

Adelina Ramos**Location:** Greenville, Rhode Island**SEIU Local:** 1199NE**Age:** 35**Job Title:** CNA

Adelina has been a nursing home worker for 11 years and currently works at Greenville Nursing Center in Greenville, Rhode Island. When COVID-19 hit, her 160-bed facility lost over 20 residents between the end of April and Memorial Day. Adelina's colleague also died — the first nursing home worker in Rhode Island to die of the virus.

Adelina describes the experience as 'horrifying.' At one point she was caring for 26 critically ill patients — all of whom required oxygen changes every 15 minutes. They were completely bedridden and could not move, eat or drink. Because of short staffing, there was only one nurse, two CNAs and no med tech. Adelina felt helpless that there was not more she could do to ease their suffering. On her floor, three or four of her patients went to the hospital and never returned. When residents died, nursing home staff were forced to put them in body bags because the funeral home staff lacked the proper personal protective equipment.

Because family members were not permitted to see residents, nursing home staff were the only ones available to provide support and comfort to ailing and dying residents. But full personal protective equipment, masks and goggles created confusion for residents who were unable to identify trusted caregivers and short staffing prevented caregivers from being able to do anything but the barest minimum.

In May 2020, Adelina lost her sense of smell. When the National Guard came in, they tested all staff and found out she was COVID-19 positive. Though she was asymptomatic, it was very stressful mentally and physically. She was very worried about passing the virus on to her family including her in-laws who lived upstairs and who have high blood pressure and are borderline diabetic. Adelina is their caretaker as well.

Adelina chose to get the COVID-19 vaccine after her first-hand experience contracting COVID-19 and the impact it had on her family. She understood that getting vaccinated was a critical step in preventing the spread of the virus and keeping her loved ones safe. However, Adelina's facility did not communicate information about the vaccine to her and her coworkers. Adelina says that many of her coworkers — including her, for a while — felt they were being treated like guinea pigs and, after what they'd been through the past year, did not trust management. She also said coworkers were worried about getting side effects and needing to take time off of



work. If a worker missed a shift to take recovery time, management required them to make up the shift later.

Adelina did independent research on the vaccine and cites her union, SEIU 1199NE, as being a trusted messenger with proactive education and outreach. Adelina says the best way to inspire essential workers to get vaccinated is to increase the amount of information available in their communities — and that the information must be delivered by trusted messengers in multiple languages, and with sensitivity to cultural backgrounds. She also says that guaranteeing workers can take the time they need to recover from vaccine side effects without penalty would increase confidence in getting vaccinated.