

Madre of the Month

Stories of inspiration and Success from our Parent-Child Education Program



With twin sons, Edgar and David

Gricelda "Gris" Velazquez-Torres

Gris is the dedicated mother of twin sons, Edgar and David, who are 1 year and 4 months old. She and her husband decided to begin a new life in the U.S. when they found out they were pregnant. They wanted a better future for their sons.

In Mexico, Gris had been a teacher for children ages 3 to 6 years old and was passionate about helping her students reach their full potential. The move, along with being a new mother and the transition into American culture was difficult, and she did not know the English language. For the first few months, she was very lonely and was afraid to leave the house.

"In Mexico, I was a very independent person," describing herself. Being a new mother, it was hard to seek new opportunities and although she had worked with

children most of her career, caring for newborn twins was quite the challenge. After David and Edgar were born, she began looking for day care centers and schools in hopes of returning to work. Her sister-in-law told her about AVANCE's free parent education program for parents and young children. She had attended the program herself the year before and it helped her.

Since joining the Parent Child Education Program, Gris has learned to nurture each of the twins' unique personalities. "David is the more outgoing one, who loves to read and Edgar is more timid and likes hands-on activities, like playing with the toy blocks." She has also learned to speak English.

She loves seeing the smiles on her sons' faces when the Early Childhood teacher, Teresa, greets them each morning. Her hope as a parent is to encourage her children's independence, but also act as a confidante when they need help. Her husband is also another source of motivation for her. "He is always asking me if I have any homework," she laughs.

As for her goals after AVANCE, she hopes to volunteer and help other mothers just like her in the community. She plans to keep learning English to continue her career as a teacher. When asked what keeps her going she says, "I see the love that I have for being a teacher of my own sons." Congratulations, Gris!



'Tis the Season of Holiday Giving

December marks the season of holiday celebrations! Whether you are gathering with loved ones, going holiday shopping for special gifts, or remembering those warm moments of 2014, we hope you consider each of the special transformations our AVANCE families undergo thanks to our generous AVANCE supporters.

With your gift to AVANCE, you help 300 loving parents and children who are struggling to improve their lives and make a better future for their families. It costs about \$1,760 per family to provide nine months of instruction for both the parent or caregiver and their young children 0-3 years old. During this time, parents receive parental guidance, English as a Second Language, Educational Toy Making, and resource sessions. Children receive age-appropriate instruction to help them develop their cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills.

To make stories like Gris's happen, give your gift today by going to our website, www.avance-austin.org and clicking the donate button or send a check by mail to AVANCE-Austin. Every gift makes a difference! Thank you for your gifts.



Marie's Corner



The holidays are here! It's time for gathering with family and friends, giving thoughtful gifts, and most especially, counting our blessings. As I approach just over 90 days as the Executive Director at AVANCE-Austin, I feel blessed to be part of an amazing

organization serving children and families in our community.

I have learned that the families we serve are eager to ensure that their children have the love and support they need to be successful in school and life. I am so inspired by the sheer determination of our parents to learn about parenting, child development, resources in the community, and speaking English. The children are precious and their faces light up as they learn new concepts and make new friends.

Our donors and volunteers make our work possible and we are blessed by their gifts of time, talent, and treasure. I am grateful for the support of our Board of Directors. I am impressed with the staff's level of knowledge, skills, and dedication to the success of their client families.

The New Year will bring opportunities for growth as we continue to partner with groups like the Austin Independent School District, Manor ISD, Del Valle ISD, and Success by Six, as well as other nonprofit partners, foundations and businesses. I look forward to learning more about the difference our donors and partners wish to make in the lives of the families we serve.

As 2014 comes to a close and we prepare to share this special season with the ones we love, I hope that you will be reminded by the stories in this inaugural edition of the AVANCE-Austin newsletter, that you have truly made a difference in a child's life this year. There is no greater gift than that.

Blessings,
Marie Felan
Executive Director



UT Austin Awards AVANCE-Austin Board Member for Community Leadership

AVANCE-Austin Board Member, Rosie Mendoza was among several people honored at UT Austin's 2014 Community Leadership Awards Ceremony for her leadership and service to Austin's Hispanic community. The event was held on November 17, 2014 at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center.

Dr. Gregory J. Vincent, UT Austin's Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement, recognized the leaders who have "worked to improve the health and wellness of the Austin community as well as education and our children."

We congratulate Rosie on her big achievement and thank her for all that she does to support the deserving families of AVANCE. We also welcome her as our in-coming Board President in 2015.



(From Left to Right): University of Texas at Austin President Bill Powers, AVANCE-Austin Board Member Rosie Mendoza, and University of Texas at Austin Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement, Dr. Gregory J. Vincent.

Photo by Brian Birzer

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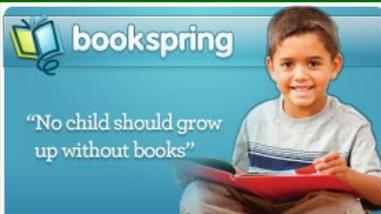
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Creating a Love for Reading



Thanks to a partnership with BookSpring and Reading is Fundamental or RIF, AVANCE parents and children had the opportunity to create books of their own to enjoy and receive new books as well.



Using magazines, families cut out photos and glued them onto construction paper. The pages were then bound together with yarn to create a homemade book. Parents use their books to practice reading to their children. Upon finishing the activity, each family was awarded a brand new book to take home. The activity promotes parent-child time, creativity, pre-literacy, and reading to children. BookSpring provided almost 200 books for the children and parents or caregivers enrolled in our six AVANCE sites throughout the community.



Supporter Spotlight

The Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation (GAHCC Foundation) presented AVANCE-Austin with \$1,000 on December 9th to support our Parent Child Education Program. GAHCC Foundation Chair, Judge Bob Perkins and Treasurer, James Rodriguez awarded the donation to our Executive Director, Marie Felan.