



IMPACTING SUSTAINABLE
ECONOMIC GROWTH
IN THE REGION...
ONE VIDA AT A TIME

LEADERS PAGE

BOARD CHAIRMAN



Due to the global pandemic, for the past two years, resiliency has been VIDA's driving force. While we must maintain resiliency, we must also look to the future and the growing need for an educated an industry-trained workforce.

The medical field offers vast opportunities--some that do not currently exist--for talented, educated individuals. Both The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and South Texas College have announced a significant expansion of their nursing programs, which means a sizable increase in the number of slots available for zealous students. What an opportunity this is for VIDA participants!

UTRGV founded its School of Medicine in 2013 and is in the process of creating a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) degree program. Could there be a future doctor or pharmacist coming out of our program? I have no doubt there will be many, and we must prepare for this now. In the words of renowned basketball coach John Wooden, "If we fail to adapt, we fail to move forward." I couldn't agree more.

The challenges persist across the country and in our community, but the future is bright and the opportunities continue to flourish. As author Angela Cecilia wrote, "You can't expect to move forward if your emergency brake is on." VIDA is alive and kicking; we have no time to apply the emergency

break. Our program is helping expanding, needed industries--such as logistics, manufacturing, construction and transportation sectors--thrive, and with the continued support of our current partners and the addition of new partners, we will continue our mission of educating and training an energetic and dynamic Rio Grande Valley workforce.

TONY AGUIRRE | MANAGING PARTNER | RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, LLC

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Resiliency gave VIDA and our participants the strength to move forward during a global pandemic. We relied on that resiliency again throughout fiscal year 2021, driven by our commitment to move people across the Rio Grande Valley out of poverty and into fulfilling rewarding careers, that change their--and their families'—lives. Students like Manuel Reta, whose story you'll read in this Annual Report, is one of countless inspiring, heartwarming, and transformative success stories we could tell. These individuals are the answer to "Why VIDA?"

As we established our goals for this fiscal year, developing new partnerships and ramping up recruitment took center stage. These investment, fundraising, academic, and collaborative partnerships are vital to VIDA's sustainability and growth, and our partners' commitment to human capital is vital to the economic development and prosperity of our region. VIDA staff focused recruitment efforts on rural sectors of the areas we serve to reach our most vulnerable population.

In this Annual Report, you will read about VIDA's 25th Anniversary Gala. Though we expected to hold it during FY 2020-2021, we postponed it until the start of FY 2021-2022 out of an abundance of caution. Nevertheless, it was during FY 2020-2021 that my staff and I formulated and developed the plan for this formidable celebration. Although an unexpected medical leave prevented me from attending the event in person, our team made it a night to remember for everyone who attended.

As I reflect on the success stories in this Annual Report and on all of those that are unwritten, I am filled with a profound sense of pride. I think about the people who came together to establish VIDA, our staff and our board, our partners, and those who make the life-changing decision to apply for our program, and I am filled with gratitude. Mid fiscal year 2021-2022 will be my last as executive director of VIDA. Serving this organization is an honor difficult to put into words. I am so proud of what we have accomplished, and I am grateful to my board of directors and, especially, to my team for giving me this incredible opportunity to lead this organization I love so much. While it is rarely easy to walk away from a job you love, it is time to pass the torch to Felida, who brings a fresh and innovative perspective to VIDA. I feel grateful for having had the opportunity to work with her these past two years and feel confident she will continue fulfilling our mission, with her ambitious vision and passion for education.

PRISCILLA DINN ALVAREZ | VIDA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021



AL VILLARREAL



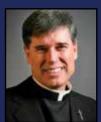
APOLONIO BORREGO, JR.



DAVID OLIVEIRA



ESTELLA SOSA GARZA



FR. KEVIN A. COLLINS O.M.I.



LESLIE BINGHAM



ROSALIE TRISTAN



EDUARDO ANAYA



MSGR. HEBERTO DIAZ VICE CHAIRPERSON



JEANNIE FAGAN



JOE HINOJOSA



THERE ARE **NO ACCIDENTS**

ecause VIDA has been changing AND THERE'S MORE! lives in the Rio Grande Valley for more than a quarter of a century, the chances of having an encounter with a VIDA graduate is high, especially in health-care facilities and other high-demand industries. But this one in August 2021, as told by Priscilla Alvarez, VIDA's executive director. took "VIDA Graduate Encounter" to an entirely new level.

"As I'm getting prepped for surgery at Cornerstone Regional Hospital in Edinburg, I am soaking in my nurse's confidence as she interviews me and prepares me for my pre-op meds. I casually ask her if she's ever heard of VIDA, and her response was THE best! She said VIDA helped her get through school. She was a single parent on food stamps with lots of other barriers. We helped her get her ADN. Then she went on to get her BSN and is now contemplating her MSN."

This nurse, who prefers to remain anonymous, called Christina Ramirez in the room to assist her. It turns out Christina was a VIDA participant, too, and she went on and on about how important VIDA was to her success.

CHRIS' SISTER. BASILIA LÓPEZ. WAS ALSO A VIDA PARTICIPANT, AND LAST MAY, CHRIS' DAUGHTER, **SARA, ANOTHER VIDA** PARTICIPANT, GRADUATED.

VIDA is the Spanish word for "life." This organization is committed to changing the lives of all those who enter our doors.

There are no accidents, and each of these encounters is a source of motivation for what we do each day.



PRISCILLA DINN ALVAREZ



ANNABEL RODRIGUEZ

Annabel Rodriguez a single 23-year-old female from Elsa, single, no children, living with parents and siblings at a household of 6. Annabel's mother works as a health care provider for her grandmother and father is retired on social security benefits. The family at the time of application fell below the OMB income guidelines to qualify her for VIDA assistance. Annabel graduated with her LVN degree in Fall 2020 and transitioned to the A.D.N. degree right away and is scheduled to graduate this Spring 2022.

Annabel states, "VIDA welcomed me with open arms and provided me with moral and financial support that has tremendously enabled me to continue my education. I will be the first generation in my family to graduate college. I was assigned to a counselor who I met with weekly to discuss my progress and concerns. It was something that kept me going when the vocational nursing program was getting quite tough. I also graciously received funding from VIDA that allowed me to purchase all of my school supplies, which I would not have been able to afford on my own. These supplies included my uniforms, shoes, stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, penlight, backpack, and textbooks, etc. All in all, VIDAs support made my enrollment in my program go much smoother and I am very grateful to them. After graduation I will be able to sit for my NCLEX-PN exam and hopefully pass and become an LVN. I will be in a field I love and better able to financially support my family and myself."

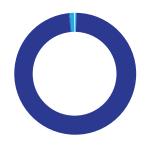
YEAR IN REVIEW 2021 PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS 464 **TOTAL SERVED** 134 **TOTAL VIDA GRADUATES** 93% PERSISTANCE RATE **AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY** UPON GRADUATION: \$45,614.40



PROGRAMS OF STUDY BY INDUSTRY

Program	Number of Participants	Percentage
Allied Health	251	54%
Business	19	4%
Educational/Social Services	50	11%
Special Trades	98	21%
STEM	46	10%
Total	464	100%

RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT: \$14.74*



RACE/ETHNICITY

ASIAN	1	0.22%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	1	0.22%
HISPANIC	455	98.06%
PACIFIC ISLANDER	1	0.22%
WHITE	6	1.29%
TOTAL	464	100.00%

REVENUE:

INDIVIDUAL & CORPORATE

GIFTS: \$130,904

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: \$1,045,000

STATE: \$299,049

FOUNDATIONS: \$267,708

MISCELLANEOUS: \$211,601

TOTAL REVENUE: \$1,954,261

EXPENSES:

PROGRAM SERVICES: \$1,555,673

ADMINISTRATION: \$282,223

FUNDRAISING: \$43,589

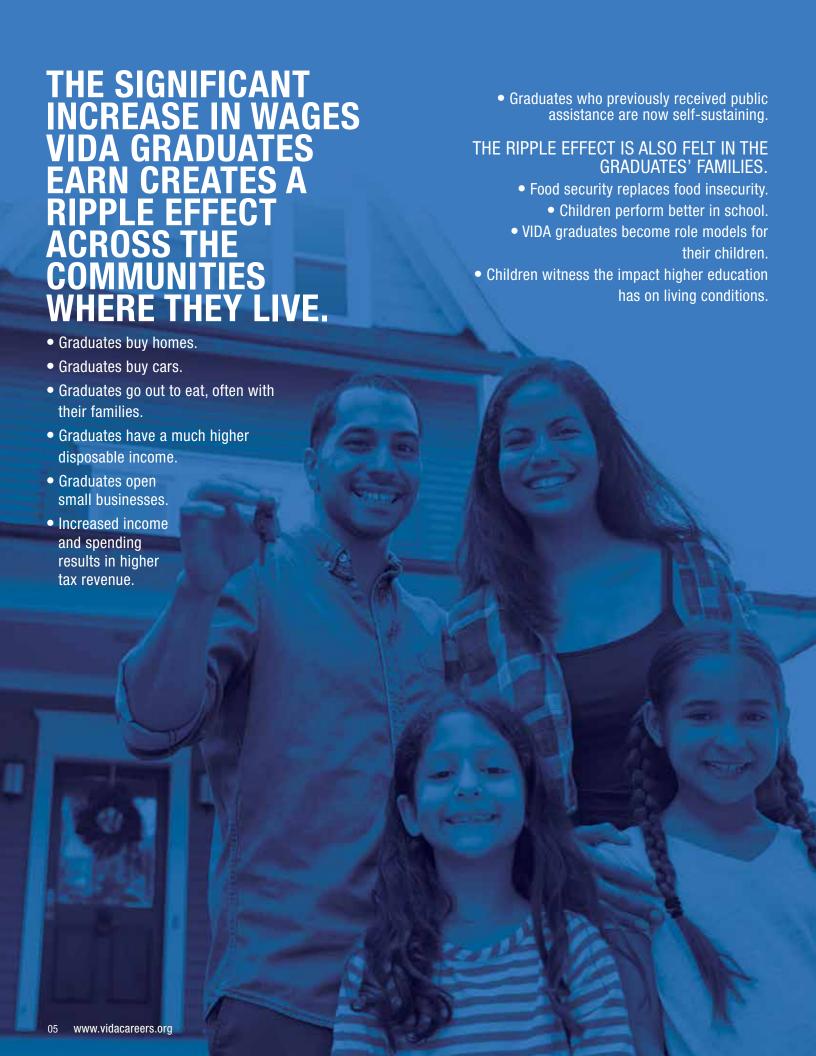
TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,881,485

NET CHANGE IN ASSETS **TOTAL: \$72,776**



PERCENTAGE UNEMPLOYED/LOW INCOME/ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

UNEMPLOYED 17% UNDEREMPLOYED 4% **LOW INCOME** 46% ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE 33%

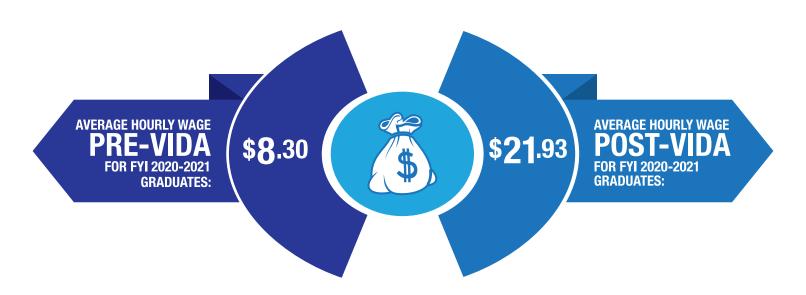


RIO GRANDE VALLEY COMMUNITY PROFILE

While the Rio Grande Valley is home to foreign trade zones, the new SpaceX Boca Chica Launch Site in Brownville, and a developing liquefied natural gas exporting industry, it is also one of the poorest regions in the country. In fact, January 2, 2020, 24/7 Wall St., LLC, published "The Poorest County in Every State" by Samuel Stebbins. Stebbins identified Starr County, one of four counties that comprise the Rio Grande Valley, as the poorest county in Texas, based on these figures:

- Median household income: \$29,294 (state: \$59,570)
- Poverty rate: 35.3% (state: 15.5%)
- Oct. 2019 unemployment: 9.6% (state: 3.4%)
- Adults with a bachelor's degree: 10.3% (state: 29.3%)

A glimpse of the Rio Grande Valley Community Profile clearly illustrates the need for VIDA.



*Based on Economic Impact Study 2021 by UTRGV Data and Information Systems Center

FY 2020-2021 PARTICIPANTS

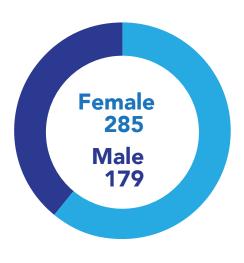
Average Age of Participants: 28

Percentage with Two or More

Children in the Household: 39%

Percentage Single Parents: 29%

Percentage Veterans: 5%



CELEBRATING CELEBRATING CHARACTER WITH A SPECTACULAR GALA

hursday, October 21, 2021, VIDA hosted our first annual gala, celebrating over 25 years of providing financial assistance and case-management services to more than 6,000 students from across the Rio Grande Valley pursuing careers in targeted demand occupations.

We hit the 25-year mark during FY 2019-2020, but COVID prevented us from having a grand celebration. We decided on a gala and had everything planned to host it in FY 2020-2021, but again, COVID got in the way. However, COVID only stopped us temporarily. Although we delayed the event until the start of FY 2021-2022, we decided to share the celebration in this Annual Report based on our original plan.

Strengthening Communities Across the Rio Grande Valley turned out to be the perfect theme for our first gala. This strength has come from many sectors of our region. Valley Interfaith, a faith-based organization whose mission is to partner with the community to provide necessary resources and build self-sustainability, teamed up with business leaders across the Valley to establish VIDA almost three decades ago. Since then, we have continued to rely on strong partnerships--as you will see in this Annual Report--in our quest to lift people in our community out of poverty and into prosperity. This gala allowed us to celebrate what we do, with their help--change lives, one VIDA at a time. In doing so, together, we strengthen individuals, families, employers, and entire communities.

The event was held at Orchidee Studio in McAllen. In addition to a fabulous dinner and joyful networking, those who attended heard the moving stories of two VIDA alumni. We then had the honor of presenting awards to our 2021 VIDA Stars:

VIDA 2021 STAR INVESTMENT PARTNER AWARD:

Development Corporation of McAllen, Inc. and Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation

VIDA 2021 STAR TRAINING PARTNER AWARD:

South Texas College







































VIDA 2021 STAR COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD: Valley Interfaith

VIDA 2021 STAR INNOVATOR AWARD:

City of Pharr Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez, M.D.

VIDA 2021 STAR EMPLOYER PARTNER AWARD:

Doctors Hospital at Renaissance

VIDA 2021 STAR ALUMNI:

Daniel Morales and Margarita Olvera

Regardless of how many hours we invested into planning the gala, it would not have been possible without our generous sponsors, listed below, and all of those who provided fabulous items for our silent auction.

CHAMPION LEVEL

Socialife Magazine
Valley Baptist Medical Center Brownsville

COMMUNITY LEVEL

Atlas Hall & Rodriguez
Falcon Bank
Pharr Economic Development Corporation
RGV Focus
Rhodes Development/Esperanza Homes
South Texas College

INNOVATIVE LEVEL

Tony & Linda Aguirre
Bert Ogden Rio Grande Valley
DHR Health
Lone Star National Bank
Robert & Margaret McAllen
Noble Charities
Rio Grande Regional Hospital
UTRGV/UT Health

GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Brisky & Perez Insurance
Decibel Communications
Freese and Nichols
Frost Bank
Security Service Federal Credit Union
The Monitor
Valley Interfaith
Valley Regional Medical Center

Definitely a night to remember! Here's to many more!

ADELA TANN



Adela Tann, a single Pharr resident and naturalized citizen from Mexico, completed the Patient Care Technician program at South Texas College in 2013 and the Vocational Nursing program in 2015. After passing the National Council Licensure Examination, Tann planned to become a registered nurse. But instead of taking the exam, Tann moved to lowa to care for her sister, who was battling terminal cancer.

In 2017, Tann returned to Texas and passed the exam. Now a licensed vocational nurse working as a provider and earning \$9.75 an hour, she suffered another setback. She had thyroid

Tann finished her treatments and was getting back on track when she suffered a stroke. This caused additional language struggles, which already plagued Tann's academic pursuits.

In Fall 2019, Tann took two prerequisite courses for the

Associate Degree Nursing program. Successful completion of the ADN program allows students to take the licensure exam to become a registered nurse. Tann was accepted into the ADN program in 2020.

While at STC, Tann learned about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. Tann, now in her mid-40s, applied to VIDA and gained acceptance.

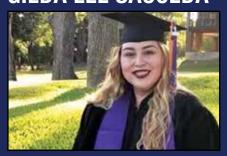
Because of the demands of the ADN Program, Tann reduced her work hours. VIDA's financial support significantly lessened the impact of a smaller paycheck. In May 2021, Tann graduated.

"Without VIDA's help, I would not have achieved my goals," she said.

Tann is currently working and studying for the NCLEX-RN exam. When she passes, she will be a registered nurse with the ability to significantly increase her salary.

"VIDA helped me achieve my goal and have a better future," Tann said. "I have no words to thank them for all they have done to support me."

GILDA LEE SAUCEDA



Weslaco native Gilda Lee Sauceda grew up with a single mom who became disabled when her daughter was just 10 years old. She felt grateful that they had a roof over their head and their basic necessities, but the struggles were real. The labels were there eighth-grade drop-out, GED holder, low-income - but Sauceda did not allow labels to determine her

Sauceda worked at Salvation Army in Weslaco, serving as cashier, donation receiver and processor, and whatever else the store needed, earning \$175 a week. "I was so happy in that job," Sauceda said. "The people I worked with made it feel like home."

But in the back of her mind, Sauceda had a burning desire to become a nurse, a desire that seemed out of her reach. She enrolled at South Texas College, where she earned her licensed vocational nurse certificate. Her goal was to become a registered nurse and to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, but it would likely be a slow journey due to her limited resources. On top of this, an eye disease caused her to lose her sight for several months. She was then no longer able to work.

One day while on campus, Sauceda met Ruben Garcia, a then case manager and college counselor for Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. VIDA is a nonprofit organization that provides wraparound services designed to take residents of the Rio Grande Valley out of poverty and dead-end jobs into high-skill, high-demand, high-paying jobs, through education. Sauceda applied and earned acceptance into the program. She was soon realizing that, with VIDA's help, she could reach her long-held desire of becoming a registered nurse.

"VIDA was able to pay my tuition, and they paid for my stethoscope, scrubs and more," Sauceda said. "They counseled me, too. At that time, I was struggling a lot. Ruben

provided one-on-one counseling. He really made a big impact.

Group and one-on-one counseling are a critical component of the VIDA program, where the case managers/college counselors talk to program participants about topics such as stress, time management, financial management, study skills, resume building and interviewing.

With VIDA's help and help from her girlfriend, Malia Tuiasosopo, Sauceda graduated from STC in 2018 with an Associate Degree in Nursing. With that ADN, she qualified to take the National Council for Licensure Exam-RN. Individuals must pass that test to earn their license as a registered nurse. Sauceda took it and passed.

Fresenius Kidney Care in Weslaco hired Sauceda to work as a dialysis nurse. While working there, she enrolled in Grand Canyon University's online RN to BSN program.

"Fresenius actually helped me get this degree," Sauceda said, gratitude evident in her voice. Sauceda is a member of the GCU Class of 2020. After working for Fresenius for two-and-a-half years, she fulfilled another goal. She took a job as a traveling dialysis nurse.

JUAN CARLOS ALANIZ



During his freshman year at Texas Southmost College (TSC), Juan Carlos Alaniz saw a presentation at the school about VIDA.

"They explained what VIDA would do and how they could help students achieve their goals," Alaniz said. Alaniz had enrolled at TSC, well aware that a college education would provide him with greater opportunities and higher salaries. He chose TSC's medical laboratory technology (MLT) program, which is nationally accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS).

"I have always been interested because my sister was a medical lab scientist, and now she is a nurse," Alaniz said. "She was my role model." He also worked in a clinic, which further inspired him to enroll in the MLT program.

Seeing the benefits VIDA offered, Alaniz applied and received confirmation of his acceptance.

"VIDA helped pay for my books and uniforms," he explained. "I did not have to worry about my uniforms, one of my biggest expenses. Instead, I could save that money and use it for my other bills. The moral support really helped when I was stressed out, and it was nice to have someone to turn to when I needed it. VIDA helped take a load off of my shoulders, and I really appreciate it.'

Time and stress management are two key features of VIDA's wraparound services, providing individual and group counseling to students enrolled in the program. VIDA's case managers also serve as career counselors, helping students rise above personal, financial, and academic struggles that often knock them down, keeping them from achieving their

goals. These services had a significant impact on Alaniz.

"VIDA helped with both moral and financial support," he said. "You don't have to struggle with payments, and you can give 100 percent of your attention to school.

In May 2021, Alaniz graduated with an associate degree and accepted a job at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance as a medical technician.

"I am earning twice as much as I was earning before for the same number of hours," Alaniz shared. "Plus, I get benefits." And there's more. "I have a degree I use and a job I enjoy."

Alaniz clearly recognizes the role VIDA played in his success.

"VIDA is important because it helps those students in need who have that drive to succeed in life but don't have the money to pay for school and bills," he said. "Sometimes a student wants to go to school but cannot afford it and has to drop. But VIDA steps in. VIDA helps students get a degree and better pay. VIDA helps students get ahead."

THE NEED FOR VIDA

December 3, 2020, Samuel Stebbins published "Cities With the Worst COVID-19 Unemployment Crisis Right Now" on the 24/7 Wall St. website. He begins this piece with, "After HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 is the deadliest pandemic the world has faced in over a century. And in the United States, the virus has ushered in an economic crisis of a scale not seen since the Great Depression."

Stebbins goes on to explain that 24/7 Wall St. identified cities across America with double-digit unemployment, based on their September 2020 unemployment rate reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Stebbins ends his introduction to the list with this: "Many of the metro areas with double-digit unemployment are also home to large populations living below the poverty line. In these areas, the rapid evaporation of jobs has added further financial strain on households that were already struggling."

It was no surprise to the VIDA staff that the areas we serve were ranked in this report.

#11 ON THE LIST: MCALLEN-EDINBURG-MISSION, TX (HIDALGO COUNTY)

- > Sept. 2020 unemployment rate: 13.0%
- > 1 yr. employment change: -5.4%
- > Largest industry: Education and health services (29.8% of local jobs)
- > Population: 868,707

The McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, Texas, metro area shed a total of 14,500 jobs in the past year, equal to over 5% of its total labor force. Due in large part to job losses in manufacturing, mining and construction and leisure and hospitality, the metro area's September unemployment rate was 13.0%, well above the 7.9% U.S. rate.

The area is already struggling with high poverty, and the job losses are putting even more residents at risk of serious financial hardship. An estimated 27.3% of McAllen metro area residents live below the poverty line, the highest poverty rate of any metro area in the country and more than double the 12.3% national poverty rate.

#23 ON THE LIST: BROWNSVILLE-HARLINGEN, TX (CAMERON COUNTY)

- > Sept. 2020 unemployment rate: 11.2%
- > 1 yr. employment change: -6.1%
- > Largest industry: Education and health services (29.3% of local jobs)
- > Population: 423,163

The Brownsville-Harlingen metro area, the southernmost in Texas, has a near nation-leading 11.2% unemployment rate. Over the past year, due in large part to the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, the area shed nearly 9,000 jobs, and the September 2019 unemployment rate of 5.5% more than doubled.

The industries hit hardest in the area were leisure and hospitality, which reported an 18.1% employment decline, and information, which shed about 14.3% of its workers.

Source: https://247wallst.com/special-report/2020/12/03/cities-with-the-worst-covid-19-unemployment-crisis-right-now-2/2/

EDUCATION

Percentage of Adults with a Bachelor's Degree

TEXAS —

CAMERON CO.

19.5%

12.1%

HIDALGO CO.

13.2%

5TAR CO. 7.1%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

TEXAS

CAMERON CO.

\$61,874

\$45,883

- HIDALGO CO.

STAR CO. -

\$45,250

\$33,515

POVERTY RATE

TEXAS -

13.7%

CAMERON CO. -

28.9%

HIDALGO CO.

29.7%

STAR CO.

34.7%

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

October 2020

- TEXAS

CAMERON CO. -

6.9%

9.3%

HIDALGO CO.

STAR CO.

10.4%

15.4%

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 2020



South Texas College President, Dr. Ricardo Solis

"Student access and success is critical to the mission of South Texas College. And most importantly, providing opportunity, so people can have a dignity for better quality of life. That is part of our mission and VIDA certainly is an organization that complements the mission of South Texas College. The personal intensive case management that VIDA brings is crucial to the success of people to be able to matriculate to higher education and most importantly for completion. Obviously, there are life changes that are out of everyone's control from mental illness, to physical, to emotional. Then of course there is the soft skills component that VIDA has been able to effectively address and to assist people to be able to work not only on their resume, but most importantly throughout the process of going through the completion of a program or a certificate that STC offers. Clearly it

has been a success because this hands-on case management, the counseling, the advising, that is ongoing is crucial for people that need this push and this type of assistance. The partnership with VIDA has proven year after year of the success, but most importantly, the completion and the job placement that VIDA provides in assisting people, to have that personal touch, that assistance that all of us need throughout our life. The advising component has been very valuable to bring to everyone who wants to continue with their lives and be able to complete a degree or a certificate in higher education. The people of south Texas college and of the community have been able to achieve and obtain degrees that change peoples' lives, and we certainly are glad to have been able to make an impact in people's lives in South Texas and in the Rio Grande Valley. Thanks to VIDA, this partnership will continue this type of impact with citizens of the Rio Grande Valley and provide remarkable results and continue throughout the years."



McAllen Mayor, Javier Villalobos

"I think education is the key to success, regardless of who does it or where they do it. Here in McAllen, it is very important. I think we all know that without proper education, it's difficult. And for a region or an area to grow, you need to have an educated workforce, whether it be vocational, certificates, junior college degrees, or bachelor's degrees, it's very important that we continue investing in our education. It's very important for McAllen. We see the difference, and as long as it continues working, we will continue supporting VIDA. Traditionally, more at risk students are assisted through the program and that is very important, it makes a difference. It's great to collaborate with different entities, whether it be VIDA, and then VIDA with STC, UTRGV, or whoever it is, we cannot say it enough, education is key. So, we thank you for what you'll do."



Valley Interfaith Leader, Estella Sosa Garza

"More than 25 years ago, we actually pushed for the funding to establish the community college, to organize around change that was needed. And one of the reasons we worked on STCC, was because we wanted to bring the program VIDA and we needed a college that would help prepare adults in the community that were either unemployed, underemployed, or maybe for life reasons had not been able to finish their formal training and education. So that is how STCC began, and once we had STCC, then we began to look at establishing VIDA. Because that is what VIDA is about. How do you sustain your families, but not get stuck? We always said, we want jobs that provide a career for these families. To us, it's an economic development strategy. Everything we do is to try and improve the capital infrastructure, but we cannot forget the human capital, which is the most

important. People think we are helping the poor, we are helping the community, wanting to invest in themselves. We have a lot of young adults that drop out of school, out of high school, and they need help, especially women who are single parents. So, there are a lot of support services that are provided through VIDA. And that's what we want, the services to be provided to people who need it and who have the desire and the energy to get to where they want to go. It gives back, people sometimes don't understand, it's not a handout, it's not welfare, it's about building self-sufficiency for people who are going to become active participants in the citizen role that we should all be taking."





ADDRESSING ESSENTIAL NEEDS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

ne year ago, VIDA launched its Craft Trades Initiative, training commercial electricians. It was both a challenging and an exciting year for the Commercial Electrician Program.

In 16 months, at a time when every aspect of our community faced adversity brought on by COVID-19, VIDA established a cohort of 70 commercial electricians from across the Rio Grande Valley. With so much uncertainty, waiting around was not an option; acquiring a new skill was the only way forward for so many people in our region.

The construction industry was identified as an "essential" industry, and many people, now unemployed, needed to put food on the table. It was not easy to start a training program in the middle of COVID; there were still so many unknowns. But VIDA has never been known for doing what's easy; we are known for addressing the needs of the people and the industries in our region. Today, we can boast a Commercial Electrician Level 1 graduation rate of 85% for this cohort; all graduates were placed with local commercial contractors. They are now certified under the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), a globally recognized credential. They have also gotten OSHA 10 certified and have completed 63 hours of the National Electrical Code® book.

During their training, these students learned electrical theory and wiring code and how to wire three-way and four-way switches, bend conduit pipe around obstacles, read an electrical panel, read blueprints, and use a multi-meter. Now these students make, on average, \$18 an hour.

They went from being laid off, not knowing where to turn, to enjoying a much brighter future.

"It has been exciting for all of us at VIDA to see these students starting their career as electricians, an industry poised for exponential growth," said Sid Ramos, VIDA workforce development manager. "You see the confidence in their faces every day when they come to class. There is purpose in their eyes as they look toward the future. There is nothing better than giving people the opportunity to learn a skill that will serve them for the rest of their lives. As the old adage goes, 'Give a man a fish, and he will feed himself for a day, but teach a man how to fish, and he will feed himself for the rest of his life.'"

This holds true for men and women of all ages, and VIDA's mission is to continue teaching our participants how to "fish."

NOTE: IN OCTOBER 2021, LEVEL 2
TRAINING FOR THIS COHORT'S FOURYEAR PROGRAM BEGAN. WE CONTINUE TO
BE INSPIRED ABY THEIR PROFESSIONAL
GROWTH, PRIDE, AND SUCCESS.







STRUCTURAL WELDING PROGRAM ALLOWS GRADUATE TO SOAR WITH SPACEX

After Manuel Reta graduated from Pace High School in Brownsville, he worked in positions that did not require a certificate or degree—in call centers, for a cable company, and at the Port of Brownsville. Reta did not have the qualifications needed to work in industries that pay higher salaries, and he struggled to make ends meet. And it only went downhill from there.

During the pandemic, Reta was laid off. Now unemployed, he relied on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to pay for food. Reta knew he needed to earn a marketable skill in a high-demand field to change the course of his life.

One day, as he scrolled on Facebook, Reta saw a post about VIDA. As he read on, "structural welding" piqued his interest. While working at the Port of Brownsville, Reta saw, firsthand, the work of skilled welders. Knowing SpaceX "landed" Starbase, its private rocket-production facility, test site, and spaceport, on Boca Chica Beach (approximately 20 miles east of Brownsville), Reta saw a clear career opportunity and a way to provide a much better life for himself, his wife, and their baby son.

VIDA formed a partnership with Super Welders Academy, LLC, in Brownsville, the Texas Workforce Commission, and NEXDEC Industries, a welding and fabrication company in Brownsville, to provide a Structural Welding Program. Upon completion of the five-week course, students earn certification as structural welders from Jesus Hernandez, lead instructor at Super Welders Academy and a certified welder inspector, and are guaranteed employment with NEXDEC. Despite having no welding experience, Reta developed the skills quickly, completed the course, and accepted a position with NEXDEC.

"Welding has always been something I wanted to do, and I have known it pays well," said Reta. "With VIDA's help, I am now certified as a structural welder."

SpaceX contracted NEXDEC, and Reta found himself working at the site he envisioned during his unemployment. After one month, a SpaceX administrator offered Reta a job with the aerospace company as a launch pad technician, allowing him to continue to hone his structural-welding skills.

"As a launch pad technician, I play many roles," Reta explained, "but my ground level-skill is welder. Rocketry is not a cookie-cutter thing; one day the team may be installing pipes, wires, or equipment or trenching, or I can get called to weld. It just depends on the day."

This new career path has allowed Reta to soar, and he is quick to acknowledge the role VIDA played in helping him live his dream.

"Without this skill and certificate, I wouldn't have had this opportunity of working at Space X," he said. "Without the assistance from VIDA in paying for my welding training, I would not have had this opportunity. The training has given me direction in a career that has a lot of opportunity, and thanks to VIDA, the future looks good for me and my family."

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

OUR PARTNERS

As you read VIDA's success stories in our Annual Report, we ask you to keep all of our partners in mind. Without them, we would not have success stories to tell. It is because of their generosity and their continued support that we have been able to play a critical role in changing lives—thus strengthening communities—across the Rio Grande Valley.

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Health Care System

Valley Baptist Medical Center -Brownsville

Valley Baptist Medical Center -Harlingen

Valley Grande Manor

Village Healthcare and Rehabilitation

Weslaco Regional Rehabilitation

Hospital

ZA Construction

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Sustainability is at the heart of VIDA's philosophy. Relentless focus to promote socioeconomic development across the Rio Grande Valley by expanding accessibility to career-training programs is key. VIDA is a proven model for success, graduating participants in targeted demand occupations with competitive wages. The ultimate goal is not job placement but rather job retention because workforce retention develops a community comprised of self-sufficient taxpayers representative of human-capital investment. VIDA's graduates not only help the families they support and the businesses that employ them, but transitioning from unemployment and public assistance to self-sufficiency helps the overall growth of our community.

OUR MISSION

VIDA's mission is to formulate new institutional relationships in the Rio Grande Valley that simultaneously address employers' needs for skilled workers and prepare the area's unemployed and underemployed residents for high-skill, high-wage jobs identified in the region.

OUR UNIQUE SERVICE STRATEGY

VIDA's unique program model is at the core of its success, demonstrated by an average 93 percent persistence rate for participants enrolled in career-training programs. Our career counselors work diligently with all participants on an individual basis to address social and economic barriers that historically prevent our underserved demographic from successfully graduating with an industry-recognized credential or degree. Financial struggles, family responsibilities, life stressors, and time management represent a few of the topics addressed during weekly counseling sessions. In addition, VIDA counselors infuse group sessions with soft-skills training, such as resume building, interview preparation, financial management, and effective study skills. Guest speakers are invited to speak to our participants about retirement planning, investments, and personal budgeting, among many other lifelong elements for professional success.

VIDA recognizes that financial barriers for our participants go beyond the inability to sustain the cost of tuition. Because of the invaluable support from local and state governments, as well as private foundations and individual donors, VIDA is able to facilitate accessibility to higher education by subsidizing high academic costs. These wrap-around services, combined with training through our strong partnerships with educational institutions in the Rio Grnade Valley, equip VIDA participants with the knowledge, skills, support, and commitment necessary to enter--and excel in--the workforce.

"The Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)...connects under- and unemployed individuals with certificate and degree programs in high-growth sectors where jobs offer living wages, benefits, and opportunities for professional advancement. VIDA serves a primarily Latino population in four Lower Rio Grande Valley counties that rank among the poorest in the nation."

~Robert Ek, "Bridging the Divide from Jobs to Careers through Education," senior policy associate at American Public Human Services Assocation (APHSA), April 2012

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Executive Director

FELIDA VILLARREAL Deputy Executive Director

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ISIDRO "SID" RAMOS

Workforce Development Manager

LESLLY BLANCAS

Case Manager/Career Counselor

SAN JUANITA SANCHEZ

Case Manager/Career Counselor

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Case Manager/Career Counselor

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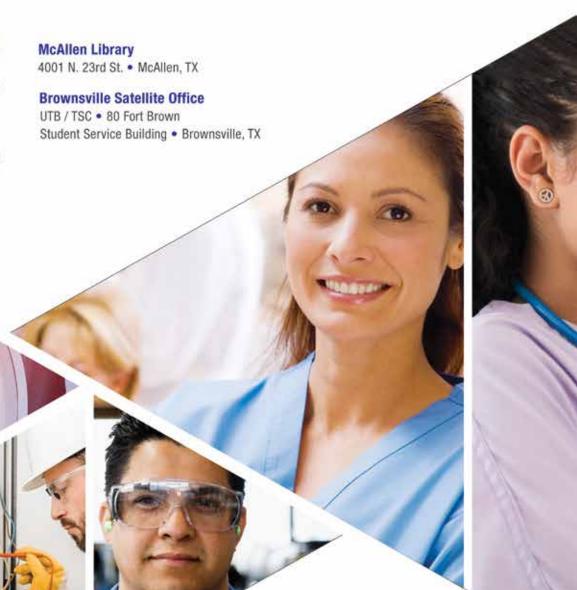


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DONATE DIRECTLY TO VIDA.

VIDA is fully funded through local, state, and federal governments, grants, private foundations, and the generous donations of individuals and companies in our community who believe in what we do.

It's easy to donate. Just go to vidacareers.org and click on the Donate now! Be part of the change! button in the header!

SHOP ON AMAZON. DONATE TO VIDA. WIN-WIN!

Are you an Amazon.com shopper? Did you know you can shop at Amazonsmile.com instead, and Amazon will donate to VIDA based on your purchase? It's true, and there's no additional cost for you! You, too, can make a difference, one VIDA at a time!

- 1. Go to Amazonsmile.com and choose Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement as your charity by typing it in the search bar and then selecting it.
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