



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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April 18, 2018

News release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Kenosha County social worker Julie Ortiz receives 2018 Connie Reyes Award**

KENOSHA – Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser today presented the 2018 Connie Reyes Award for Excellence in Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention to Julie Ortiz, a social worker in the county Division of Children and Family Services.

The award, now in its fourth year, honors Reyes, a Kenosha County social worker who was murdered on April 12, 1990, as a result of her work serving children and families in the community.

Ortiz has been a child protective services investigator for 17 years. Prior to that, she worked in juvenile crisis for four and a half years.

“Julie’s deep dedication to protecting and improving the lives of children and families in Kenosha County is very much in keeping with the spirit of Connie Reyes,” Kreuser said. “I am honored to present this award to her, just as I know Connie would be honored for her to receive it.”

Ortiz’s duties call upon her to respond to referrals in which there are allegations of child abuse, neglect or sexual abuse. More recently, she has also become involved in cases in which there is any potential for human trafficking.

“In my job in particular, a lot of what I’m doing is responding to immediate situations,” Ortiz said. “I’m responding often when people are at their worst. I like being able to engage with families. I like making decisions that can change the course of children, of families.”

Ortiz was nominated for the award by several colleagues, including Kenosha County coworkers and representatives of other related agencies.

Ron Rogers, director of the Division of Children and Family Services, said Ortiz is a leader within the Child Protective Services Unit, mentoring new staff and working to find ways to improve the unit’s work with families. Rogers said Ortiz clearly embodies the characteristics of a recipient of the Connie Reyes Award.

“In her work throughout the community, she is leading efforts to promote the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of all children in the Kenosha community, and she has helped families with concrete supports in times of need,” Rogers said.

While she never worked with Reyes, Ortiz noted that her first direct supervisor with Kenosha County, JoAnn Slater, was close friends with Reyes, whose name and legacy came up often.

“It was drilled into us about safety and being safe when we’re going into these homes,” Ortiz said. “So I didn’t not directly know Connie, but I know the impact she had on this community.”

The Connie Reyes Award was established in 2015. The past winners are Karyn Van Heijningen (2015), Chris Hribal (2016) and Byron Wright (2017). The award is presented each year in April, which is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month.

In receiving this year’s honors, Ortiz said she considers it an honor for herself, as well as her colleagues.

“It takes a community of people engaged in trying to make families’ lives better, children’s lives better,” Ortiz said. “It takes many people to do this.”

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