



DCLC Profile: Joy Huertas Brings Personal & Professional Experience to DCLC Board

by Sally Sapega

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Joy Huertas, who joined the DCLC Board of Directors in 2019, knows firsthand what it's like to arrive in a new country and not speak the language well. In January 2010, when she was just 17, she traveled alone from Colombia, South America, to Virginia. "I wanted to be an investigative journalist," she says, but her basic knowledge of English gleaned from her middle school and high school courses were not going to get her there.

Soon after arriving in this country, Huertas enrolled in the English Language Institute and by August of that year, she started her undergrad career at Liberty University in Virginia. But, even with her hard-earned knowledge of English, "the work was difficult," she says. "Three times as hard as for someone who speaks English." In May 2014, she graduated and went on to earn a master's at Liberty University on a full scholarship, graduating in 2016 with honors. "I went from barely speaking English to teaching public speaking on a graduate level"—all while supporting herself and sending money back home. "I was lucky to go to school here," she says. "My parents valued education."

Huertas currently works as a communications manager in Philadelphia's Office of Transportation, Infrastructure and Sustainability—part of the Mayor's Vision Zero to eliminate traffic fatalities and increase safe and equitable mobility for all Philadelphians. Previously, she served as marketing communications manager at Esperanza, a nonprofit that helps empower those living in poverty in North Philadelphia by helping them develop agency, voice, and influence over their own lives.

Huertas says she joined the DCLC board to help others who come to this country with English as their second language. She hopes to use her knowledge of digital marketing to find new ways to raise money for the organization, allowing DCLC to expand its services.

"I see how above and beyond DCLC teachers go," she says. "They really care about the students holistically. They understand that there are other factors to success than just classes and want to help students in these other ways."

"I'm honored that they welcomed me in," she says. "I'm learning so much from tutors, volunteers, teachers, and I love to be part of it, part of the family."