

Trinity River Mission helps kids succeed

West Dallas has been known by that name for years, but it wasn't made part of the city until Dec. 31, 1952, when it was annexed primarily as a means to deal with health and sanitation hazards there.

One of the poorest neighborhoods in the state, it has remained a municipal stepchild to a large extent. But Trinity River Mission and other nonprofits see hope — tangible hope — where others see despair, says Dolores Sosa Green, the mission's executive director.

Trinity River Mission was founded in the early 1960s as an outreach ministry of Lovers Lane United Methodist Church to help relocate American Indians from Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

In 1988, it became an independent nonprofit organization.

"The focus from the start has been to promote literacy, augment academic skills and develop educational success with the understanding that language proficiency and educational achievement open doors to satisfying jobs and productive futures," Green said.

Dreams, achievements

The agency serves all children without regard to race or ethnicity, but because it's in West Dallas, the participants are overwhelmingly Hispanic.

Despite the poverty in the neighborhood, "many of our students have experienced achievements beyond anything they could have dreamed, thanks to the dedication of mentors, tutors and donors," Green said. Those achievements and dreams were experienced by



STEELE BURROW/Staff Photographer

Top row, from left: Volunteer David Nethery, executive director Dolores Sosa Green and volunteer and alumna Laura Baez work to improve opportunities for West Dallas children, including (bottom, from left) Angel Cortez, 10; Gatsbeberket Aredo, 9; Sebastian Diaz, 6; and Alissa Cabrera, 5.

Elyse Serpas-Hernandez, a proud alumna of the mission's Believe and Achieve Scholarship Program, which pairs 125 to 135 children in the sixth through 12th grades with Big Brothers Big Sisters mentors.

Serpas-Hernandez's moving story tells it all: "Breaking the cycle of poverty ... how is this possible without a helping hand?"

"As an immigrant from El Salvador, my future was predetermined ... get pregnant, drop out of school, work long hours with minimum wages, live in West

Dallas for the rest of my life," she said.

"However, there was one difference in my life; the staff from TRM was not going to let this happen.

"With the help and guidance of my tutors, mentors and friends from TRM, my future changed, and in turn my family's future is more promising."

Serpas-Hernandez graduated from the Government and Law Magnet High School in 1995 and Southern Methodist University with a bachelor's degree in 1999. She got a



Adnan Barbosa receives computer instruction from AmeriCorp volunteer and alumnus Luis Mendez.



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master's degree in bilingual education from SMU in 2004 and was named the Gilbert Chellier Elementary School Teacher of the Year in 2005-06.

"Determination and self-motivation are the keys to success, but guidance and support are indispensable," Serpas-Hernandez said.

"Thank you for investing in the education of all the Elys in West Dallas but more importantly, in the lives of our children who are the future of this beautiful country."

Helping hands

Trinity River Mission's programs include:

Homework Help, an after-school program with assistance from staff and volunteers.

Kids Cafe, which serves hot meals and snacks four days a week in collaboration with the

have made this progress possible are:

- \$60,000: Dallas Foundation.
 - \$50,000: Rees-Jones Foundation.
 - \$48,000: Meadows Foundation.
 - \$40,000: Nancy and Ray Hunt.
 - \$27,500: J.W. Bagley Foundation.
 - \$20,000: Exxon Mobil Foundation, Harold Simmons Foundation and M.R. & Evelyn Hudson Foundation.
 - \$18,925: Hoak Foundation.
 - \$15,000: Capital One.
 - \$13,290: Lovers Lane United Methodist Church.
 - \$10,000: Citigroup Foundation, Donald J. & Linda J. Carter Fund at the Communities Foundation of Texas, Chris and Ashlee Kleimert and the Hoglund Foundation.
 - \$7,000: Janet and William "Bill" Hill.
 - \$6,000: Polson Charitable Foundation Inc.
 - \$5,500: Martin W. and Bette J. Haisell Foundation.
 - \$5,000: Jeff and Judy Hinson, Jackson Walker LLP, Seward Family Foundation, Texas Instruments Inc., Who Foundation and Trinity Industries Inc.
- To contribute, call Green at 214-744-6774, ext. 102, or 214-883-2387.

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