

## Volunteering is a family affair

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Kathy (center) escorting a 6-year-old Peruvian girl traveling from Peru to New York City for surgery.

Kathy and her daughter Cristina with a patient during a medical escort to Japan.

Customer Care Agent Kathy Garza is loved by customers and team members for her fervent spirit and vivacious personality. Each day, her love for the airline is evident in the energy she brings to the job. Her true passion, however, lies with family and volunteer work. At American, she can merge all three.

Kathy began her career with American Airlines at Jorge Chávez International Airport (LIM) in her hometown of Lima, Peru. She moved to Chicago in 1999 to get married and raise a family, but Kathy's Peruvian roots are never far out of sight or mind — especially during National Hispanic Heritage Month.

"My heritage inspires me in many ways," Kathy said. "I am a strong Hispanic woman and I want to help others because I've seen the effects of poverty in Peru. When we visit, my kids notice people who are hungry and cold. Working for American puts me in a good position to help people from my country and others all over the world."

An avid volunteer, Kathy works prolifically with Airline Ambassador International (AAI) to escort children who are traveling from their homes for medical treatment. She has completed more than 20 medical escorts in her career. Through AAI, Kathy accompanies sick children that would otherwise fly alone across the world to receive medical treatment.

Kathy visits family in Peru as much as she can, but this summer, she made a special trip back to Lima. Kathy went to accompany a 6-year-old Peruvian girl to New York City where the young girl was scheduled for surgery. The child would be away from her parents for four months. Kathy was honored that the girl's parents trusted her with their ill

daughter.

“This child is so vulnerable, and she is depending on me,” Kathy said. “It helps that I’m Peruvian because I’m from where she’s from and I know what she needs. As a parent, the worst thing would be separation from my child during a difficult time. So, if I can provide comfort to this family in a crucial moment, it could have a positive impact on this child’s recovery.”

Kathy’s mom, Lilian, raised her to believe that there’s always someone that needs more than her. Now, Kathy imparts the spirit of volunteerism to her daughter and son — and to her husband who she credits as her support system. Her family inspires her to volunteer, and she has inspired them to join in. Her daughter Cristina has already completed six medical escorts, including one from Peru.

“I believe that we have to make our kids better so that they have the tools to create a better future of their own,” Kathy said.

One of their most memorable contributions as a family involved a boy named Tristan who suffered a brain injury in an accident causing short term memory loss and paralysis in his limbs. When Tristan had the opportunity to travel to Tokyo to receive treatment in a hybrid assistive limb exoskeleton suit, Kathy stepped into action and corralled her family to join. Kathy’s husband Gerardo and 17-year-old daughter Cristina non-revved to Tokyo with Tristan. Kathy and her 13-year-old son Nicolas then flew to Tokyo to assist with his return trip after therapy.

Because of the medical treatment he received in Tokyo, Tristan outpaced his prognoses and made history when he swam six laps in a pool.

It’s no wonder that Kathy received American’s highest honor, the Chairman’s Award, and recently received the O’Hare Wings of Vision Award. She is the President of Chicago’s Professional Women in Aviation Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG) and an active member of the Latin Diversity Network EBRG. Kathy is a staple at all station events and initiatives, and she supports all Chicago EBRGs in any way she can.

In her free time, Kathy likes to crochet — a hobby that produces hundreds of warm hats that she donates each winter. This year, she’s already crocheted almost 200 hats to be donated to organizations across Chicago and Peru.

“Above all, I just like to make people happy. Everyone has their own problems and situations, so if you see me for five minutes of your day, at least you know you will smile with me.”