

**SIX CITIES FUND VIDA ● VIDA NAMED BEST PLACE TO WORK**

# VIDA

VIDA helps low-income, unemployed and under-employed Valley residents get the skills they need to secure a high-skill, high-wage job.

## **BORDER AGENCY CELEBRATES TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

**We profile ten star  
graduates from each  
of our first ten years  
to see where they  
are and how VIDA  
has changed their lives.**

**2005  
Annual Report**



# From the Chair & Director

## Ten Years and Counting

**A**s we celebrate our 10th year of operation, we would like to thank the community leaders, business leaders, politicians, and educators that have helped the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) have such a remarkable impact on the lives of so many.


At such a milestone, it is only natural that we reflect on our accomplishments while setting new goals for the future. In ten years, we have helped over 3,000 residents get the skills they need to secure gainful employment with an average wage of nearly \$30,000 per year.

But in an area of double-digit unemployment, and among the highest poverty rates in the nation, it is important that we not become complacent. We must continue to forge new partnerships, develop new programs and launch new initiatives that will continue to have a solid economic impact on our region.

On behalf of the VIDA Board and staff, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support in helping Valley area residents reach their potential, while helping Valley businesses meet their need for quality, skilled labor.

We look forward to continuing to work with you for the next ten years and beyond.

Sincerely,

  
David Oliveira  
VIDA Chairman

  
Dr. Dominique Halaby  
Executive Director

*If you believe in what you are doing, then let nothing hold you up in your work. Much of the best work of the world has been done against seeming impossibilities. The thing is to get the work done.*

**Dale Carnegie**

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VISTA

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Read the remarkable and inspirational stories of ten graduates from each of our first ten years

Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) is a non profit 501 (c) 3 organization. VIDA is committed to helping low-income, unemployed and underemployed residents of the Rio Grande Valley get the necessary skills to secure a high-skilled, high-wage job.

VIDA Case Managers meet with participants on a weekly basis to cover a variety of training topics to address potential barriers that may prevent participants from successfully graduating. This assistance has resulted in a 93 percent retention/graduation rate and an employment rate of 94 percent.

VIDA offers both postsecondary education and customized training and a variety of services to accomplish that goal. The assistance is provided on a case-by case basis to meet each participant's needs. To date, VIDA has helped over 3,000 Valley residents successfully complete a job training program and enter employment earning an average annual salary of \$29,307.

For more information please visit our website:  
[www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org). You can also call us at:  
 1 (800) 478-1770  
 or visit our main office at:  
 1715 E. Pike Blvd  
 Weslaco, Texas 78596

## In Their Own Words

*Upon completion, graduates are asked to say a few words about their experiences. Here are what some of them told us.*

Without VIDA I would've never had the opportunity to move forward with my education. VIDA to me was God sent. They not only provided monetary help but now I realize the real treasure they provided "support" throughout the ADN program. The only constant I had was the support of my VIDA counselors who, week after week were there for me. The money was nice and above all timely, but what I take away with me and will treasure for ever are the following words: "If you think you can or if you think you can't, either way you are right" and "No matter what you, do you never do it alone."

Frank Lopez, R.N. Class of 2005

VIDA and the LVN program have been of great help and benefit for my family and myself. It has helped me through difficult times. I am greatly thankful for all the financial and moral support which I have been awarded by VIDA. There were times when I was feeling every effort wasn't enough but in every class meeting we were offered different kinds of support. Some of our meetings were centered on coping with stress, which I really enjoyed; others were focused on learning to work as a team. These workshops that I attended were very interesting. I could say our class meetings were more like support group meetings. We had time to pour out our feelings and tough times we were going through. I would like to thank the different sponsors that support VIDA. They have given my family and me the opportunity for a better future. Thanks.

Sylvia Robles, Class of 1999

VIDA made this possible for me and my family. Before VIDA, I seriously thought that I was going to have to settle for less. I thought that Food Stamps and Medicaid were going to be a part of my life.....forever. Luckily, all of this has changed, thanks to VIDA. As for the counselors, they are so optimistic. I remember when I was scheduled to take my first THEA exam. I was so nervous that I would have bet anything that I had flunked. It felt so great that my counselor had so much confidence in me and that she was right. I ended up passing the writing section of the THEA, which was what I needed to get into STC. The counselor gave me the boost of confidence that I needed to pass my exam and to continue my education. Thanks!

Iris De Hoyos, Class of 2003

## With a Mission

**From the community, for the community. VIDA brings new life to those it serves.**

**V**alley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) was founded in September of 1995 by a group of Valley Interfaith leaders committed to increasing economic opportunities for area residents. Valley Interfaith, a faith based grassroots organization dedicated to advocating for the needs of area residents, partnered with key business leaders to create an independent organization to serve as a labor market intermediary that would simultaneously increase employment opportunities to area residents and meet area employers' needs for quality, skilled labor.

Originally designed to be a two-year, workforce demonstration project, VIDA is now celebrating its tenth year of operation. VIDA was created to develop and implement:

- ... A market driven approach to provide workforce services that contribute to sustained economic growth for the local area and provides access to quality jobs paying a living wage for the population served;
- ... An enhanced set of workforce services that lead to

significantly better jobs and earnings for the targeted population residing in the Valley's Empowerment Zone than is possible under current workforce service strategies; and,

- ... An integrated approach to providing participant services based on a one-stop model that offers easy access, maximum flexibility and services tailored to the needs of those seeking assistance.

Since its inception, the organization has helped over 3,000 Valley residents get the skills they need to become self-sufficient.

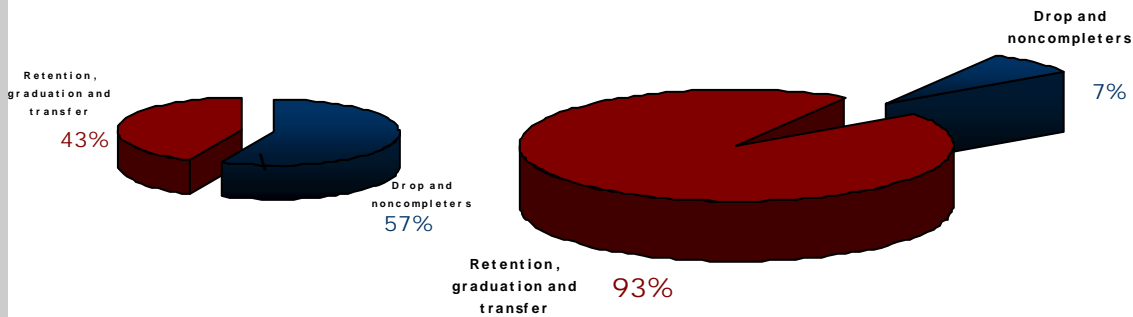
VIDA seeks to achieve its organizational purpose by creating a market-driven workforce system that will make the Lower Rio Grande Valley more competitive in the global economy and provide access to quality jobs.

In pursuit of this purpose, VIDA is committed to:

- ... Developing quality job training programs;
- ... Collaborating with public and private partners;
- ... Developing a strong community outreach network;
- ... Fostering a strong sense of civic responsibility;
- ... Creating a supportive work environment; and,
- ... Providing compassionate service.



## PROGRAM STRATEGY



### AREA COLLEGES RETENTION RATES

AS REPORTED BY TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION  
COORDINATING BOARD

An increasing number of relatively high skill/ high wage employment opportunities requiring occupation – specific skills are presently developing in South Texas. Rather than having these jobs filled by skilled workers from other states and/or regions, or to lose these jobs altogether due to the low number of skilled workers in this area, VIDA along with community partners, South Texas College, Texas State Technical College, the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, the University of Texas–Pan American and Region One Education Service Center have developed a three-tiered, community-based workforce system to better serve the residents and employers of the Rio Grande Valley.

The three-tiered system includes: Basic Skills Training, Customized Training, and Post Secondary Occupational Training.

**Tier I: Basic Skills** – This component is primarily funded as part of the McAllen Self-Sufficiency Project. It encompasses GED services performed through Region One Educational Services with Region One receiving payment directly from the City of McAllen. Also included are two annual Pre-TASP (Texas Academic Skills Preparation) study courses conducted either through Region One or South Texas College (STC).

**Tier II: Customized Training** – This tier includes programs developed specifically for employers such as emergency medical technicians and

bank tellers. Programs range from as little as two weeks to as much as nine months.

**Tier III: Post-Secondary Occupational Training** – Generally thought of as long-term training programs, these programs range from one to two years and include such occupations as nurses, automotive technicians, social workers, and teachers. Given the length of time required to achieve certification in these programs, the entry-wage tends to be much higher than that of the customized program.

VIDA provides all selected applicants with tuition assistance, support services, counseling/case management, financial planning, career planning, job placement, and follow-up services.

VIDA's performance has resulted in a post-secondary graduation rate of over 93 percent and an employment rate of 94 percent. For those employed, their hourly wages range from \$8.50 to \$25.00 with an average of \$14.09 per hour.

Comparatively, the current graduation rate for area colleges is approximately 43 percent and the average income for area residents is less than the federal minimum wage. VIDA is assisting a higher percentage of Valley residents complete their training and aiding them to earn considerably more than the area average.

## Leading by Example

The Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) was recognized as one of the "Best Places to Work in Hidalgo County" by the Hidalgo Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).



In total, six employers were recognized in various categories. VIDA received the honor for companies with less than 100 employees.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. Representing more than 200,000 individual members, the Society's mission is to serve the needs of HR professionals by providing the most essential and comprehensive resources available. Founded in 1948, SHRM currently has more than 550 affiliated chapters and members in more than 100 countries.



# Changing Lives

Above: Eloy Gonzalez is one of VIDA's first graduates and one of AmFELS' leading welders.

In ten years, VIDA has helped over 3,000 Valley residents get the skills they need to secure a good paying job. Here are ten amazing stories from some of our graduates, one for each graduating class.

- ... Eloy Gonzalez (1996)
- ... San Juanita Ochoa (1997)
- ... Mary Jo Galvan (1998)
- ... Alicia Cacarez (1999)
- ... Richard Rodriguez (2000)
- ... Deanna Ramirez (2001)
- ... Rene Gonzalez (2002)
- ... Jose Benavidez (2003)
- ... Mark Krause (2004)
- ... Juan Valle (2005)

## Eloy Gonzalez 1996

In 1996, the idea of a workforce intermediary in the Rio Grande Valley was just taking root. VIDA's first project involved a partnership with Texas State Technical College at Harlingen and American Far East Levingston Shipyard (AmFELS) to train 60 new welders. One of those graduates, Eloy Gonzalez, is still a welder there with no thoughts of leaving.

As a boy, Eloy had been fascinated by the welders working in a nearby New Mexico oilfield. Both Eloy and his wife Maribel grew up in families that moved around to find work. As a young married couple, they also moved frequently while Eloy worked as an uncertified welder. Although he was able to support his family with welding jobs, Eloy and Maribel knew they did not want their children to move from place to place, as they

had done. They decided to plant roots in the Valley where each had family.

Eloy built a home in San Benito, but his job did not pay enough to support the family. That is when he heard of VIDA and the new AmFELS welder training program. Eloy immediately contacted VIDA and applied for the program. At no cost to the Gonzalez family, Eloy enrolled in the training and completed it. Ten years later, he has advanced to the certification of heli-arc (i.e. TIG) welder.

According to Ruben Vega, assistant manager of human resources at Keppel AmFELS, Eloy is considered one of the top welders among their 4,000 employees. Since the Singapore-owned company repairs and manufactures rigs, ships, and pressure vessels, the welds must be flawless.

Eloy really enjoys being a welder. Becoming



A certified welder at a leading area company has given him and his wife the stability and lifestyle they had always hoped for.

## San Juanita Ochoa 1997

"I always wanted to pursue a career in the medical field, but being a single parent made it difficult," said San Juanita (Janie) Ochoa, a resident of Sullivan City and a 1997 VIDA graduate.

Fresh out of high school, Janie went to work full time. Soon after, she married and started a family but before long became a single parent. When Janie's daughter graduated from high school in 1996, Janie decided to pursue her own dream.

Although she had been accepted into the nursing program at South Texas College, Janie feared failing. But the fact that friends of hers had applied to the LVN program and had not been accepted convinced her to take advantage of what seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. After quitting her job to pursue nursing training, Janie discovered that not only was the nursing program hard, but life without a job made the whole experience even more of a challenge.

After one semester, she was convinced that she could not afford to complete the program. As she prepared to drop out of school, Janie just happened to meet a VIDA counselor on campus. The counselor told her about VIDA and encouraged her not to give up. Feeling optimistic, Janie applied for services and was accepted into VIDA.

Janie became a Licensed Vocational Nurse on August 12, 1997. "I am so thankful for the counseling services and financial assistance provided to me by Project VIDA. What seemed impossible to me became real with the help of Project VIDA," Janie said.

## Mary Jo Galvan 1998

This 1998 featured graduate has roots three generations deep in the sands of Port Isabel. Mary Jo Galvan is now a coach and Reading teacher at Esperanza B. Garza-Eliseo B. Vega Education Center, also called Port Isabel Junior High. Mary Jo admits she had no thoughts of becoming a teacher while growing up the oldest of 10 children.

For 11 years, this single parent worked as a paraprofessional in the Port Isabel schools and at night worked at a hotel on South Padre Island. It was not until two principals told her she should be teaching that Mary Jo began dreaming of the possibility.

When asked if she ever thought about giving up, Mary Jo admitted she thought about it every night on the drive home from Brownsville. But her determination kept her going. She knew having a degree would let her earn enough from a single job to help her parents and to spend more time with her daughter.



Above: Mary Jo Galvan teaches and motivates young minds everyday as a teacher and a coach.

After completing her first two years of college, Mary Jo heard of a unique partnership between VIDA and the Point Isabel School District. She attended a VIDA orientation held at her church and discovered that VIDA would be able to assist her with support services and the School District would help pay for her classes if she studied a field in demand.

Therefore Mary Jo switched to a reading focus, graduated, and has been with the Point Isabel School District ever since. Currently, she works with students who needed extra encouragement, much as she did. Mary Jo Galvan has accomplished all her goals and is ready to achieve new ones. Now, she dreams of going back to school to work towards a Master's Degree.

## Alicia Casarez 1999

Alicia Casarez remembers life as a migrant worker. "It was tough, working in the fields at the age of eleven," she said. Her time in the fields convinced her to aspire to a different future, so when she was 15, she learned to be a hairdresser. After devoting the next seventeen years to a trade she loved, Alicia realized that earning \$10,000 a year was not enough.

With the support of her family, Alicia decided to become a nurse. She applied for financial aid and enrolled into South Texas Community College, known today as South Texas College (STC). Soon after being accepted into the program, she learned her financial aid assistance was not enough for tuition, books and supplies. Concerned and not knowing what to do, Alicia sought financial assistance from Project VIDA, a program she learned about at school.

(continued on page 9)

# The Rio Grande Valley Allied Health Training Alliance

*Working together to address the shortage for  
nursing and allied health professionals*

**T**he shortage of allied health professionals, coupled with double-digit unemployment, emphasized the need for a collaborative strategy. No one institution would be able to adequately address these daunting problems. These challenges spurred the formation of a coalition to address the shortage in health care professionals and develop innovative strategies to solve those shortages by capitalizing on the area labor surplus.

The Rio Grande Valley Allied Health Training Alliance is a group of employers, educators and community-based non-profit organizations that have come together to collaboratively seek innovative solutions to the nursing and allied health labor shortages along the Texas-Mexico border.

VIDA, the organizational hub of the Alliance, has developed a strategic plan to meet its goal of “growing our own” workforce to deal with the critical nursing and allied health professional labor shortages and has been successful in securing over \$7 million in funding.

The Alliance members are working to address the shortage through the development and/or recommendation of the following strategies:

- ... Regional student/clinical scheduling system;
- ... Retention services;
- ... Formalized specialty instruction for post-licensure training;
- ... Regional faculty sharing and distance education programs;
- ... Dual track (High School/College) programs;
- ... Programs to aid the academic preparedness of applicants; and,
- ... Adjustment of policies regarding clinical/student ratios and preceptor qualifications.

The first State of the Alliance Assembly was held on June 24, 2005. Texas Health Commissioner Dr. Eduardo Sanchez spoke to over 500 attendees from the region’s hospitals, colleges and universities.

Also involved in some of the panel discussions were Wanda Douglas, Director of Education, Texas Nurses Association; Justice Parazo, U.S. Department of Labor; Robert Vanderveer, CEO, Knapp Medical; Dan McClean, CEO, South Texas Health Systems; Thalia Munoz, Administrator, Starr County Hospital, Wanda Spratt, Dean of Allied Health, STC, Dr. Eldon Nelson, Dean of Health at UTB/TSC and Stella Garcia, President Workforce Solutions.



Texas Health Commissioner addresses a crowd of over 400 hospital administrators, college administrators and faculty, and state and federal officials at the first State of the Alliance Assembly.

## ALLIANCE MEMBERS

- ... Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA);
- ... Valley Interfaith;
- ... South Texas College;
- ... Texas State Technical College;
- ... University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College;
- ... University of Texas-Pan American;
- ... Dolly Vinsant Hospital;
- ... Harlingen Medical Center;
- ... Knapp Medical Center;
- ... Mission Hospital;
- ... Rio Grande Regional Hospital;
- ... South Texas Health System (which includes McAllen Medical Center, Edinburg Regional Medical Center, McAllen Health Clinic and Rehabilitation Pavilion);
- ... Starr County Memorial Hospital;
- ... Valley Regional Medical Center;
- ... Valley Baptist Health Systems (which includes Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen and Brownsville);
- ... Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley;
- ... Cameron County Workforce Development Board; and
- ... Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Development Board



# Human Capital

## *The Role of Skills in the Modern Economy*

Technological innovation, global competition and a shift in the economy (from manufacturing-based to service-based) has not only created new opportunities for the workforce, it has also enhanced the risk that workers' skills will become obsolete. As a result, securing gainful employment for low and semi-skilled workers has become increasingly difficult. Without intervention and innovative projects, this condition is likely to worsen.

As was the case during the Industrial Revolution, changes in technology continue to redefine the skills needed in the workplace. The automation of menial tasks and the advent of robotics has prompted many large manufacturing firms to displace less skilled workers with more efficient automation equipment. Conversely, the skills needed to operate and maintain costly automation equipment are highly sought-after and often well-paid positions.

In the early 1900's, the manufacturing process was shifting from small craftsman to large facilities built on the specialization of tasks and the assembly line. Today, the dominant change in U.S. business processes has been the outsourcing of low-skilled production abroad. Not only has this reduced the need for low-skilled workers in the U.S., it has increased the demand for more highly trained, more educated U.S. workers to oversee the production abroad.

In the context of workforce development, technological innovation and globalization have created an environment of instability. The changing competitive environment and leveling of the business playing field has enabled businesses to start, expand, contract and collapse at a faster rate than ever before. As a result, roughly one-third of all jobs are in flux. Perhaps the area most greatly impacted by these changes is that along the Texas/Mexico border.

Connecting low-income people to jobs that will pay a living wage with advancement opportunities requires systemic change to the workforce delivery system and the buy-in from elected officials, employers, schools, community based organizations and others concerned citizens.

According to Dr. Paul Osterman in *Reforming and Training Policy*, community leaders and public administrators "need to confront an uncomfortable truth. When responding to scarce resources, they have long traded off quality for quantity, supporting relatively cheap interventions (largely informational services) that spread out the available resources over as many people as possible. This guarantees limited results and precludes some of the most effective designs."

Projects like VIDA, not only help the individuals that receive the training and the companies that employ them, it enables the community to be better positioned for changes in the marketplace. The widespread adoption of similar programs that increase the earnings of the economically disadvantaged will likely also increase the community's tax base. It is this approach that has made VIDA, and its sister organizations the models that should be replicated and expanded throughout the nation.

## Long Term Job Training



Ernesto Cortes address the crowd of area residents at the Valley's first Long Term Job Training Symposium

The first ever Long Term Job Training Symposium was held on April 9, 2005. The symposium was jointly sponsored by VIDA and Valley Interfaith and looked at the value and significance of long term job training and the overall impact this type of investment has made to the Rio Grande Valley.

Over 500 concerned residents attended to hear Southwest IAF Director Ernesto Cortes, MIT Dean Paul Osterman and IAF Texas Director Sister Christine Stephens speak on the values of long-term job training programs and civic engagement.

Local dignitaries included U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett, Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa, Texas State Representative Armando Martinez, Brownsville Mayor Eddie Trevino University of Texas-Pan American President Blandina Cardenas, South Texas College President Shirley Reed and University of Texas at Brownsville/ Texas Southmost College President Juliet Garcia also spoke in support of VIDA and its long-term training program.



Above: Alicia Casarez went from earning \$10,000 per year as a hairdresser to \$60,000 as a nurse.

(from page 6)

“VIDA was a very positive and helpful organization,” said Alicia. “It provided me an opportunity to pursue my dream.” Most of all, Alicia remembers the impact of the weekly meetings she had with her counselor and peers. “I was able to discuss and resolve many issues when attending these meetings.” She learned she wasn’t the only one struggling to integrate school and life. “Paying for my tuition, I thought was the hardest thing. In fact, overcoming the daily demands of the nursing program was the real challenge, but thanks to the sessions I finished the program!”

Today, Alicia’s love for nursing is evident in the care she gives to patients at Valley Baptist Emergency Room and Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Pediatrics Unit. She is currently pursuing her Bachelors degree in Nursing and hopes to one day earn her Masters degree. “Earning \$10,000 a year as a hairdresser doesn’t come close to the \$60,000 I’m earning today,” said a smiling Alicia.

## Richard (Jeremy) Rodriguez 2000

Richard (Jeremy) Rodriguez graduated from VIDA in 2000. Earning an associate degree in Computer Aided Drafting and Design, Jeremy now earns an annual salary of \$60,000 as an Engineering Department Manager.

When you talk to Jeremy he speaks in a respectful, friendly energetic tone without a hint of his turbulent past. Ask Jeremy about VIDA and his excitement elevates a notch, occasionally stumbling as he anxiously chooses his words. “Wow, yea. . .” (pauses for moment and begins again) “I am going to be honest with you,--- Wow, yea if it wasn’t for VIDA. . . VIDA without a doubt helped me get to where I am today!”

You see, unless you get to know Jeremy it would be easy to assume his story was a textbook success. Jeremy, however, would quickly object. “I had great parents. I don’t know what went wrong; I was uncontrollable,” said Jeremy. “Hanging around with the wrong crowd, I eventually found myself a resident at various youth detention centers.” Looking back, Jeremy states he still doesn’t understand how he got so out of control. At the age of 20, Jeremy became a single parent. With no job and no real future, Jeremy knew he needed to improve himself if his son was to have a chance. Jeremy saw that improvement coming through education and a project called VIDA.

“If it wasn’t for VIDA, I don’t know where I’d be now,” said Jeremy. “VIDA did so much for me. It wasn’t just the

financial assistance I received”, he said. “Heidi (his VIDA counselor) was there when I felt insecure or like giving up. She made me feel confident and encouraged me to keep going. You see, being in and out of detention centers wasn’t at all like college so I constantly felt insecure, out of place and like I didn’t belong,” said Jeremy. “VIDA’s assistance and guidance was so great I aced all my classes that first semester.” But it wasn’t smooth sailing after that. “There were many times when it was so easy to go back to selling and doing drugs—the easy life, however, Heidi didn’t let me give up. Thanks to VIDA I graduated!” said Jeremy. “When I compare my life those times it’s like day and night... Looking back to when I was earning \$6,000 dollars a year. I see myself now and sometimes I can’t believe it!”



Above: Deanna Ramirez helps mentally-challenged persons find jobs.

## Deanna Ramirez 2001

When Deanna was growing up, she remembers her Donna classmates falling into two groups—those with money and those without. The counselors encouraged one group to think about college, and the other to pick up a vocation. Though Deanna did not grow up with money, her father, an auto mechanic who had left school after third grade, stressed education as the way to a better life for his children.

Deanna had thought about college, but in order to help her parents financially, she instead went to work earning minimum wage at a nursing home. After her father’s death, she lived with her legally blind mother and started classes at STC while continuing to work at the nursing home.

When Deanna first applied to VIDA, funding was not yet available for students who lived outside McAllen. Irma Garcia, a Project Manager with VIDA, remembers Deanna’s persistence. “She kept in contact with our office, and, as fate would have it, VIDA did receive funds that could be used for Donna residents, about the time Deanna had reached the pivotal point. We helped her with the tuition and books.” Deanna graduated and went on to earn a Bachelors degree in Social Work.

Today, Deanna is a job specialist with Tropical Texas Center for Mental Health and Mental Retardation, making much more than what the nursing home paid. She now gives back to society by helping mentally-challenged persons train for jobs.

(continued on page 11)

# Return on Investment

**VIDA is more than just about aiding residents in becoming self-sufficient, it's also a powerful economic engine.**

Since 1998, the McAllen City Commission and the Development Corporation of McAllen have invested in the McAllen Self-Sufficiency Project (MSSP). MSSP is an innovative project consisting of three components: a workforce academy (basic skills), a college capacity building component and a job training component. These components are coordinated through South Texas College, Region One ESC, and the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.

This report measures the effectiveness of the job training piece by answering two basic questions: Are we making a difference? And if so, by how much?

Since the project's inception, 1,465 area residents have been aided in their quest for self-sufficiency. Of those, 792 were enrolled in job training. These participants received training to become a nurse, mechanic, paraprofessional or various other demand occupations at STC. They also met weekly with a VIDA case manager to identify and address financial and emotional barriers. This process has resulted in an 85.4

percent retention/graduate rate. Furthermore, MSSP graduates are staying in the area. Unemployment insurance records indicate that 88.9 percent are employed in the McAllen MSA.

Successful completers went on to earn an average quarterly wage of \$7,375.84 or \$29,503.36 per year. This is a dramatic increase from the \$1,824.06 quarterly or \$7,296.24 annualized wages they made before entering the program.

When the increase of earnings are factored in and adjusted for emigration, the Net Present Value of the return on this investment is 111 percent. For every dollar spent in MSSP, the city receives \$2.11 back in additional sales tax, property tax and other fees. That amounts to a net benefit of \$5.112 million.

The McAllen Self-Sufficiency Project was inspired by area leaders who are passionate about their community and committed to making it a great place to work. The Valley's economy is directly linked to its ability to development a skilled workforce.

With more communities, like San Juan, Harlingen, Port Isabel, Mercedes and Brownsville agreeing to fund VIDA, the future of the Rio Grande Valley looks bright.

## 2005 By the Numbers

**689** total served

**296** total graduates

**197** total employers hiring  
VIDA graduates

**\$29,695** average  
annual salary upon graduation

**1,150** number attending  
VIDA orientation

**139** number on waiting list

**16 to 57** years, age range

**30** average age

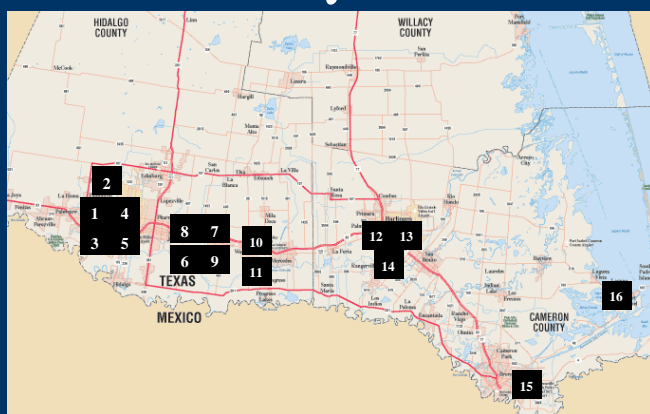
**132** total number of youth  
served

**11.86** average level of  
education upon entry

**2 weeks to 5.5 years**  
range of length in program

**13.69** average number of  
months in program

## Community Outreach



In 2005, VIDA held orientations in conjunction with 16 area churches and community centers operating as community outreach centers for residents interested in job training programs.

1. St. Joseph the Worker Church
2. Holy Spirit Catholic Parish
3. Palm View Community Center
4. South Texas College
5. McAllen Community Center
6. St. John the Baptist
7. San Juan Fire Station
8. St. John the Lutheran Church
9. San Juan Nursing Home
10. St. Pius X Church
11. St. Martin de Porres
12. St. Eugene de Mazenod
13. Texas State Technical College
14. Queen of Peace
15. Christ the King
16. Our Lady Star of the Sea



(from page 9)

Five years from now, Deanna Ramirez sees herself with a Masters Degree in Counseling. She and her husband have three children.

Deanna's father would have been proud of her, the youngest of his seven children.



Left: After having been laid off by Levi Strauss, Rene Gonzalez contacted VIDA and got the training he needed to become a Physical Therapy Assistant.

## Rene Gonzalez 2002

Working in the Rio Grande Valley apparel industry for 15 years earned Rene Gonzalez a modest lifestyle. However, a national trend that would inevitably hit the Rio Grande Valley brought an end to Rene's lifestyle, when Levi Strauss announced it would be closing its doors. Among hundreds of soon-to-be-laid off garment workers Rene quickly found himself having to replace an annual salary of \$30,000, something that would not be easy with only a high school diploma.

Rene understood he needed to better himself and an education was the only way to do so. He decided to attend South Texas College in hopes of being accepted into the Physical Therapy Assistant Program. It was not easy; Rene's wife worked while he attended STC full-time. Having five children made it more difficult. He divided his waking hours between parenting and studying late into the night. When Rene learned about a program called VIDA he quickly applied and was accepted. VIDA assisted Rene with tuition, books and a gas stipend. "I couldn't have done it without VIDA. The financial help and the counselor's advice were awesome. VIDA helped me start down the road to a satisfying future," said Rene.

With his Associate's degree in Physical Therapy Assistance, Rene got a job with Knapp Medical Center. Because of VIDA's assistance, Rene now earns over \$46,000!

Today Rene is busy planning his dreams: the building of his new home and establishing a college fund for his children.

## Jose (Joe) Benavidez 2003

Jose (Joe) Samuel Benavidez, a resident of Weslaco, Texas, is a 2003 VIDA graduate. With his certificate in Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning, Joe now earns an annual salary of \$40,000 as a HVAC Maintenance Technician for the Whataburger Company.

Joe remembers 2001 as the year he learned he would be laid off because his employer, Haggars, was relocating south of the border. After devoting 24 years to Haggars and working up to a decent salary, Joe was devastated by the news. "Having a mortgage and bills to pay is not hard when you have a secure job," he said. But with the layoff, expenses that were once easy to pay suddenly became a burden. Without the means to support his family's expenses, Joe was forced to file for bankruptcy. That experience led Joe to gather his thoughts, plan for a new life, and begin on a new journey. The journey would not be an easy one, because it involved living under financial constraints. However, patience and learning a new trade would enable him to regain the life he once knew.

Joe heard about VIDA and called to get more information. Once he learned the organization's mission and available resources, Joe decided to apply. He also enrolled at STC in the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning program. Joe brought determination and ambition to learning his new trade bolstered by the realization that skilled HVAC technicians would always be in demand.

When Joe thinks back to the first year that VIDA provided assistance, he remembers, "VIDA helped me at a time when I felt the world was coming down on me." He smiles as he recalls, "VIDA was just a phone call away." Joe admits that one of his academic struggles was with math, but, thanks to lots of encouragement and tutorials, he was able to pass. There were days when Joe found himself without money for food or gas. Days like that made it difficult for him to attend school, but they gave him even more reasons to strive to succeed. "VIDA was always there, especially at the times when I was most in need," he said.

Today, according to Joe, thanks to VIDA, he is no longer in debt. He hopes to retire early at the age of 55 with plans of spending some time traveling and visiting with his two daughters and grandchildren.



Above: Once a garment worker, Joe Benavidez now is an HVAC technician for Whataburger.

## Mark Krause 2004

Our nation is a strong and viable one, thanks in large part to the sacrifices of the men and women of the military. But even our soldiers rely on help from a few civilians, like Mark Krause.

Mark came to VIDA through the Texas Workforce Commission after the New Braunfels company he and his wife worked for moved its operations overseas. The Krause family, which includes a son and daughter, decided to move to the Valley, since his wife is an Alamo native.

Mark never considered giving up while going to school. "There were hard times. But having a great wife and seeing the light at the end of the tunnel kept me from ever thinking about not finishing. VIDA helped me with gas, school supplies and childcare. That reduced the stress."

Mark, who earned a certificate in Computer Maintenance and Repair, works directly with soldiers in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Hired initially as a systems analyst, he became an instructor and now spends his days teaching members of the military how to resolve computer problems wherever they are in the world. He now earns \$20 per hour.

## Juan Valle 2005

"We were a big family living below the poverty level," recalled Juan Valle, a 2005 VIDA graduate from Hidalgo. "I only had 2 pants and 3 to 4 shirts for the entire school year." Juan's father took him and his siblings to work in the fields after school.

Although motivated in part by his sister's disability and his relatives in the medical field, Juan admitted he went into nursing because of a nurse's kindness and tranquility when

he was hospitalized. Once enrolled in courses that were supposedly easy, he was confronted with the financial and time demands of the nursing program. Refusing to let go of his dream, Juan found a solution in Project VIDA. Juan made sure he met Project VIDA requirements, leaving one job to take another more suitable.

"Project VIDA was my ticket to a better future," "Project VIDA provided not only the opportunity to better my life it provided financial assistance for gas and tuition." Juan said, beyond that, VIDA offered guidance and moral support on those days when he felt like giving up. Overcoming hardships during his training, Juan graduated with a degree in Nursing.

Today, Juan is employed at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance earning \$20 per hour. Juan stated, "VIDA makes this world better. Without VIDA, our goals would not be realistic." ■

### Employers That Hired VIDA Graduates in 2005

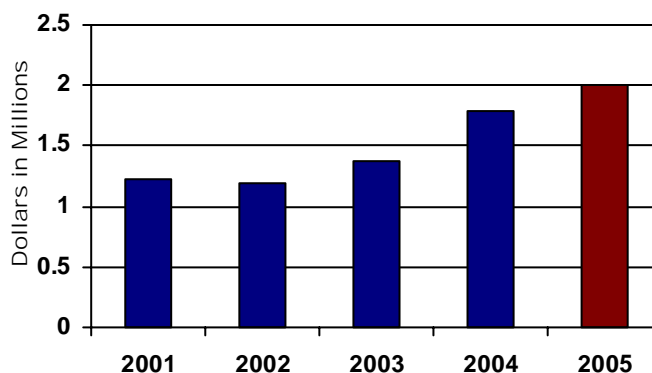
Last year over 200 employers in the Rio Grande Valley hired VIDA graduates. Here are just a few:

- ... BERT OGDEN MOTORS
- ... BRIARCLIFF NURSING REHABILITATION
- ... BROWNSVILLE NURSING & REHABILITATION
- ... CVI COMPANY
- ... EASTER SEALS
- ... EDINBURG NURSING & REHABILITATION
- ... HARLINGEN MEDICAL CENTER
- ... KNAPP MEDICAL CENTER
- ... LA JOYA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ... LIFE CARE HOSPITAL
- ... LOS FRESNOS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ... MCALLEN HEART HOSPITAL
- ... MCALLEN MEDICAL CENTER
- ... MCALLEN NURSING CENTER
- ... MISSION REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
- ... PROGRESSIVE REHABILITATION
- ... RAMADA INN & SUITES
- ... RENAISSANCE HOSPITAL
- ... RENAL CARE GROUP
- ... RIO GRANDE CITY ISD
- ... RIO GRANDE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
- ... SOUTH TEXAS HEALTH SYSTEM
- ... STARR COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
- ... SOUTH TEXAS COLLEGE
- ... SUN-GLO
- ... VALLEY BAPTIST HEALTH SYSTEM
- ... VALLEY REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

# Financials

**S**ince 1995, VIDA has received over \$24.3 million in funding from federal, state and local agencies, as well as corporations and private foundations. These direct funds have allowed the organization to assist over 3,000 area residents in getting the skills they need to become self-sufficient and has enabled VIDA to leverage an additional \$20 million in training funds for the Rio Grande Valley. With the expansion of services to include six Valley cities, 2006 will undoubtedly be an exciting year.

FIVE YEAR ANNUAL REVENUE



REVENUE	2005	2004
Development Corp. of McAllen	\$ 419,500	739,748
U.S. Department of Labor (High Growth)	1,025,868	-
U.S. Department of Labor (Earmark)	178,124	72,781
Workforce Solutions	247,479	-
San Juan Economic Development	11,887	-
Texas Workforce Commission	-	175,279
U.S. Department of Labor (H1-B)	-	162,500
Southwest Community Investment Corp	-	124,186
ACS	8,853	88,581
Houston Endowment	54,678	65,322
Levi Strauss Foundation	-	75,000
Other	56,868	180,218
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 2,003,257</b>	<b>1,683,615</b>

EXPENDITURES	2005	2004
Salaries/Fringes	\$ 837,770	667,848
Operational Expenses	255,492	162,868
Participant Training Expenses	908,943	958,136
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$ 2,002,205</b>	<b>1,787,052</b>

VIDA undergoes annual independent audits by an external firm. Every annual audit to date has resulted in an unqualified opinion. In other words, VIDA's financial records had no major discrepancies or findings and complied with all cost principles and guidelines for non-profit organizations.



The VIDA Board, staff and over 600 participants that benefited from the program this year, would like to thank the following organizations for their unyielding support and contributions to making the Rio Grande Valley a great place to work for all its residents.

- ... *U.S. Department of Labor*
- ... *City of McAllen*
- ... *City of San Juan*
- ... *City of Harlingen*
- ... *City of Port Isabel*
- ... *City of Mercedes*
- ... *Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Development Board*
- ... *JP Morgan Chase Foundation*
- ... *Houston Endowment*
- ... *Annie E Casey Foundation*
- ... *South Texas College*
- ... *ACS*
- ... *Harlingen Medical Center*
- ... *Valley Regional Medical Center*
- ... *Valley Baptist Health System*
- ... *South Texas Health System*
- ... *Rio Grande Regional Hospital*
- ... *Mission Hospital*
- ... *Knapp Medical Center*



For people like Estella Sanders, the financial support VIDA raises not only enables us to help them with tuition, books, child care and other support services it enables us to have them meet weekly with an assigned VIDA counselor to go over and hopefully resolve potential barriers before it's too late.

If you are interested in learning more about our organization and how your contribution can help someone in need become self-sufficient call us at:

**1 (800) 478-1770 or stop by our main office at 1715 E. Pike Blvd. in Weslaco, Texas.**

## Volunteering



A group of VIDA participants volunteered to help paint an elderly couples home during Paint McAllen Beautiful

Last year, over 100 VIDA participants volunteered more than 2,000 hours of community service cleaning up vacant lots, removing debris from drainage ditches, picking up trash in city parks, and painting houses for elderly residents.

This year, VIDA is organizing activities to coincide with Keep McAllen Beautiful, the Great American Clean-Up, Don't Mess with Texas trash-Off and the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

Volunteering in these types of activities is one way that participants are able to give back to their community.

# VALLEY INITIATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT

## CELEBRATING 10 YEARS IN THE VALLEY



For the past 10 years, VIDA has helped over 3,000 Valley residents get the skills they need to become self-sufficient. Apart from assisting in the development of new programs and conducting our case management sessions, VIDA is using technology to expand our service delivery.

From developing a Web-based youth mentoring discussion forum where high school students are able to get questions regarding career paths answered by professional mentors in a monitored forum, to a new online Centralized Clinical Scheduling System to assist colleges in the placement of college students in various clinical sites throughout the Valley, technology is playing a vital role in how VIDA contributes to academic and economic well-being of the region.

To find out more about these innovative projects, be sure to visit us online at [www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org)



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1715 E. Pike Blvd  
Weslaco, TX 78596  
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Fx. 956.447.0400

**Job Training Center**  
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Weslaco, TX 78596  
Toll Fr.800.478.1770  
Ph.956.973.8600  
Fx.956.447.0200

**McAllen Office**  
1521 Galveston Ave  
McAllen, TX 78501  
Ph.956.668.0775  
Fx.956.668.1460

**Allied Health**  
STC Allied Health  
Bldg.  
1101 E. Vermont  
McAllen, TX 78501  
Ph.956.683.3134

**Brownsville Office**  
Christ the King  
2255 Southmost Rd.  
Brownsville, TX 78520  
Ph.956.546.1982

**Coming in 2006**  
**Harlingen Office**  
TSTC Building B