

# Xochie Aranda

**Waiting for an organ transplant** | *Esperando un trasplante*



Hi, my name is Xochitl Aranda. At 30 years old, my kidneys stopped functioning. I was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease (PKD), one of the leading causes of kidney failure. I was put on the national transplant waiting list and within 3 years I received a transplant. However, I was put back on the waiting list after my transplant failed almost 10 years ago.

While I wait for a new kidney transplant, I receive dialysis treatments for almost 10 hours a week. Using the experience gained from my challenging health journey, I educate the community as a volunteer ambassador for Donor Network West.

When I went back to dialysis after my transplant failed, I was a single mother and also working. I had to educate myself about my health problems. As an ambassador for Donor Network West and someone who is part of the local Hispanic community, I try to listen to people's questions and clarify any myths about registering as a donor to help people understand why registering as an organ donor is important.

One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation and heal up to 75 lives through tissue donation. More than 600 Nevadans are on the waiting list for an organ transplant.

Visit [DonorNetworkWest.org](https://www.DonorNetworkWest.org) to register today

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# Victor Salazar

**Kidney & Cornea Transplant** | *Trasplante de riñón y córnea*



Victor Salazar's health battles began at just 10 years old when he was diagnosed with keratoconus, an eye disease that affects the cornea and can result in vision blurring or loss. During his college years, Salazar's vision worsened drastically. He also began experiencing unrelated health issues due to an under-developed kidney. Fortunately, he received two life-changing corneal transplants and a kidney transplant between 2014 and 2015.

Thanks to organ, eye and tissue donation, Victor now thrives; he enjoys archery, exploring the outdoors in off-road vehicles and spending time with his husband and family.

"I want people to know how many lives, like mine, can be affected by organ donation," Salazar said. "After going through vision troubles and four and a half years of dialysis treatments, donation has really improved my life and given me a second chance."

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**DONATE  
LIFE**

**DONE  
VIDA**

# Michael Balsley-Rodriguez

Organ Donor  
Saved 5 Lives

Donante de órganos  
Salvó 5 vidas



In March of 2017, Silvia Van Steyn was living every parent's worst nightmare. Her son, Michael Balsley-Rodriguez, was not going to survive a tragic accident. Silvia decided that she wanted to give meaning to his life and said "yes" to organ donation. Michael saved five individuals through the donation of his heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and pancreas.

"Michael was treated with dignity, respect, and honor during the donation process and I am so proud that he could help others," says Silvia.

Silvia was asked if she knew anyone that was on the waiting list for an organ transplant. Silvia's good friend knew of someone in need of a liver who was a coach connected to the Titan's football team, the same team that Michael played on in Lodi. Eric received Michael's liver. A few months later, Silvia asked Eric if he would accept Michael's middle school diploma at Robert McCaffrey Middle School.

Silvia also connected with two other recipients, Carrie, who received Michael's left kidney and pancreas, as well as, Alexander, who received Michael's other kidney. Alexander just celebrated the birth of his youngest daughter. Seeing how Michael changed so many lives, gives Silvia great joy.

In 2018, 23 families in San Joaquin County hospitals had the option to save lives through organ donation, however only six decided to donate. More than 500 residents in your county are waiting for incredible families, like the Van Steyns, to give them hope. Make the choice. Say "yes" to save someone seeking a second chance at life.

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# Monika Aldarondo

**Liver Transplant Recipient** | *Receptor de trasplante de hígado*



Monika Aldarondo's health battles began in 2009 when she was diagnosed with Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSC) – a rare, chronic liver disease that attacks the bile ducts in your liver, which can lead to cirrhosis, liver failure and cancer. Monika's best chance at survival was to receive a liver transplant.

There are more than 14,000 individuals waiting for a liver on the national organ transplant waiting list. Sadly, there only enough donated livers to perform around 8,000 transplants per year in the United States. The waiting period to receive a liver transplant can range from less than 30 days to more than five years. Monika waited for eight years to receive the call.

Monika's family received notice from the Mayo Clinic in Florida that a potential donor had become available in February 2017. Thanks to the caring team and staff at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, Monika's liver transplant was a success.

"It gave me a new lease on life. It gave me a new lease to do things that I haven't been able to do since I have been sick. It's given me the health to start businesses, to be an advocate for the same illness that was affecting my life, and it gave me all the time in the world to watch my son grow old and spend time with my family," said Monika.

In many cases, recipients do not get the chance to connect to their donor's family as both parties have to be willing to consent. Monika has never received the opportunity to meet her organ donor and has since gone through her own journey of processing her emotions.

"Initially, I felt a strong sense of guilt, as there was a lingering feeling of someone passing, giving me this new lease on life. It was hard to separate the two from each other; the events felt intertwined. After a few years of discussing with my therapist, and talking to other donors, donor recipients, families of donors, and advocates across the community, I've learned not to feel or carry such guilt, but rather have an intense and eternal gratitude. That gratitude comes with the need to live my life to the fullest and serve my community in the best ways that I can because that's how I can celebrate their life," shares Monika.

Since recovering, Monika has become a Donate Life Ambassador for Donor Network West and an champion for organ, eye and tissue donation. She also continues to be an advocate for PSC and shares her story with others to bring awareness to these important issues. With her second chance at life, Monika now hosts two podcasts – PSC Mami which is dedicated to spreading awareness of Our Latina Lens, a podcast giving light and a platform to Latinx creatives, including photography.

Because of her heroic donor, Monika was given the ultimate gift – the Gift of Life. She can now continue to live her life to the fullest and be a living legacy to her generous donor and their family. It is her hope to one day get the chance to meet her donor's family and thank them for saying "yes" to donation.

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