

EMPOWERING JOY

Alisa Emedi Congolesse Integration Network

Members of the Puget Sound College and Career Network (PSCCN) had the opportunity to sit down with Alisa Emedi, Program Director of the Youth and Early Learning Department at the Congolesse Integration Network (CIN), to explore her remarkable work. Alisa shared her inspiring journey and insights into her impactful role. Her deep passion for supporting underprivileged youth is evident in her commitment as both a navigator and supervisor. Alisa's story highlights the challenges and triumphs of guiding young people toward brighter futures.

Here is a Q&A with Alisa Emedi



Can you describe your current role at CIN and what you do in this position?

As the Program Director for both the Youth and Early Learning Departments at CIN, I see myself as a navigator and supervisor. I train our navigators and work closely with higher-ups, acting as the middle person in our operations. I recently onboarded a new navigator, but before her, I handled the cases directly. Now, she manages her own cases, and I provide support and guidance.

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What are some personal or professional accomplishments you are proud of?

Graduating from Washington State University (WSU) in 2023 while working was a significant achievement. Balancing school and work is tough, but I grew up watching my mom work tirelessly, so I knew what it took to get things done. I'm currently studying for my PMP certification, hoping to be certified by next month. Outside of work, I'm passionate about dance. I started an Afro fitness class for adults and a dance program for kids at CIN. Watching our culture gain mainstream recognition and sharing that joy with our kids is incredibly fulfilling.

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What led you to this position at CIN?

It's been quite the journey. I started as an Early Learning Specialist at CIN after college at Washington State University (WSU). During the COVID pandemic, my plans changed unexpectedly. My mother, who also worked here, encouraged me to apply for a position at CIN. Although I had volunteered a bit before, my American upbringing made me feel somewhat distant from the community. However, once I joined as an Early Learning Specialist, I quickly connected with the families and excelled in the role. Over time, I became the manager for early learning, and now, I'm the Program Director. My passion for working with youth, especially those underprivileged, drives me every day.

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What's something surprising about your job?

People might be surprised to know that my job isn't always as glamorous as it sounds. There are many challenging days filled with frustration and hard work. We often operate with limited resources, and balancing our achievements with the reality of our needs can be difficult. While we do amazing things, we still need a lot of help to improve our operations and support the youth more effectively.

Can you tell us about the barriers and challenges you face in your work?

One significant barrier is building relationships with schools and having counselors reach out to us when a student is struggling. Many of the youth we serve are of African descent or immigrants, and they find it easier to open up to someone who shares a similar background. Unfortunately, public schools often don't provide the same level of understanding or support. This cultural disconnect can make it difficult for us to reach and help all the youth who need our services.



Can you share an instance where you helped a student overcome discouragement?

I had a student who wasn't on track to graduate on time due to a tough junior year. We explored options, and I convinced them to enroll in a GED program at iGrad. Initially, they were hesitant, but they are now set to graduate and have started classes in a nursing program. This experience taught them that life can turn around, and it's been incredibly rewarding to see their progress.



Conclusion

Alisa Emedi's work at CIN exemplifies the power of dedication and empathy in transforming lives. Her journey from an Early Learning Specialist to the Program Director showcases her resilience and passion for making a difference. Alisa's story reminds us that with the right support and determination, even the most challenging circumstances can lead to remarkable achievements.



How do students find joy in their academic journeys despite the challenges?

For high school students, joy often comes from their peers and the sense of community they build. Many come from challenging home environments, so having friends who understand their struggles is crucial. For college students, the prospect of finishing their education and the opportunities it brings motivates them. Although school can be tough, the hope for a better future keeps them going.



Is there anything else you want to add?

In reflecting on our program, I feel compelled to highlight the remarkable journey of Adolphine Kapanga. Despite joining us later in life while still navigating her own educational pursuits, Adolphine has seamlessly integrated into our community. It's been heartwarming to witness the genuine connection she's forged with our students, who see a bit of themselves in her journey. Adolphine has embraced the opportunity to both learn and impart knowledge to our youth. She embodies the essence of resilience and the belief that life's experiences, regardless of one's educational background, hold immense value. Through her experiences, she imparts invaluable lessons about life's diverse trajectories, inspiring us all to embrace our unique journeys. I would be amiss if I didn't take a moment to recognize Adolphine's contributions and the profound significance of her role in shaping the next generation.

