

Responding to the buena gente of Esperanza



Amelia (at right behind the white chair) with a group of buena gente volunteers at the Esperanza preparing for the annual Peace Market in November, 2019.

by Amelia Valdez, Esperanza staff

My name is Amelia Valdez, Buena Gente volunteer coordinator of the Esperanza and representative for Las Tesoros of San Antonio. For me, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center has always been a first responder organization. My role on staff is calling volunteers and going on home visits with our elders. We call our elders all the time to make sure they are fine and don't need anything because they sometimes get sick and need help.

I also coordinate programs in the Westside community and in the schools working with a variety of volunteers including artists. I often get supplies for artists who work with us. I also play a role as a community organizer for the Esperanza especially in the historic westside where I grew up and reside. At times, we also

assist residents in the westside with their home repair programs and with property issues they may not fully understand.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it became even more urgent to check in on elders, so we started a phone call chain list to check on elders and make sure they didn't need anything and were connected to their family members. When necessary, we deliver food curbside and sometimes line up at food pantries to pick up food. We connected with Lee Thielen of Our Lady of Lake Church, who helped connect us with a food pantry.

Individuals from the Esperanza's buena gente community also helped out donating food, including food for special diets. Kamala Platt, Professor at St. Phillips who has a native plants' garden has donated nopalitos, chinese plums and fresh eggs and Imelda De Leon, an elder herself, connected us with a box of food delivering it to us at the CASA de Cuentos. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was scary for me because food shelves at the stores were mostly empty but I found out how best to help standing in line early in the morning at our local HEB to insure that our folks were receiving their basic necessities.

Las Tesoros de San Antonio, Beatriz Llamas, "La Paloma del Norte" and Blanquita Rodríguez, "Blanca Rosa" have been ill on and off since returning from their trip to Washington where they received their NEA Award early in the fall of 2019. Since January 2020, however, Las Tesoros have been improving in their health. During the COVID-19 pandemic they have been at home with their families wishing they could come to the Esperanza. In a recent Easter interview that I videotaped with Beatriz, she appeared to be doing quite well. We will be making that video available to the public soon! Blanquita struggles with her respiratory system and is recovering slowly, but we look forward to hearing them both singing together, soon.

I am very fortunate to work with the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center who take care of their buena gente, especially the elders, the artists, and Las Tesoros de San Antonio. As a staffmember I have the faith to know that this, too, shall pass. We will be back with our buena gente and our community at the Esperanza Center, soon.



Kamala Platt, Professor at St. Phillips, who has a native plants' garden has donated nopalitos, chinese plums and fresh eggs from her home for food deliveries.

