

Carla Benavides is a 2010 graduate of Towson University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Sport Management. She brings over 14 years of experience in the Recreation and Sports field, with a deep understanding of program development and community engagement.

Carla started her journey with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, in 2011 as a seasonal Help Desk Representative before advancing into a full-time role as a Recreation Specialist III with the Northern Area Operations Division. Over the years, she has held various positions, including Recreation Specialist for Montgomery County Recreation's Countywide Sports and Youth Development teams, Program Specialist with M-NCPPC's former Central Area Operations Division, Countywide Sports Specialist III with the Youth and Countywide Sports Division, and Health and Wellness Coordinator with the Special Programs Division of the Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County.

Her passion for serving Prince George's County, particularly in youth programming and expanding opportunities for underserved communities, led her back to the Department in 2022. As a key member of the Youth and Countywide Sports Division, Carla spearheaded the girls' soccer initiative, providing young female athletes with access to quality soccer programs year-round. Under her leadership, the initiative served over 500 girls aged 11-19 and recruited 35 middle and high school volunteer coaches. The program's success allowed Carla and her colleague, Nick Hermes, to present at both the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) State Conference and the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) National Conference, highlighting the initiative's impact and collaborative approach.

Currently, Carla manages the afterschool health and wellness youth programming unit and the Get Fit Mobile Unit, which brings health and fitness programs directly to communities through outreach events, removing barriers to access.

An active member of the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association, Carla is a 2017 graduate of the MRPA Leadership Institute and has held several leadership roles, including MRPA Executive Board Secretary and Treasurer, Recreation and Leisure Services Branch Chair and Secretary, and Momma Duck for the Donald Long Memorial Duck Race. She has contributed to MRPA's strategic initiatives, including membership growth and advocacy efforts. As a former member of the Social Justice, Racial Equity, and Inclusion (SJREI) Committee, she helped organize the inaugural Ride for Justice Bike Ride, raising scholarship funds for minority MRPA members.

In 2024, with the restructuring of MRPA branches, Carla and her board organized numerous educational and social events, including Drag Bingo, which raised over \$450 for the MRPA 2SLGBTQIA+ Summit; *HOLA: A Strategic Approach to Providing Equitable Service to Hispanic & Latino Communities* in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month; the *Women in Recreation and Parks Virtual Roundtable* for Women's History Month; and a *Holiday Relief Social and Meeting* in partnership with the PARC and TR Branches. Additionally, she led the effort to design a new logo for the Recreation and Leisure Services (RALS) Branch, which will be officially unveiled at the 2025 MRPA Conference.

In her free time, Carla enjoys being an active member of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc., spending time with family and friends, junk journaling, running Disney races, riding her Peloton, and playfully arguing with her Yorkie, Pumpkin Benavides.