

End Hunger CT! Hires New Administrative Director

Anti-hunger nonprofit welcomes first director of color, celebrates staff diversity



Photo: End Hunger CT!'s Administrative Director Julieth Callejas was recently interviewed for NBC CT's Telemundo.

East Hartford, Conn. – End Hunger Connecticut! (EHC!), a statewide anti-hunger organization dedicated to increasing food security and eliminating hunger across Connecticut, is thrilled to officially announce the recent hire of its Interim Administrative Director, Julieth Callejas, who is also the first person of color to ever lead the organization.

Callejas has volunteered with EHC! for the past four years and sat on EHC!'s Board of Directors from 2018 through part of 2021, serving as elected vice-chair in 2019. She recently stepped down from the Board to accept her newly appointed role of Administrative Director as part of EHC!'s staff.

"I'm looking forward to understanding and supporting all of EHC!'s programs," Callejas said. "This is the first time that I get to work with all the staff and focus on what each program needs to grow and develop into something greater."

Callejas has vast experience in managing [various nutrition programs](#). She operated [CT Summer Meals](#) sites, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) family home daycare sites, afterschool meal programs, and older adult meal programs. She was also the first sponsor in Connecticut to operate a summer meals and afterschool meals program at a HUD housing complex, run completely by volunteers. Further, Callejas directed operations in early childhood centers and opened her own home daycare in 2008. In 2019, she also established a home care agency for older adults and people with disabilities.

"I have known Julieth Callejas for about 10 years now on a personal and professional level and she is a hard worker and very dedicated," said Megan Monroe, a State of CT Employee. "Nutrition and hunger are two things she has been passionate about, and she is continuing to learn everything she can about the issues while trying to find solutions to the problems. She loves helping others and continues to want to fight hunger here in CT."

Callejas holds a Bachelor of Science in Social Service and Disability Studies and is currently working on earning her Master of Science in Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership at Charter Oak State College.

“Not only is she an amazing caregiver, but I have also witnessed her commitment for continuing her education and working within the community,” said Christine Peruccio, a former parent of Callejas’ home daycare. “Her relentless and tireless passion for community is beyond impressive and certainly inspiring.”

Callejas, who identifies as Native American and Hispanic, is specifically Colombian and from the indigenous community of Kiloka Playa Verde. She moved to Connecticut at five years old and is bilingual in English and Spanish.

“As a first-generation immigrant, I would like to partner with the immigrant community and help mixed-status families get the benefits and services they need and dispel misleading information,” Callejas said. “I would love EHC! to focus on racial equity to help understand and assist these communities.”

Callejas is a collaborative force when it comes to partnering on events and “her enthusiasm and passion for her work is clear every time,” said Philip Blonski, Senior Manager of Community Engagement and Marketing at United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut.

“United Way and End Hunger CT! work on food insecurity initiatives and free meal canvassing events and marketing every summer,” Blonski said. “The children and families that benefit from End Hunger CT!’s efforts will always have an advocate in Julieth.”

EHC!’s programming and operations are spearheaded by Sherry Suber, also a woman of color, who was recently promoted to SNAP & Operations Director. Suber has worked at the organization for nearly 11 years.

“As a woman of color, I am very excited to see someone ‘that looks like me’ in a leadership role,” Suber said of Callejas’ hiring. “It is extremely important for little brown and black girls to see women that look like them in leadership positions, especially in positions that make a difference in many of their communities.”

In her short time on staff, Callejas secured funding to support and expand EHC!’s programming, as well as established and cultivated partnerships that will be essential to the organization’s efforts. New grants will benefit EHC!’s CT Fresh Match program – which enables farmers’ markets across the state to double SNAP purchases of fruits and vegetables – and EHC!’s Full Shelves Initiative, a cooperative food purchasing group developed to collectivize food pantries and their buying power. Callejas said she is excited to collaborate with staff and see these programs grow.

“Julieth has already created partnerships with some grassroots organizations that are doing the ‘heavy lifting’ on the ground in the communities that EHC! serves,” Suber said.

Jendayi Scott-Miller, Founding Executive Director at Angel of Edgewood (AOE), said she was introduced to Callejas during the planning of AOE’s Back-to-School Extravaganza. Not only did Callejas secure food and beverage donations, volunteers, and supplies for the event, but she also connected AOE with local and national partners/sponsors, which allowed for greater community engagement, Scott-Miller said.

“Since [the event], Julieth and I have partnered on several opportunities that will bring forth change in some of the most deprived neighborhoods throughout the state,” Scott-Miller said. “I feel as though our partnership

is so successful because both Julieth and I are very personable, reliable, and compassionate to the needs of the communities we all work so hard to serve.”

The partnerships Callejas is developing are already opening doors for EHC! to connect with people and communities through their trusted members, Suber said.

“Julieth has a strong blend of passion and insight that she brings to everything she does,” said Chris Marcelli, Director of Programs at Achieve Hartford. “She has been working with us as a mentor for recent high school graduates making the transition to college during this pandemic. Her unique combination of experience has made her a valuable resource to those students and to the rest of the team as we seek to address the challenges students are facing under these extraordinary circumstances.”

Callejas’ hiring presents an opportunity to re-assess the organization’s mission and goals, Suber said. She looks forward to strengthening efforts to advocate for Connecticut residents struggling with hunger and food insecurity.

“Over the years we shifted with the times to modernize and streamline processes,” Suber said. “While we recognize the importance of those years and the changes it brought to the organization, we also learned that it is very easy to lose touch with your mission and purpose if you are not connected with the members of your community.

“I’m most excited about getting back to the basics. And with the new priorities presented by our hunger leaders to address inequalities in the hunger world, I truly believe Julieth is the person to lead the charge for EHC! at this time,” Suber added.

As part of her role, Suber directly oversees [EHC!’s SNAP Call Center](#), which provides Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) assistance to clients over the phone. The Call Center team consists of two Associates and one Senior Associate, all Hispanic women who are bilingual in English and Spanish. Currently fielding nearly 1000 calls per month, EHC!’s SNAP Call Center team has assisted CT residents for over 20 years.

End Hunger Connecticut! welcomes this chance to celebrate its staff, while also recognizing the opportunity to re-evaluate internal and external racial equity to ensure people of color are properly represented both in the organization and in its work with all Connecticut communities.

This celebration of diversity, community, and impact appropriately comes just weeks ahead of GivingTuesday, a [global movement](#) intended to unleash the power of radical generosity to transform communities. Givers are cordially invited to support EHC! on November 30, 2021 at www.endhungerct.org/donate and via EHC!’s [Facebook/Instagram](#) fundraisers to join the fight against hunger, change the landscape of food insecurity, and positively impact communities across the state.

Learn more about EHC! at www.endhungerct.org and on all social media platforms ([@endhungerct](#)).

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