

Robán San Miguel

National Latina/o/x/e Behavioral Health Excellence in Prevention Award 2021



Robán is a community mentor, described by many as the essence of "*Tlamatini*," a wise person that leads truly exemplary lives (Náhuatl translation). In her various roles through the years and across our systems, she has strengthened not just the resiliency of many Latina/o/x/e individuals but also of programs that serve Latina/o/x/e families. For example, many young immigrant teenagers found sanctuary within solid non-profit programs in the SF Mission District, such as **Real Alternatives Program** (RAP) and **Danza Xitlalli** (i.e., a group teaching indigenous dances of the Mexica tradition), both organizations where Robán has held pivotal roles. She is highly respected by the community for her understanding of indigenous teachings and has been a mentor to younger generations who pursue indigenous practices as part of their path to healing; and

countless youth who eventually became community workers, case managers, and social workers across the city and state. During her time at RAP, Robán authored an unpublished manual, highly valued and adopted by clinicians doing violence prevention work, which integrated community ethics and social work theories to support Latina/o/x/e youth with a holistic, indigenous approach. This handbook, described by many of her mentees as the essence of "*La Cultura Cura*" (i.e., our culture cures), has helped inform guiding principles of many SF community mental health programs such as Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR).

Robán's innovative work involving the use of culturally appropriate prevention strategies

As director of **Mission Family Center** (MFC) since 2014, and as a Latina and Indigenous clinician, Robán has grounded her treatment and leadership by centering culturally-responsive practices and community. She has insured that mental health services are provided in the language of the family, and focus on the family in the context of community. She has provided training, supervision, and leadership at MFC to ensure that traditional, spiritual, cultural, and intergenerational practices have been interspersed with western treatments, and that healing is co-created and collaborative. Robán understood through her own involvement in traditional dance and ceremony that healing must be holistic incorporating the mind and body. As an example, following a tragic shooting in an SF housing development witnessed by many residents, staff and children in 2014; Robán co-led healing circles that integrated mindfulness, use of sage, and culturally-adapted healing practices for trauma.

Robán's most recent and ongoing innovative work is with the successful implementation of the **Fuerte** program in San Francisco (SF). *Fuerte* is an intervention and prevention program for Latina/o/x newcomer (LN) immigrant youth, which uses a sociocultural and ecological lens; and an evidence-based Attachment Regulation and Competency (ARC) framework. Robán co-led efforts to implement *Fuerte* in a way that was community-engaged, culturally-responsive, and trauma-informed. She has been integral in setting up partnerships between behavioral health and

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educational systems, as this program is based in schools, allowing the intervention to be available to youth in a safe and easily accessible location. This helped address barriers to treatment for LN youth including documentation status fears, distrust of institutions, and stigma attached to mental health services. Details of the program have been described in a published [book chapter](#) that she co-authored: “Patient and community engagement for mental health disparities in Latinx youth immigrant populations: the *Fuerte* program” (Martinez et al., 2020).

Robán’s impact on the quality and access to treatment in Hispanic/Latina/o/x/e communities

San Francisco has been providing targeted specialty mental health services to Latina/o/x/e immigrant youth since the 1970s, as a result of community advocacy given the dearth of culturally and linguistically competent clinicians. One of two primary clinics serving this population is MFC. As director of MFC, Robán leads and manages a diverse group of mostly Latina/o/x/e staff with different professional backgrounds. Through her leadership, she bridges clinical services between MFC and schools, across generations of families, and within a community of varying degrees of needs. To strengthen the quality and access to culturally-responsive treatment in Latina/o/x/e communities, she has: (a) implemented extended clinic hours; (b) spearheaded health outreach efforts during events such as Latina/o/x/e Heritage Month, Carnaval, and Fiestas de las Américas; (c) supervised clinicians in providing school-based mental health services; and (d) organized a Latina/o/x/e access committee to ensure timely access to services for all families in need. Since 2014, Robán has also actively led two committees that became the pillars of ensuring quality and access to services: **Spanish-speaking Providers’ group** and **Unaccompanied Minors Workgroup** (UMW). As a seasoned community organizer, Robán steers these two networks, and strengthens collaborative efforts amongst clinicians, social services providers, legal services agencies, and housing advocates.



Robán’s life work in San Francisco

Robán is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and holds a Master’s in Social Work from San Francisco State University. She was Associate Director and Clinical Supervisor at Real Alternatives Program (1985-1998), which serves multi-ethnic youth and their families in the SF Mission district. She was Program Coordinator of the SF Department of Public Health (DPH) Community Substance Abuse Services (1998-2002). She served as program director of three BHS CYF SOC programs: (a) **Family Mosaic Project** (2003-2005) for youth at risk of out-of-home placement; (b) **Special Programs for Youth** - Youth Guidance Center (2006-2014) for juvenile justice-involved youth; and (c) **Mission Family Center** (2014-present) for mostly Latina/o/x/e children, youth, and families.



For all these and more, Robán was aptly selected and awarded the ***Latina/o/x/e Behavioral Health Excellence in Prevention Award*** by the National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA). She will be recognized and celebrated on September 16 at the 2021 National Latino Behavioral Health Virtual Conference. More information about the conference can be found [here](#).

Congratulations Robán! We are so proud of you!