

# Miami Herald

## **SOCIAL WORKER HELPS CHANGE FARM CAMP**

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When Carmen Rivera gets to work every morning, she checks her office for messages and then starts walking. She's a social worker who goes door-to-door at the Everglades farmworker camp, which houses about 400 families, visiting residents and identifying needs. She rarely has time to sit down in her sparsely furnished office. But when the phone rings, she stops in her tracks.

"Somebody was breaking into a trailer," Rivera said after taking a call. "Since we started with the Crime Watch program, people are beginning to call when they see something." Phone calls are an important sign of change for the Everglades community. Another milestone: residents marched in December to bring attention to crime in the community and gather support for a neighborhood watch program. "It's the beginning," said Rivera. "The march was to let people know that it's about time that we change and that we do something."

Residents say Rivera has made the difference. "We have seen a lot of change, now that Carmen is with us," said Josefa Martinez, 40, a 15-year resident of the Everglades center, 19400 SW 376th St. Rivera, 40, ran a business at Miami International Airport -- returning luggage lost by the airlines. But after the company closed down last April, she contacted Cip Garza, former chairman of the Everglades Community Association, about a job. Rivera told Garza about her experience as an elementary school teacher in Mexico and he hired her on the spot.

ECA director Enrique Vazquez said some extra money after the hurricane allowed him to hire Rivera. Before the hurricane, he had to do her job -- and run the camp. "She's got ways to treat people that make them feel welcome," he said. Rivera said she feels fortunate to have found her calling. "The most important thing is that people trust me," she said. "I will help them in any way that I can. Anything that they need, they can come to me or I will go to them."