Before Rhiana Medina started working at the Moab Valley Multicultural Center, she worked in property management in Salt Lake City.

“That job exposed me to working with individuals and families in intimate settings,” she said. “We were finding people homes, and sometimes having to remove people from homes. There was death, there was domestic violence, there were drugs…I was exposed to a lot of different social crises that happen that affect people’s living situation.”

She was drawn to helping people pay their rent or pay for food, and if there was an eviction, to help find somewhere for people to go. The social aspects of that work “came naturally to me,” she said.

“I did not know that was going to bring me into my next career, but it did,” she said. This year marks Medina’s tenth year as the executive director of the multicultural center, which at the time of her hiring had only three part-time employees.

The nonprofit was struggling with its identity, Medina said. It was balancing between being an education-based nonprofit, focused on school improvement and supporting school children, or being a social-services nonprofit. As the nonprofit grew, it was clear the social-services aspect of the nonprofit was needed more by the Moab community.

“It was really just an immigrant resource center at its beginning,” she said. “It has really grown more fully into its name as a multicultural center.”
MVMC’s official mission is to “build bridges across language and culture through our programming in Moab, Utah”; the nonprofit’s programming includes crisis resource and advocacy; language and life skills support; cultural education and outreach; youth education and outreach; and interpretation and translation.

“It is an honor working with Rhiana,” said Liz Donkersloot, housing project manager at MVMC. “She goes above and beyond for her staff and clients. Most EDs focus solely on admin work, but in addition to those responsibilities, she always makes time for clients and treats everyone with the utmost respect. I couldn’t ask for a better boss or role model.”

Bradia Holmes, education coordinator at MVMC, has been working at the nonprofit since 2018, and said Moab is lucky to have Medina.

“I’ve learned to be humble and creative while watching her navigate challenging situations and throw epic fundraisers,” Holmes said. “[Medina] is someone who can come up with a solution to any problem and a celebration for any occasion. She is someone who truly leads by example.”

The Moab Sun News chatted with Medina about how the nonprofit has grown, and changed, under her leadership.

**Moab Sun: When you became the executive director, what were your goals, and have you accomplished them? What are your goals now?**

**Rhiana Medina:** The goals that I have as the executive director include staying true to the mission, vision and values of the organization. And that’s really important. I’m lucky that our mission is somewhat broad enough that we can be flexible and adaptable ... To provide high-quality services, you need to be adaptable. [The mission] allows us to do a lot of things.

Another goal of mine has always been to listen and respond to the greatest needs of our clients in the larger community. A goal of mine is to help the individuals that come into this building, but also to keep a broader viewpoint of like, what is this saying about the culture of our community? MVMC helps people, but I also want to live in a community where we help each other. I want to live in a community where we celebrate cultural diversity, where we want to learn about each other, where we want to honor everybody. It’s about the work we’re doing here, but it’s also about spreading that identity to the community and sharing it.
Another goal has always been to do my job with integrity, compassion, cultural humility and professionalism. I hold myself to a pretty high standard ... I really strive for excellence in communication and transparency. Communication is one of the hardest things ever, especially when you have clients from so many different backgrounds. I’m always trying to be as best I can at communication.

And another goal is to have fun. To have a workplace where we can be silly sometimes, where we can have fun and we can laugh, it’s so important, especially in social services. I have a goal of promoting self-care and professional boundaries with staff—I think that’s super important. We encourage each other to take care of each other and if somebody needs help, we make that a priority.

**Moab Sun: What are you most proud of accomplishing in 10 years?**

**Medina:** I think it’s just building up an organization that has a good reputation, and I feel like that is even extended outwards towards other regions in the state. I’ve had some interactions lately and they’re like, ‘oh we’ve heard about the multicultural center, we’ve heard really good things!’ And that makes me feel so good, and really proud.

When you get to stick to one place, especially in Moab where it’s like a revolving door sometimes for some people, you get to see the impact on people’s lives that you’ve helped. I’ve been here so long so I get to see maybe a family whose child was born and then how they’re doing years later, or someone who’s really struggling and see how they’re thriving later. Just knowing that you maybe played some small part in that is really rewarding.

**Moab Sun: In what ways do you think the work has influenced you personally, or vice-versa?**

**Medina:** I feel challenged every single day when I come here. The work is just never done. There are always systems I want to improve. There are always ways that I want to be a better supervisor and things I want to know more about ... There’s just always so much to do, sometimes I have to remind myself to stop working so much.

And vice-versa, I was joking around with a coworker the other day—when you walk into the center, we notice some of my own taste has rubbed off. This place is very colorful and eclectic and that probably is somewhat of a reflection of like, I have an aversion to any kind of cold or gray looking space. You won’t find that here.
Moab Sun: Are you planning to stay?

**Medina:** I am. I think that life is crazy, and you never know, something tragic or wonderful could happen tomorrow that would call me away. But right here, right now, I’m just looking forward to 2022 and having another great year at the center.

**Moab Sun: Do you have anything else to add?**

**Medina:** I’m profoundly aware of what an honor it is to sit with other people and help them, day after day. Even though I’ve been doing that for a long time, I haven’t become numb to it. If anything, it’s kind of the opposite—I’ve just become a bit more acutely aware of how much I’m doing and how much I can do. It’s a great honor. It’s a great responsibility.