

# Ramon Soto-Lopez



## Recipient: Distinguished Service Award

Ramon Soto-Lopez was born and raised in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. From a crime-ridden childhood in a low-income town, Ramon grew up in a community critical of police but he dreamt of becoming a police officer and changing that perspective. His family moved to Florida in 2006, struggled through language and poverty barriers, lost their home, and moved to New York, then Chicago, and finally to Michigan.

Ramon says: “My biggest struggle was learning English. The language was very complicated and this affected me personally and academically.” In Florida, Ramon and his brother lost interest in school but were encouraged to continue their education by their mother, who believed it was the only way forward. Ramon joined a high school police academy and lost weight he'd gained from stress and personal issues. Ramon’s family moved to New York but attending school in a large city was overwhelming. He left school to work with an uncle, but the family lost their home and moved to Chicago, which they found more dangerous than Puerto Rico. Ramon’s uncle assisted the family's move to Michigan.

In Michigan, the family lived with an uncle to save money and buy a home. The house was not in a livable condition, and they struggled to keep utilities on and make repairs. After a few years, the family was able to fix the home. Afterwards, the family learned the home sale was a scam and they lost it. This sent them back to the projects until they secured a single bedroom apartment in Grand Rapids. Due to the size of the home, Ramon’s brother was not able to move with him, and returned to Florida. Ramon’s mother developed mental illness and was not able to keep a job, so Ramon worked to help pay bills while trying to finish high school. He participated in a high school police academy that assisted him with focusing on his dream.

In 2012, he graduated with outstanding academic awards and enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College. He married his high school sweetheart and experienced financial struggles as a first-generation college student. He had multiple jobs while attending GRCC, and his first child arrived in 2014. He stayed focused, graduated, and completed the police academy.

In 2016, Ramon received a conditional offer to work for the Ottawa County Sheriff’s Office. Ramon is currently assigned as a School Resource Officer, Crisis Negotiator, and Crime Scene Technician. Ramon joined law enforcement to help the community and provide a safe place for others. He wants to improve the community relationships with law enforcement and jointly work to have a safer community for others. He has been involved with investigations ranging from minor crimes to major cases. In 2017, Ramon and his wife had their second child. In 2021, Ramon bought his first home with his family in Ottawa County. He enjoys sharing his story with other students to inspire them.

