

Voices of Latina Women in the JLFW

Conversations with Dr. Tara Reed, Diversity & Inclusion Chair

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing three outstanding members of the Junior League of Fort Worth (JLFW) as a kickoff to our D&I three-piece article covering diverse voices in the League. Each of these members represent our Latina sisters and each are powerful in their own right! However, together their voices make music and teach us so much more about culture, community and collaboration.



Rachel Navejar Phillips



Jessica Walsh



Dr. Clara Cantu

Tara: When did you join JLFW and why? What was the draw?

Rachel: I joined JLFW as a Provisional in 2013 after my friend, Robin Greenhaw, talked me into applying. After learning more about JLFW, I thought it would be a holistic way to serve our community and to be a part of something much bigger than myself. I also thought it would allow me to get outside my bubble and make new friends.

Clara: My Provisional year was in 2015. I moved to Fort Worth in 2011 and became a new stay-at-home mom and graduated with my doctorate in education in 2012. By 2015, I was looking for a way to connect with ladies that I could build a relationship with since Fort Worth was fast becoming my permanent home. I wanted to also give back to the community and build my capacity as a leader. I was introduced to the Junior League and I have found fulfillment with my work in the League.

Jessica: I joined Junior League in the 2015-2016 year. At the time one of the board members encouraged me to join and thought I could add value to the League and would enjoy it. I jumped in with two feet and embraced everything the League had to offer – meeting new friends, making an impact in my community and learning more about the amazing organizations that surround Fort Worth.

Tara: What are your favorite leadership roles in and out of the Junior League?

Rachel: My favorite leadership role outside of the League has been serving on the Board of Directors for Presbyterian Night Shelter. It doesn't take long after visiting PNS for the first time to realize that any of us, no matter what your background is, has the potential to experience homelessness. Our organization works hard to give our guests the resources to guide them along their journey to permanent housing.

Inside the League, I feel like a broken record saying this, my favorite leadership role was serving alongside Emily Ottinger as a Rodeo Program Sales Co-chair. The ladies on that committee are some of the hardest working women I know. When we were still in Will Rogers, we had the tiniest office space to work out of, however because of this and the amount of time you spend with each other, we truly became a family.

Clara: My favorite leadership role has been Education Vice President. The selection process incorporates a group of women elected to choose the next Board. There are many candidates, and I was chosen due to my hard work, skills and leadership in the League. Being on the Board is the culmination of all the leadership experiences I've had in the League until now. My biggest areas of influence are with Training, All Aboard, Diversity & Inclusion, and Junior MINTS.

Jessica: I have enjoyed both In-League and community placements. Some of my favorites are my current role as Provisional Co-Chair. I remember sitting in my seat during my Provisional Retreat thinking how amazing it would be to lead a group one day (like Becky Escott and Meredith Belew) and now here I am. It has come full circle for me. And the icing on the cake, is that we believe I am the first person of color to hold the Provisional Co-Chair role, which is very special. I also enjoyed being a Provisional Advisor to lead a group of ladies in hopes that they would have a great experience like I did. Union Gospel Mission and Team Lead for Catholic Charities also impacted me significantly. I had the opportunity to tutor Pre-K homeless children and I believe they helped me more than I helped them. I also loved my time helping children at Catholic Charities.

Leadership roles out of the League that I'm most proud of include serving on the Association of Fundraising Professionals Board, serving as the President of the PTA for my son's school and serving on the TCU Frog Club Advisory Board.

Tara: As JLFW reaches 100 years, what do you hope to see more of in terms of leadership, inclusion, community affiliation?

Rachel: We have come leaps and bounds over the last 100 years as a League. I look forward to the day when potential members coming to our headquarters for the first time do not have to ask themselves, "Will there be someone who looks like me there?" The gap between perception and reality is often what makes some women wonder if they will be accepted (in all senses) into the Junior League. As we move forward, we need to make sure to tell our whole story- all of the communities, schools and organizations we serve, and show the faces of all of those women serving. I also cannot wait to celebrate the day when the first member of color is elected to serve as President of our League!

Clara: I hope to see the League grow in its diversity in membership and the leadership. Recruitment needs to conscientiously put in place to foster relationship with young adult women of color so they can see the benefits of joining such a powerful organization for the community, but also for networking that could aid these ladies in the future. All we need to do is keep opening the doors to women of color, welcome them into the room, and sit next to them and talk.

Jessica: I am proud of how Junior League has put Diversity and Inclusion in the forefront and how we're continuously looking for ways to improve. I feel like it's a part of every conversation and love how important it is to our League.

When I was on Nominating Committee a couple of years ago, it was important to me to help select a Board to represent Junior League that looked like our community. I believe that we made some huge steps forward with the board that was selected, and if I remember correctly, it was the most diverse board JLFW has ever had. I am so proud of that! I hope in my time we'll have a person of color as President of our Board. That would make me most proud to be a League member, and I think we're close to seeing that happen.

Tara: What connections do you feel The League needs to make in our local Latin community to become more inclusive?

Rachel: We could utilize our bilingual speaking volunteers more to make deeper connections within various communities within Fort Worth.

Clara: I believe we should be more involved with young women in high school and college, such as speech contests or essay contests and target the Latinas in schools. I guarantee most of them don't know of the Junior League and all its splendor. However, through outreach to both high school and college students we can build our future Provisionals inclusive of more women of color.

Jessica: I think as a Latina, it is my responsibility to do my part as a member of the League to go out into communities and events and recruit ladies to join. We have an amazing League, but imagine how much better we would be by getting even more ladies from different backgrounds to join. In addition, we can always be more visible at Hispanic Chamber events and other Hispanic organizations.

The Diversity & Inclusion Committee would like to thank Rachel Navejar Phillips, Dr. Clara Cantu and Jessica Walsh for taking the time to talk with us and share their stories with our members. To learn even more, make sure to sign up to attend the October Table Talk Training with Glenda Diaz, Rachel, Clara, Jessica and myself, Tara! Let's keep the conversation going!