive, non-medication treatment plan that included:

- A **10-pound weighted pad** to use at bedtime, calming her nervous system and helping her fall asleep more easily.
- A **FlexSpace wobble cushion** for her classroom chair—providing subtle movement to improve focus and reduce anxiety through core engagement.

- **In-ear noise-canceling headphones** to block out distractions during test-taking, since over-the-ear models felt too tight and uncomfortable.
- **Daily deep breathing exercises** to regulate panic and manage sensory overload.
- A **coping skills game** to play at home with her family—turning emotional regulation into daily practice, supported by the people who love her most.

Care extended beyond the clinic.

The IWS clinical team designed a plan that extended into every part of Eliana’s world—home, school, and self. Her teachers were involved. Her parents were trained to support Eliana in using the tools provided by her therapist. And Eliana began learning to manage a condition she will live with for life. *“This isn’t something she’ll outgrow,”* said Dee. *“But she can grow into it—with the right support.”*

That support includes you.

Eliana’s family pays what they can. But the services she received—treatment planning, classroom supports, parent coaching, and coordinated care—go far beyond what Medicaid reimburses.

Your generosity bridges that gap.

Today, Eliana is sleeping better. Her friendships are healing. Her laughter is returning. And her future feels possible again.

“I saw myself in this child,” said Dr. Portela. *“She told me she wants to be a doctor like me when she grows up. Without support, that dream could have slipped away. Thank you for giving her the care and the confidence to believe in her future.”*

“What donors made possible wasn’t just care. It was trust.” added Dee. *“Eliana opened up to me in a way children only do when they feel safe. Her parents went from overwhelmed to empowered. That transformation—that calm in the chaos—is because of you. Thank you.”*

Your gift today ensures that a child like Eliana, and the other children who receive 500 integrated behavioral health visits a year, don’t just receive care—they discover calm, confidence, and hope.

Make that future possible. Give now—and be the reason a child feels healthy, strong, and confident.

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“Eliana needed tools—simple, supportive tools to help her body feel calm and her brain feel safe.”



VOICES OF CARE: Sonia's Story

CONFIDENT SMILES START WITH COMPASSION:
BRINGING A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO OUR
PEDIATRIC DENTAL CARE.

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Dr. Agnes recalls,
“As dentists, we’re taught a lot
about how to care for children.
With these trainings, I had even
more tools to provide an
individualized approach.”

Sonia, a third-grader, did not want to go to the dentist. Her mother made her appointment knowing her daughter needed her cleaning but worried about her reaction. Sure enough, when it was Sonia’s turn to sit in the dental chair, she just couldn’t do it. She started crying before she even made it to the waiting room.

Her dentist, Dr. Agnes Smyk-Horvath, recalled her recent Mental Health First Aid and therapeutic practice training and implemented many techniques to comfort her little patient. The entire dental team, including the dental assistant, knew

just what to do, thanks to the extensive in-person and video trainings they had all received by Denise “Dee” Vidal Gonzalez, Director of Behavioral Health Integrated Care. As Dee states, “An important part of the training for the dental team was knowing different ways to respond when a child sits in their chairs. We provide a therapeutic approach to dental visits.”

Meeting them where they are.

“Anxiety can look like a lot of things—crying, nausea, trembling, or even just shutting down,” explains Dee. “We want our team to not only recognize those signs but have the right tools to respond to a patient’s unique needs.”

Dr. Agnes says, “From my perspective as a dentist for 31 years, dental anxiety is one of the biggest barriers to oral health, particularly among children.” Whatever the source of their anxiety, the result is often the same: delayed appointments, missed checkups, and visits that only happen when a situation becomes too painful to ignore.

Sonia didn’t get her dental exam that day, but she received something else that would change her life. Dr. Agnes gave her a referral to therapy.

Dee and Sonia started therapy together, a short-term, solution-focused intervention that would empower Sonia and her mom to find ways to calm her mind and body. During their conversations, Dee discovered not just the dental anxiety that Dr. Agnes had witnessed, but general anxiety and a history of trauma.

Dee worked with Sonia and her family on her anxiety and the other challenges that were contributing to her fear. Together, they worked on coping skills and ways to respond when she was feeling overwhelmed. To prepare for her next dental visit, Dee and Sonia played therapeutic games, did some exposure therapy, and even conducted her last therapy session in a dental chair.

Before Sonia’s dental visit, Dr. Agnes and Dee consulted so that the dental team was ready for Sonia and her individual needs. Sonia wanted a



weighted pad and while she didn't want specific updates during her exam, she wanted reassurance that everything was going well.

With Sonia, her mom, and Dr. Agnes all prepared, Sonia sat in the dental chair for the first time and completed her cleaning, without even taking the breaks they had pre-planned.

Dr. Agnes remembers with a smile, *"She even gave me a hug at the end."*

Sonia's mom confided, *"Sonia is a different child. Not just today at this dental visit, but at home and at school."* Sonia's pediatrician had also been following her progress, and mom reported at her medical check-up that with Sonia's anxiety lessened, she was able to build new friendships at school for the first time.

Each year ~4,000 children visit our dental home for over 7,000 visits. Since integrating a therapeutic approach, the dental team has incorporated gentle, reassuring language into their practice, and young patients are introduced to the office with friendly walkthroughs, often guided by a stuffed animal "buddy". Weighted blankets, fidget toys, and stress balls are available to help put patients at ease, and books are given to patients to help explain dental visits in a kid friendly way.

Big plans for the future.

"I am excited to implement some more therapeutic touches to the dental office. The dental waiting room can become a space that is more than just welcoming—it can create a sense of safety, security, and serenity—something our kids need and deserve." says Dee.

She says, *"I now see many patients referred by the dental department. I'm proud to say that like Sonia, they are each able to receive dental services and practice their therapy skills not just at health visits, but at home and at school."*

Thanks to the support of our donors, our patients experience is evolving into something far more holistic and far more healing.

IWS Family Health is proud that our innovative approach is capturing the attention of peer health care professionals. Our presentation at the Illinois Primary Healthcare Association conference was well-received, spreading our message of integration of behavioral health and dental services to caregivers across the state.





VOICES OF CARE:

Jazzlin's Story

FOOD IS MEDICINE. IT'S ALSO ONE OF THE WAYS WE SHOW HOW MUCH WE CARE.

Jazzlin has always been hard-working. She takes care of her four children and takes pride in learning new skills and seeing what she can accomplish.

She and her family have been patients of IWS Family Health for 20 years and she was excited when she learned about our food pantry, Janie's Kitchen, while coming to Logan Square for a pediatric visit. She still remembers her visit: *"I saw the flyer advertising the food pantry and looking for volunteers and I wanted to know more."*

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"I saw the flyer advertising the food pantry and looking for volunteers and I wanted to know more."

The food pantry and the clinic had given her family so much.

It was important to her to contribute. She wanted to volunteer her time—a scarce resource for a mom of four looking for additional employment.

She reached out to Estefania Hernandez-Caballero, Director of Administration, whose dedication running the pantry is immense. Estefania can be found lifting heavy produce boxes to stock the shelves, recruiting and training community and Auxiliary volunteers, and managing every ebb and flow of the pantry operations.

Jazzlin was put to work right away, taking a Tuesday morning shift. Her first impression as a volunteer was of a mini grocery store. *"I loved it from the very first day"*, she remembers. She also noticed the scale of the food pantry operations noting, *"We are so busy all the time. Patients line up outside because people come here and feel respected, welcome, and safe. It is a beautiful experience. And*

it's been good for my health too – and my mental health. It's been a hard year, and I wake up on pantry days and feel like I have another purpose."

Estefania points out that Janie's Kitchen is the perfect example of the strength of partnerships.

She says, *"The food itself comes for free from the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Their large-scale partners supply the food and together, they keep us well stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen meats, milk, eggs, and pantry items that our patients love to eat to stay healthy."*

She adds, *"And then our partnerships click into place—Auxiliary members volunteer many, many hours per week to keep the pantry open. They're joined by local business owners, church congregants, other patients, and community members we've met along the way."*

She further notes, *"And of course, Janie's Kitchen only exists because of the generosity of a family wanting to honor their late wife and mother with a*



Estefania and Jazzlin proudly display the fresh produce offerings.

significant donation. Janie's incredible legacy lives on through the hundreds of people she nourishes each week."

Because **Janie's Kitchen is open exclusively to IWS Family Health patients**, Jazzlin and Estefania have gotten to know some of the other families who come to the food pantry.

Estefania smiles as she says, "*We've made a lot of relationships, because the pantry is always full.*" In fact, approximately 100 households each week are fed by Janie's Kitchen. **All those busy days add up to almost 2,000 households who are served each year, with over 6,000 people walking through the doors.**

They both say, "*People who come to the pantry are so grateful and kind.*" Estefania tells of a patient who shared personal details with them, saying that she appreciated the whole experience of coming to the pantry, seeing friendly faces and getting nutritious

food for her family. It was a welcome reprieve from the difficulties of her daily struggles.

Our patients are healthier with access.

Providers say that asking families about their food needs and telling them about the food pantry when they are in need is an important part of their clinical practice. Medical, dental and behavioral health staff all provide access to the food pantry, and our patients are healthier because of it.

Jazzlin is joined by other patients who volunteer their time at the pantry. **Receiving food from the pantry each week inspired them to get more involved and support the pantry's contributions to families and their community.**

Jazzlin says, "*I wanted to be part of something big. I wanted to give back to the community. And here, I'm putting my hands in and doing my part.*"

Janie's Kitchen and coordinated care efforts—addressing the needs of families beyond our clinic walls—are made possible by donors and supporters who invest in our mission.

Supporting IWS Family Health puts healthy food right in the hands of children and families.

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Jazzlin says, “I wanted to be part of something big. I wanted to give back to the community. And here, I’m putting my hands in and doing my part.”

**Thank you for being part of our mission.
We hope these stories show you the difference
your generosity makes.**



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