

Manisha Paudel – Nepal Manisha is the Equity Officer for the City of Des Moines. She has long been a champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the Greater Des Moines area. As her nominator said, “The work conducted by Manisha transcends city boundaries.” Her community engagement efforts have been described by others as making central Iowa a better place, and one that is equitable and inclusive. Manisha was instrumental in the creation of the Ankeny Human Rights Commission. Originally from Nepal, Manisha has also worked in Canada, East Timor, Eritrea, Indonesia, Kenya, and the Philippines. She serves as a national co-chair of Government Alliance on Race & Equity network.

Narayan Rizal – Bhutan Narayan has made a significant contribution to the Des Moines community through his leadership in assisting hundreds of older adults’ access critical services and navigate the naturalization process. In his role in elder services within Immigrant and Refugee Community Services for Lutheran Services in Iowa, he goes above and beyond in his role to assist others in the community in understanding and overcoming barriers they face in accessing or navigating community systems. Narayan is a devoted father and husband and is a leader in the local Bhutanese community. He has served in several leadership roles for the Hindu Cultural and Educational Center.

Isabel Martinez Santos (Conn) - Mexico As the Bi-lingual DOJ Representative and Co-director of the Legal Clinic at the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV), Isabel demonstrates a fearless commitment to advocacy on behalf of individuals, families, children, and communities impacted by domestic violence. An immigrant from Mexico and now a US citizen, Isabel is driven to empower, mentor, and support others – both inside and outside of her community. Among many things, she is active with the Iowa Alliance for Immigrant Rights, Latino Service Provider Coalition, Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice Community Committee, and recently helped organize the New Citizen’s Project, which engages Spanish-speaking Iowans in civic and voter activation.

Biak Thang – Myanmar Through his work as family liaison with the West Des Moines Community School District and a church pastor, Biak is constantly listening, seeking to understand, counseling, and identifying opportunities to teach and connect. Biak is a strong advocate within the refugee community and an active leader of the Iowa Chin Community. His personal commitment to education as the path to greater prosperity, his work to connect families to schools, and his work to foster intercultural understanding are at the core of who he is. In addition to his work as an educator, he has written books for children, introducing them to English and his own Chin dialect.

Monica Paulina Vallejo – Ecuador Monica is a strong advocate for the immigrant and refugee communities in Eastern Iowa. As an immigrant from Ecuador, Monica serves as a 'bridge builder' between newcomers and residents who may not understand the needs of those recently arrived. Her efforts lead to the education and integration of families into the state. Information that ranges from car seats to holding legal clinics, all in accordance with the needs of the people she serves. She is the first Latina appointed to the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission. She has also been fundamental in the creation of the City's Latino Festival, obtained multiple Municipal Proclamations and received recognition from elected officials.