

Tejano Center

Proceeding Holistically Against Poverty, Illiteracy

BY MANUEL LOPEZ

Tejano Center for Community Concerns, a NeighborWorks® organization formed in 1992 to improve opportunities for low-income minority children and their families in Houston's East End, started out in the cross hairs of Mother Nature and has never looked back.

Before the ink was even dry on its incorporation papers, a wave of twisters hit a densely populated, predominately Hispanic residential neighborhood in northeast Houston.

Tejano directors immediately engaged themselves in repairing homes and tending to the human needs of those most devastated. Repairs were done for more than 30 victims. Private businesses and individuals also donated their labor to help their neighbors.

Tejano Center's service area consists of large neighborhoods that are in a state of social and economic deterioration, with a growing poverty rate and per capita income that is 44 percent of the city's average. East End residents are three times more likely than the rest of the city to have less than a ninth grade education. Households are comprised of large families with limited assets. A significantly large percentage is comprised of undocumented residents. Most work, but receive the bulk of their income in cash.

New housing starts are almost nil, providing impetus to overcrowding as well as more rapid deterioration of the existent residential stock. There is limited information in the community on the home-ownership process, opportunities for home ownership, or bank and mortgage company requirements and procedures.



Raul Yzaguirre Charter School for Success PHOTOS COURTESY TEJANO CENTER

The situation is attributable not just to private disinvestment, but also to the lack of public strategies or support for any meaningful revitalization of the area.

Empowering Residents

Committed to reversing these conditions, Tejano Center's goals spring from a board-driven community building focus and methodology that employ a holistic approach in dealing with needs and problems. Its philosophy is based on a firm commitment to empower residents to create and foster an environment that will facilitate a better life for themselves and their children.

Tejano plans, devises strategies, and sculpts programs and projects based on the total needs of the residents of its service area. Directors and staff apply due diligence to assure that community building will be the end result of time, energy, and resources expended. Current activities span three broad areas – housing, family and children's services, and education.

Creating new home-ownership opportunities anchors



Tejano's affordable housing initiatives, while new construction of single-family homes is the driving force validating its revitalization strategies. Other housing strategies include home-ownership counseling, homebuyer education, credit counseling, loan origination services, down-payment and closing-cost assistance, and postpurchase counseling.

diversity, Tejano Center is uniquely positioned to increase and broaden its scope of services and delivery. In housing, plans are currently being formulated for a 15-acre residential subdivision that will include development of both multifamily rental units and new construction of single-family homes.

In the very near future, Family and Children's Services

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In addition, a 66-unit development funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides affordable rental housing to low- and moderate-income elderly. El Hogar de Niños, a 24-bed homeless shelter and long-term facility, services abused, runaway, throwaway, and homeless children, ages 2 to 17.

Family and children's services include the Tejano Foster Child-Placing Agency and the Tejano Health Clinic. The foster child placing agency places abused, neglected, and homeless children in culturally and language-appropriate private foster homes. The health clinic provides outpatient, primary health care services to the indigent.

Educational services encompass the Raul Yzaguirre Charter School for Success and the Community Education and Technology Center. The charter school is the only charter school in the state to target high-risk students from grades pre-kindergarten to 12. It serves more than 900 students on two campuses. The technology center is an emerging initiative, utilizing the recently expanded GED and Adult Education classes as its foundation. It includes much-needed technical, skill training, vocational, and other job-enhancing activities.

will include a long-term residential treatment facility. Meantime, negotiations are underway for the acquisition of three-plus acres of vacant land for a new charter school Brownsville campus. ■

Manuel Lopez is deputy director of Tejano Center for Community Concerns.



Homes by Tejano Center Housing



Ready to Grow

As Houston continues to expand its population and