

## **Why I volunteer**

### **Alexandra Cariboni**

I am a middle-aged Hispanic woman, mother of five children, three still living at home. My wonderful husband and I had the opportunity to move to this amazing country five years ago. Arriving in North Carolina, I did not speak English (although I could read it fluently). I took the free English as a Second Language classes in the local community college and improved my skills a lot.

In July 2017, a distracted driver crossed the centerline and hit me head-on. Miraculously, I survived, but lost my left arm and leg to amputation. In addition, in the hospital they discovered I have a large, inoperable meningioma in my brain. The tumor affects my life on a daily basis.

I was afraid, dealing with immense changes and struggling to find a new purpose in life as a disabled person, along with the certainty that I am not going to live the long life I was planning.

Through my amputee support group, I took the Certified Peer Mentor Training with the Amputee Coalition to help other amputees. I also discovered the opportunity to volunteer at the Children's Specialty Clinic with Carolina Conexiones as a bilingual patient navigator.

I remember a day when I was waiting for the next Hispanic family to arrive, and someone came up to me and said, "I just want to thank you for being here. Watching you makes me realize that my problems are not so bad. You are an inspiration, and if you can do it, I can too." I will never forget his face and the love I received from what he said to me. It changed my life.

So many mothers remember me every time they see me. I am not alone in this country anymore. There are people with whom I can speak my language and feel at home.

Also, the kids! Let me tell you about the children. They are so cute, so curious, so innocent, so alive! When they look at me with fear, I approach their parents and ask permission to tell the children why I look the way I do. I explain what happened and tell them everything I am still able to do. I become a superhero to many of them. When I tell them I can cook with only one hand, or how I can go up the stairs one by one, just seated on the steps, they look amazed.

In awe, a seven-year-old boy once asked me, "Can you fly?" In that moment, I felt that maybe I could! His excitement was contagious. Some days I feel tired, and some days I'm not sure if I'll be helpful, but I still go to the hospital, knowing that I'll come back home recharged with energy and purpose, ready to courageously face the challenges I have every day.

Volunteering and helping people give me that courage. It has helped me so much. I have become addicted to it, knowing that some days my mere presence can change someone's perception of their own problems. I have discovered that I still have a lot to give. That makes my pain worth it.