



SAVES



Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Ms. Milena Gonzales - A Refugee Story

The SAVES mission is to ease the transition of adult refugees/asylees/entrants into the South Florida community. Our goal is to provide academic and vocational training to eligible refugees and asylees living in Miami-Dade County, Florida.



Milena Gonzales - A grateful refugee

As of August, 2004, approximately 15,000 adult refugee/asylee students have participated in SAVES. The majority of the students served is Cubans.

Many of these students have risked their lives to reach our shore. Seeking freedom and an opportunity for a better life, many Cubans have used rafts made of pneumatic tubes, along with makeshift oars, to float and paddle across the Florida straights.

Ms. Milena Gonzalez, along with eight other individuals that included her husband, attempted this treacherous journey. In March of 2004, they placed their makeshift raft in the water and proceeded to float towards what they perceived was a better life. Along the way, almost everything that could go wrong went wrong.

The fragile raft could not sustain the crew of nine, and the Blazing sun combined with strong winds and a relentless tide dissipated the strength of the crew. Three days after leaving Cuba, the raft was

spotted by the U.S. Coast Guard off the shores of Fort Lauderdale. In an effort captured by television cameras and featured on every news channel in South Florida, the Coast Guard plucked the survivors out of the sea using helicopters with their human rescue baskets.

Ms. Milena Gonzalez survived the ordeal, along with two of the other nine original members. One of those who perished was her husband. When Milena was rescued, she was suffering from severe dehydration and sunburn. Ms. Gonzalez spent weeks in the hospital recuperating physically and mentally from her ordeal. She was granted refugee status and allowed to stay in the U.S.

A year and a half later, Milena is striving to improve her life. She joined the SAVES program at Robert Morgan Educational Center, where she has focused a lot of her attention on learning English. She is currently enrolled in ESOL Level 2, and her teacher praises her effort and motivation. Milena was recently selected as the SAVES Success Story from Robert Morgan Educational Center, and she presented her story to the district-wide SAVES staff in English.

Ms. Gonzalez is a true motivational force. Her future plans include making English her second language, which will help her in reaching her ultimate goal, a chance to work in television production. Good luck Milena!



Milena and her teacher, Sonja Pantry

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If you know anyone else who would like to receive future newsletters, please send your request to Jtravieso1@dadeschools.net.