

VIDA

EDUCATING ONE LIFE AT A TIME SINCE 1995

Valley Initiative for Development
and Advancement

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024



*Educating one life
at a time since 1995*



INCREDIBLE!

OBSERVATIONS FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

TONY AGUIRRE, JR.

Self Employed Businessman | McAllen City Commissioner

The words *INCREDIBLE*, *AMAZING*, and *STELLAR* express excellence in performance. When you add the words *KINDNESS*, *CARING*, and *DEDICATION* to the equation, you have a winning result.

Wow! I was recently told that I repeatedly use the word "INCREDIBLE!" when anyone asks me about what VIDA accomplished in FY 2023-2024. **We have experienced great feats, with incredible fundraising growth, nearly 750 participants in our program, and a persistence rate of over 90%.** Don't you agree that this is INCREDIBLE?!

This has been a monumental year. The dedication and passion of all those involved--our participants, staff, board, funders, and partners--enabled VIDA to excel.

This year leads the way to 2025--our 30th anniversary. Thirty years! Again, incredible! The VIDA Annual Report for FY 2023-2024 shares success stories and highlights of our participants, our expanding list of generous sponsors and funders, events, our VIDA Team, our VIDA Board, and more. All are deserving of acknowledgement.

Let's make 2025 and beyond magical for the betterment of our community.
Dios por delante.



The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do. —Steve Jobs

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS | 2023 - 2024



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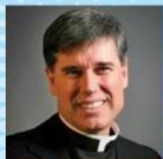
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MOSES ROBLEDO

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

FELIDA VILLARREAL | CPA



Dear Friends and Partners,

As I reflect on 2024, I am filled with profound gratitude and optimism for VIDA's continued impact in the Rio Grande Valley. This year marked significant milestones in our journey to transform lives through education and workforce development.

In the face of evolving economic challenges, VIDA has remained steadfast in our commitment to creating pathways to prosperity. Through strategic partnerships with employers, educational institutions, and community stakeholders, we've expanded our reach and deepened our impact. Our participants' success stories continue to demonstrate that--with the right support and opportunities--individuals can overcome barriers and achieve their career aspirations.

THIS YEAR, WE:

SERVED **746 participants** across our programs

ACHIEVED **83%** completion rate in our training programs

Secured new employer partnerships

Expanded our services to include justice-impacted youth

INCREASED our operational capacity **from \$3.4M to \$3.9M**

Behind these numbers are real people--parents working to provide better futures for their children, first-generation college students breaking generational cycles of poverty, and dedicated individuals pursuing their dreams of economic independence. Their determination inspires our work every day.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are positioned to expand our impact further. With our strengthened partnerships, enhanced program offerings, and dedicated team, VIDA will continue to be a catalyst for economic mobility in our region.

I extend my deepest appreciation to our board of directors, staff, partners, and supporters who make our work possible. Together, we are building a stronger, more equitable future for our community.

With gratitude and commitment,

Felida V
Felida Villarreal, CPA



EVERY DOLLAR DONATED ADDS TO THE

VIDA HARVEST EFFECT



What you plant now, you will harvest later.

—Og Mandino

When funders choose recipients of their charitable donations, they are vigilant about their return on investment (ROI), namely to the individuals and communities the recipient organizations serve. This ROI must be supported by hard data.

For every dollar invested in VIDA during FY 2023 - 2024, an ROI of \$15.69 was realized.

As Sal Mullanpudi, Business Economic Research Associate IV at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Data & Information Systems Center, reported in his 2023 Economic Impact Study for VIDA, the effects of the ROI can be seen in direct, indirect, and induced effects.

“Direct effects are changes in the local economy caused by an economic change in the area. Indirect effects are changes in inter-industry transactions as supplying industries respond to increased demands from the directly affected industries. Induced effects reflect changes in inter-industry spending resulting from household spending. This spending comes from household income generated from the direct and indirect effects.”

A clear picture comes into focus when we look at participants’ pre-VIDA average annual earnings of \$11,169 and their average annual earnings, upon graduation, of \$52,894.

The Rio Grande Valley, a region of the country widely known for its agricultural significance, continues to benefit from the “harvest effect” created by VIDA. Each dollar our generous donors entrust us with is planted in our participants, and they, their families, and our region benefit from the bountiful harvest.

The best way to fight poverty is to empower people through access to quality education.

—John Legend

COMMUNITY PROFILE **PAINT BY NUMBERS**

“A picture paints a thousand words” is a well-known idiomatic expression. For VIDA, numbers paint far more than a thousand words.

As we study the median household income in Texas, as compared to that of residents in the Rio Grande Valley, we quickly realize the disparity. This is further validated as we look at the poverty rate, which is double—or greater—in our region than in the state. Our unemployment rate is also significantly higher. When we study the cycle of poverty, we confirm that individuals who live in these conditions often lack the resources to access and afford higher education and to persist, should they begin.

Almost 30 years ago, Valley Interfaith and business leaders from across the Rio Grande Valley came together to confront an even greater disparity head-on. Together, they created the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.

In Spanish, “VIDA” is the word for “life.” The founders of VIDA understood that, through the program they were developing, life would change for individuals, their families, and the region. Instead of a cycle of poverty, they envisioned this cycle of change—through education—significantly boosting the average household income, decreasing the need for government assistance, and increasing the region’s skilled workforce.

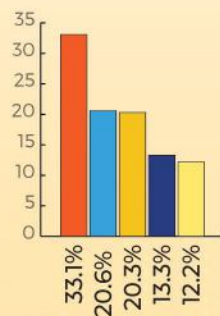
The program they designed, VIDA, provides much-needed financial assistance, in addition to individual and group counseling, addressing a wide range of topics to prepare participants for setbacks that may otherwise prevent them from completing their course of study. VIDA also offers volunteer opportunities, with the VIDA Team working alongside our participants as a way of expressing gratitude to local communities for their ongoing support.

VIDA has made a significant impact on our region, but with our front row seat in the gallery, the “Rio Grande Valley Paint by Numbers” paints a clear picture of the work that remains. With continued funding, the individuals represented by these numbers will step out of the cycle of poverty—and its labels of undereducated and underemployed—and into the VIDA cycle of change.

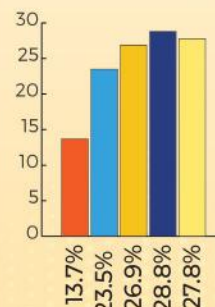
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (In 2023 dollars) - 2019-2023

● Texas	\$ 76,292
● Cameron Co.	\$ 51,334
● Hidalgo Co.	\$ 52,281
● Starr Co.	\$ 38,182
● Willacy Co.	\$ 45,645

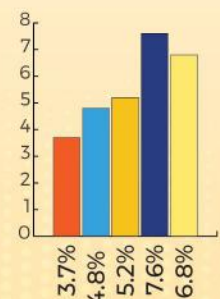
ADULTS 25+ WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE (2019-2023)



PERSONS IN POVERTY (PERCENT)



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (OCTOBER 2023)



Sources: Texas Workforce Commission, U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, and YCharts

Action is
the antidote
to despair.

—Joan Baez

VIDA

PHILOSOPHY

At the heart of VIDA's philosophy lies a steadfast commitment to the well-being of the individuals we serve. Central to this commitment is our unwavering focus on fostering socioeconomic development across the Rio Grande Valley. Recognizing that economic growth hinges on a skilled workforce, we have developed a robust model that guides participants toward targeted, high-demand careers offering competitive wages. At VIDA, we understand that merely securing employment marks just one milestone on the journey to sustainable prosperity. True success lies

in ensuring job retention; it is through this stability that our communities truly flourish. By retaining their positions, our graduates not only achieve self-sufficiency but also contribute as active, taxpaying members of society, providing for their families while bolstering the companies they serve. Through our investment in human capital, we empower residents of the RGV to break free from the cycle of unemployment and reliance on public assistance, enabling them to play an integral role in fostering a vibrant and thriving economy.

MISSION

At VIDA, our mission is fulfilled by empowering Rio Grande Valley residents to achieve economic prosperity through market-driven training, resources, and career pathways.

STRATEGIC MODEL

Within the Rio Grande Valley, numerous challenges--including poverty, limited support networks, financial stress, and the complexities of balancing academic pursuits with familial responsibilities--continue to hinder the path to success for many residents. These formidable barriers have historically obstructed the achievement of industry-recognized certifications and degrees, perpetuating socioeconomic disparities. It is precisely these circumstances that VIDA aims to address through its unique program model, targeting underserved demographics for empowerment and workforce development.

Through our strategic program model, VIDA has achieved a remarkable 91 percent persistence rate this fiscal year, a testament to our participant-centered approach. Each facet of our wraparound support services is meticulously crafted to address the specific challenges faced by our participants.

Our dedicated career counselors engage with participants individually, providing guidance on budgeting, financial planning, time management, and coping with personal stressors during weekly counseling sessions. In group settings, participants receive soft-skills training, including interview preparation, resume building, and effective study habits. Additionally, guest speakers enrich our program through their expertise in various fields, broadening participants' knowledge and life skills.

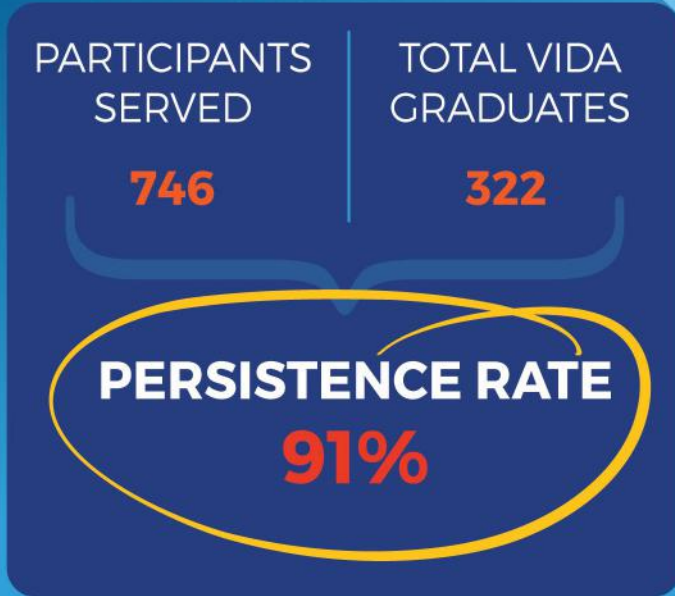
Recognizing that financial hurdles extend beyond tuition, VIDA offers tailored assistance with textbooks, transportation, childcare, and other essential expenses, made possible through the generous support of local and state governments, private foundations, and individual donors. While education forms the cornerstone of workforce development, it is our community partnerships and collaborative efforts that ensure accessibility to higher education through our comprehensive student-support approach, which epitomizes the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.

Don't let your past dictate who you are. Let it be the lesson that strengthens the person you will become.

—Author Unknown

FY 2023 - 2024 IN REVIEW

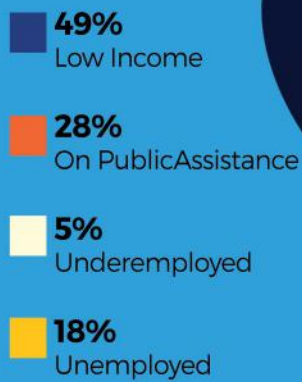
A PORTRAIT OF WHO WE SERVE



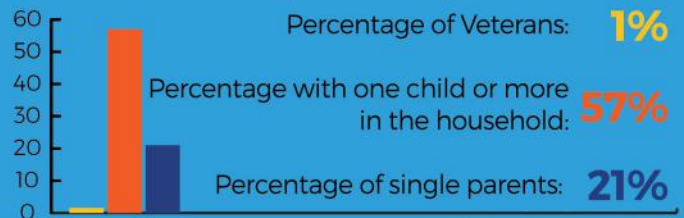
Ethnicity Percentage



Financial Profile



Gender Percentage



We must use our lives to make the world a better place to live, not just to acquire things. That is what we are put on the earth for. —Dolores Huerta

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SERVICE

We believe that service is more than an act. For VIDA, service is a powerful force for transformation. Through active collaboration with our student volunteers, we spotlight the many ways community service uplifts lives and strengthens bonds. These efforts also give us the opportunity to express gratitude to the organizations, businesses, and individuals who have supported VIDA's mission for nearly three decades.

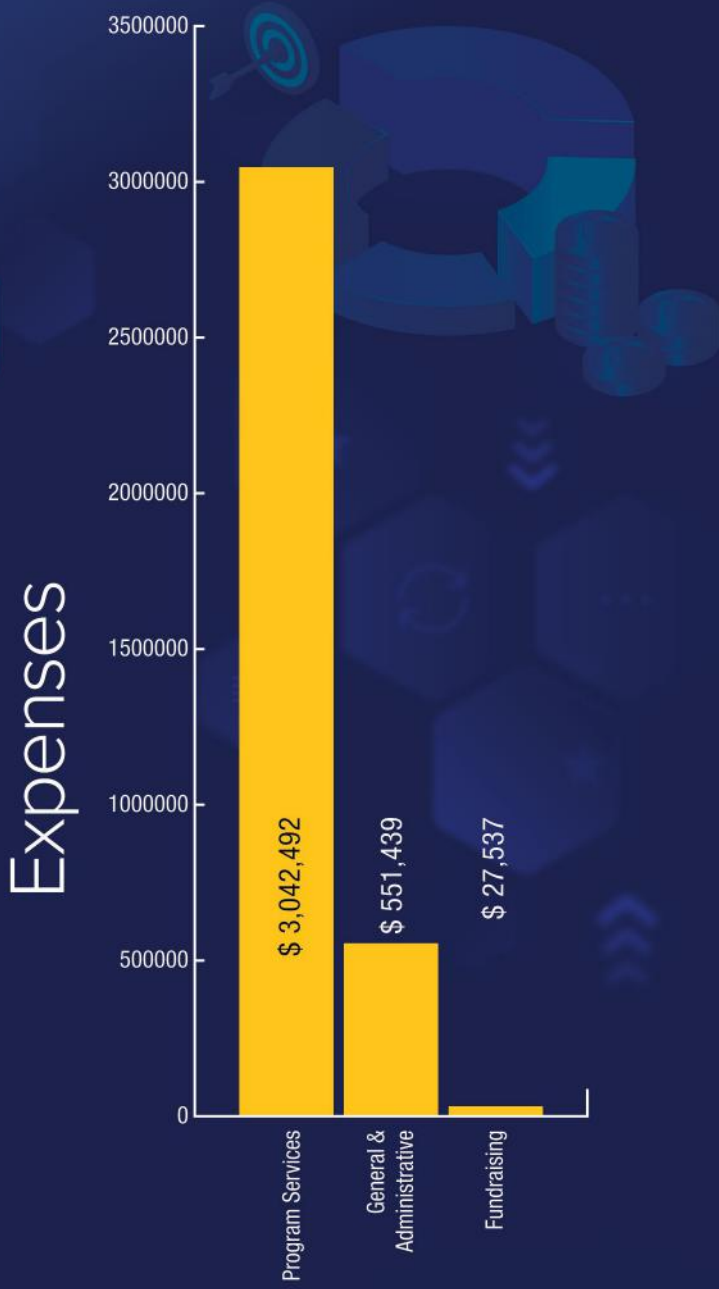
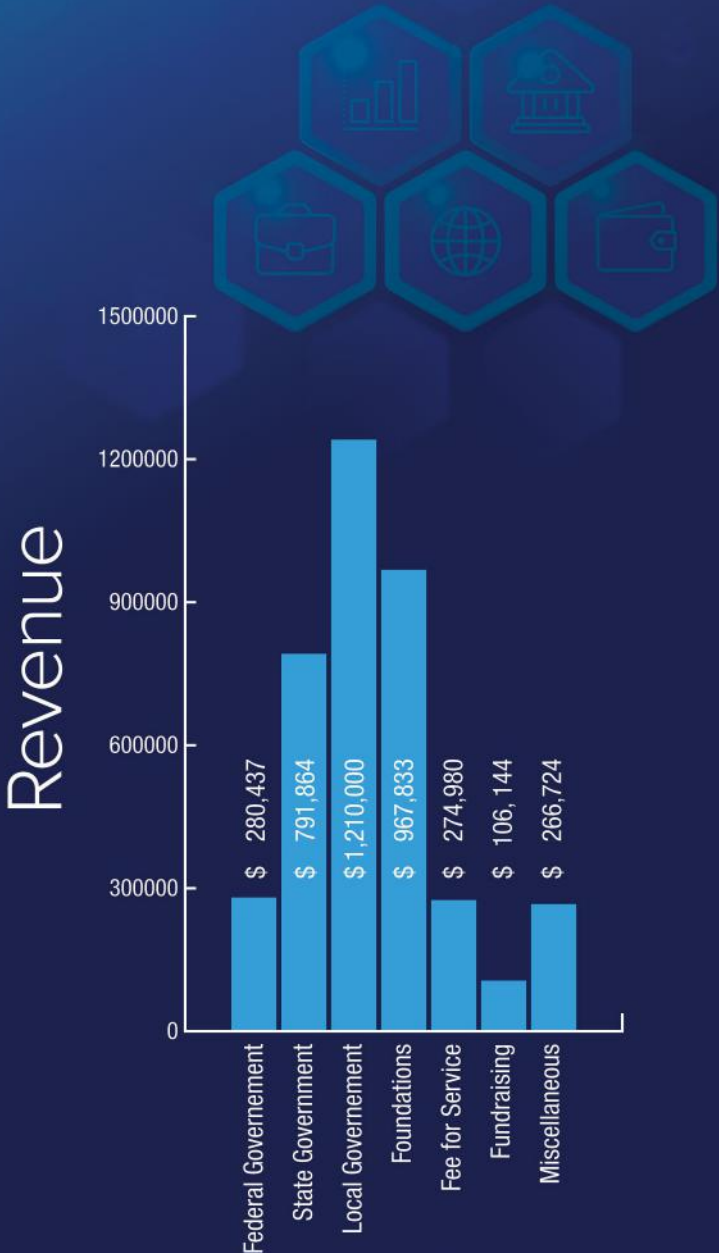
Our team and student volunteers lead by example, sharing their time, talents, and compassion to make a lasting impact. Together, we cultivate a culture of giving back, inspiring individuals to drive meaningful change in their communities and beyond. Through service, we empower hope and build a foundation for a stronger tomorrow.



Impacting Sustainable
Economic Growth in the Region...
One VIDA at a time



FY 2023 - 2024 REVENUE & EXPENSES



TOTAL REVENUE > **\$3,897,982**

TOTAL EXPENSES > **\$3,621,468**

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS
> **\$276,514**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FOUNDERS AND THE DIFFERENCE VIDA MAKES

Moving from east to west across the Rio Grande Valley, Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Starr counties comprise the region VIDA serves. Funding and support from our local governmental entities play a critical role in our success. These communities feel the impact of our work in countless ways.

*"We can choose to be a character in a story written by someone else or we can choose to be the author of our own story."
—Ruby Garcia*



Thank you

For all you do to make VIDA possible!

- City of Alamo
- City of La Feria
- City of Port Isabel
- City of Brownsville
- City of McAllen
- City of Weslaco
- City of Edinburg
- City of Mercedes
- Hidalgo County
- City of Harlingen
- City of Pharr
- Cameron County

FY 2023-2024 GRADUATES

AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS

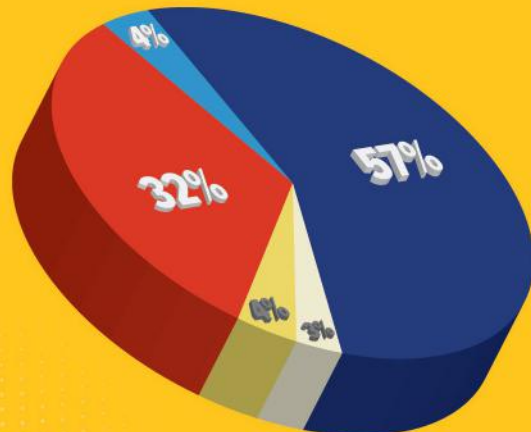
Pre-VIDA
\$11,169

Post-VIDA
Upon Graduation
\$52,894



VIDA TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Allied Health **57%**
- Business **3%**
- Educational and Social Services **4%**
- Specialized Trades **32%**
- STEM **4%**



\$2 MILLION + IN NON-LOCAL GRANTS FUEL VIDA'S GROWTH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.
—Booker T. Washington

VIDA is thrilled to announce the receipt of over \$2 million in non-local grants that will significantly enhance our workforce development and educational initiatives across the Rio Grande Valley. These generous contributions from key partners are instrumental in enabling VIDA to provide vital resources, training, and support for underserved residents in high-demand fields, such as health care, STEM, and skilled trades.

With the support--made possible by these grants--VIDA is thrilled to expand its impact and ensure that more individuals have access to the tools they need to pursue meaningful careers and achieve long-term economic mobility.

VIDA OFFERS SINCERE GRATITUDE TO THESE GENEROUS DONORS:

- ✓ Anonymous Donor
- ✓ Ascendium Education Group
- ✓ FHI 360's Compass Rose Collaborative
- ✓ Land O'Lakes Community Impact Council
- ✓ Moody Foundation
- ✓ Texas Talent Connection
- ✓ The Meadows Foundation





Felida Villarreal
President and CEO
Valley Initiative for
Development
and Advancement
(VIDA)



FELIDA VILLARREAL

NAMED TOP

30 UNDER 30

Hispanic Executive

Congratulations to **VIDA president and CEO Felida Villarreal for being named one of NextGen Collective's 30 Under 30 honorees for 2024!** This prestigious recognition celebrates 30 exceptional professionals (30 years old or younger) from across the U.S. who are making significant strides and setting new standards in their fields.

NextGen Collective is a movement for a new generation of Latino professionals, powered by Hispanic Executive. "By turning the spotlight to business' most influential Latinos, we help drive our community's unmatched economic, political, and social power. As we shape the dialogue on the cultural force that is Hispanic leadership, we amplify the voices of those driving growth in the global marketplace," NextGen Collective writes. "But Hispanic Executive is more than just a magazine, and those we feature are more than just executives. We are a key resource for Latino leaders, providing a platform for them to elevate their thought leadership and connecting them with those who are redefining the international business landscape."

As a nonprofit leader, Felida embodies the innovation, passion, and leadership that drive VIDA's success while inspiring others.

"I feel incredibly honored and humbled to receive this national recognition alongside fellow trailblazing Latinos like my former Sharyland High School classmate Samuel Garcia," Felida commented upon learning of this honor. "The future of our communities

is Latino, and this recognition is one I share with my entire team, board of directors, and mentors for their collective support in amplifying our impact. This is not just a personal achievement but a testament to the incredible wealth of talent and opportunity in the Rio Grande Valley. As someone born and raised here, I stand as living proof that our region's public schools and institutions, like South Texas College, are world-class. Thanks to innovative initiatives, such as STC's Dual Enrollment Program, I was able to jumpstart my career during high school and graduate with a bachelor's degree at just 20 years old. My journey underscores a crucial message to our youth: You don't need to leave the RGV to be successful. The foundations for extraordinary achievement are right here in our community. Con esfuerzo, perseverancia, y colaboración, tenemos un enorme potencial para seguir rompiendo barreras y creando más oportunidades para nuestra comunidad Latina. (With effort, perseverance, and collaboration, we have enormous potential to continue breaking barriers and creating more opportunities for our Latino community.)"

Felida possesses a decade of experience in accounting and financial management. She is a certified public accountant (CPA), holding a bachelor's degree in business administration, with a major in accounting, from The University of Texas - Pan American (now The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)) and a Master of Accountancy from UTRGV. In her professional career, Felida has excelled in nonprofit leadership and workforce development through strategic partnerships and resource development at VIDA.

To learn more about 30 Under 30 and others selected for the honor, type "NextGen Collective, 30 Under 30 2024" in your web browser.



PERSISTENCE MATTERS

My greatest point is my persistence. I never give up in a match. However down I am, I fight until the last ball. My list of matches shows that I have turned a great many so-called irretrievable defeats into victories.

—Bjorn Borg

When addressing return on investment and economic impact, it is imperative that we highlight a critical component:

PERSISTENCE RATE.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, in its most recent report on the subject, reveals, "The national persistence rate for students who started college in the fall of 2022 rose to 76.5 percent (+0.8 percentage points [pp] compared to the fall 2021 starting cohort)," adding that this is the second straight year of improvement and the highest rate in the last decade.*

Now let's turn our attention to graduation rates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in its most recent findings, "Among first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate degree at

2-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2017, about 34 percent attained their credential within 150 percent of the normal time required for completion of these programs. An example of completing a credential within 150 percent of the normal time is completing a 2-year degree within 3 years.**

In FY 2023 – 2024, VIDA's persistence rate **was 91%** significantly higher than the national figure.

Because we are required to use three years of data to determine the graduation rate for two-year degree-granting institutions, **VIDA followed their 2022 participants through 2024. For this cohort,**

VIDA realized an 83% graduation rate.

*National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Persistence and Retention, Fall 2022 Beginning Postsecondary Student Cohort: nscresearchcenter.org/persistence-retention

** National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, Undergraduate Graduation Rates: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>



VIDA'S 2ND ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

A SWING FOR SUCCESS

Keep your sense of humor. There's enough stress in the rest of your life not to let bad shots ruin a game you're supposed to enjoy. —Amy Alcott

VIDA hosted its 2nd Annual Golf Tournament, uniting community leaders, local businesses, and supporters to drive our mission forward. The event raised critical funds that allow us to continue our mission.



We extend a special thank you to our generous Gold, Silver, and Team sponsors for making this event possible. With your support, we are creating brighter futures and stronger communities.

- Amel Zamora
- Bubba's 33
- Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages
- Conzepto Magazine
- Eduardo Anaya Law Offices
- EKR Attorneys, LLP
- Falcon International Bank
- IBC Bank
- Judge Richard Cortez
- KWS Financial Group
- Lone Star National Bank
- Michael Garcia
- Pharr Economic Development Corporation
- Pharr Housing Authority
- RBC de Mexico
- Rio Grande Valley-Laredo Electrical
- Senator Morgan LaMantia
- Southern Industrial Careers Center
- South Texas Health System
- TagleRock IT Solutions
- Texas Regional Bank
- TrillaVision
- Villalobos Law Firm



Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death

—Albert Einstein

VIDA STAFF

COMMITTED TO LIFELONG LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



At Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA), we believe--to best serve our community--it is essential for our staff to continually grow and learn. Throughout the year, VIDA team members attended a variety of conferences, workshops, and professional development events to remain at the forefront of education, workforce development, and community engagement. These events provided invaluable opportunities to network, share knowledge, and explore new tools and strategies that can be implemented to enhance VIDA's mission.

We would like to express our gratitude to organizations including UnidosUS, Excelencia in Education, the BRIDGE Conference, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Texas HHSC Institute.

By keeping up with the latest trends, research, and best practices, we ensure that our programs are innovative and impactful, ultimately empowering individuals to succeed. Our commitment to ongoing learning and development is a key part of how VIDA continues to make a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve. We strive to foster a culture of growth, both within our organization and throughout the Rio Grande Valley.



VIDA RECOGNIZED NATIONALLY FOR ADVANCING LATINO STUDENT SUCCESS

VIDA is proud to reflect on a remarkable achievement—our Enhancing Career Pathways for Latinos in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) program was recognized as a finalist for the 2024 Examples of Excelencia. This prestigious recognition celebrates programs that intentionally and effectively support Latino students through culturally relevant, evidence-based practices.

VIDA's Enhancing Career Pathways program was one of just 18 finalists chosen from 103 submissions across 20 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Since 1995, VIDA

has worked to address high unemployment rates and workforce skills gaps in the Rio Grande Valley by providing tailored wraparound services that help students overcome barriers, persist in their education, and secure meaningful employment.

"We were deeply honored to receive this national recognition for VIDA's program," said Felida Villarreal, President & CEO at VIDA. "This recognition affirms our commitment to educational equity and economic empowerment, and we are grateful for our partners and supporters who help make this work possible." We thank Excelencia in Education for highlighting the impactful work being done to improve Latino student success.

VIDA

My vision for workforce development in the Rio Grande Valley centers on creating an ecosystem where nonprofits serve as catalysts for transformative economic mobility within our Latino community. —Felida Villarreal

Q & A WITH FELIDA & JULIAN CASTRO

VIDA AND HISPANIC EXECUTIVE'S AMERICAN DREAM SERIES

July 10, 2024, Hispanic Executive posted Uplifting Latinos: A Conversation with Felida Villarreal and Julián Castro on its website and its YouTube Channel. January 1, 2024, the Latino Community Foundation (LCF) named Julian, former San Antonio mayor and secretary of Housing and Urban Development, CEO of the organization. The video can be seen on the website or YouTube channel.

Part of Hispanic Executive's 2024 American Dream Series, this exclusive interview focused on driving economic opportunities for the Latino community. What follows is a Q & A with Felida about this interview.

Q: How were you chosen to conduct this interview for Hispanic Executive?

A: My connection with Hispanic Executive began serendipitously during a conference trip to Chicago, where they are headquartered. What started as a chance encounter evolved into a meaningful professional relationship after a meeting with their team. Since then, we've maintained strong ties, and I've been consistently impressed by the dedication of their president and the entire team to their mission of amplifying Latino voices across the nation. Their commitment to showcasing authentic leadership stories and creating platforms for Latino executives to connect and collaborate has been invaluable, not only for my professional growth but also for advancing VIDA's mission in workforce development.

This relationship exemplifies the power of authentic networking and shared values in creating lasting professional partnerships. Hispanic Executive's focus on highlighting Latino leadership aligns perfectly with our work at VIDA, where we strive to create pathways for economic mobility and professional advancement in our community.

Hispanic Executive



Q: What can you learn from the LCF?

A: We're especially interested in learning from LCF's successful model of community investment and their innovative approaches to Latino philanthropy. Their work in California provides valuable insights that could inform our strategies in the Rio Grande

Valley, particularly as we look to expand our impact and create sustainable funding streams for workforce development initiatives.

Q: What correlations do you see between the work of LCF and VIDA, especially in the areas of boosting economic opportunity and civic engagement within the Latino community?

A: At VIDA, we've observed that when individuals achieve economic stability through career advancement, they become more actively engaged in their communities and more likely to participate in civic processes. This mirrors LCF's understanding that economic empowerment serves as a foundation for broader community engagement and leadership.

Both organizations approach our work through an asset-based lens, recognizing the inherent strengths and potential within Latino communities--rather than focusing on deficits. Where LCF builds philanthropic power and civic leadership, VIDA creates pathways to economic mobility through education and workforce development. These complementary approaches address different aspects of the same goal: creating sustainable, positive change in Latino communities.

While VIDA focuses on breaking cycles of poverty through career pathway programs, LCF works to transform systems of philanthropy and civic participation. Both approaches recognize that individual success stories, while important, must be accompanied by broader structural changes to create lasting impact.

Q: Julian spoke about the importance of elected officials listening to the needs of the people they represent. What are some specific examples of how you have seen this work to benefit VIDA participants?

A: We've seen firsthand how elected officials' responsiveness to community needs creates tangible impacts for our participants. A prime example is our recent expansion of health-care training programs. When local officials listened to our advocacy about the critical shortage of health-care workers in the Rio Grande Valley and the growing waitlist of residents eager to enter these careers, they responded by

allocating additional funding through the American Rescue Plan Act. This enabled us to expand our nursing program capacity and create new pathways for allied health professionals.

One of the most compelling examples of how responsive leadership benefits our community is in the realm of supportive services funding. When we've presented data showing the direct correlation between comprehensive support and program completion rates, our elected officials have truly listened and taken action to continue investing in our program. They understand that technical training alone isn't enough; our participants need holistic support to overcome the barriers they face while pursuing their education and career goals.

Q: You and Julian addressed the role nonprofits play in investing in workforce development for the Latino community. Please explain your vision for the Rio Grande Valley.

A: My vision for workforce development in the Rio Grande Valley centers on creating an ecosystem where nonprofits serve as catalysts for transformative economic mobility within our Latino community. We must move beyond traditional workforce training models to build comprehensive career pathways that acknowledge and address the unique strengths and challenges of our region. This requires leveraging our proximity to the border as an asset, embracing our bilingual workforce as a competitive advantage, and building upon our strong cultural values of family and community.

In the RGV, nonprofit workforce development must focus on creating sustainable career trajectories--not just jobs. This involves deep collaboration with employers to identify high-demand occupations, particularly in sectors like health care, advanced manufacturing, and technology, where our community can build generational wealth. We must also strengthen partnerships with educational institutions to ensure our training programs align with industry needs while remaining accessible and culturally responsive to our Latino community.

Critical to this vision is the role of nonprofits in advocating for systemic change. We must continue

Q & A WITH FELIDA VIDA AND HISPANIC EXECUTIVE'S AMERICAN DREAM SERIES CONTINUATION

pushing for policies that support economic advancement. By combining direct service delivery with advocacy and community engagement, nonprofits can help create an environment where Latino workers not only access opportunities but thrive and advance in their chosen careers.

Q: Julian addressed “opportunity deserts.” Are there areas within the RGV you would consider opportunity deserts? If so, how is VIDA addressing this?

A: Yes, we definitely see opportunity deserts in the RGV, particularly in our rural communities, like Starr and Willacy counties and remote areas of Hidalgo County. These areas face multiple barriers to economic mobility: limited access to training facilities, scarce employment opportunities, inadequate public transportation, and insufficient broadband connectivity. This challenge is compounded by the fact that many residents are working multiple jobs just to make ends meet, making it even more difficult to access education and training opportunities that could lead to better-paying careers.

VIDA is actively addressing these opportunity deserts through several strategic initiatives. First, we've developed strong partnerships with educational institutions to ensure their programs are accessible to rural communities. Our career counselors work closely with these partners to coordinate class schedules and locations that accommodate our participants' needs.

Second, we've implemented a comprehensive transportation assistance program. Understanding that lack of reliable transportation is often the biggest barrier to participation, we provide gas cards to increase program completion rates for participants from rural areas.

Third, we provide targeted support services to help participants overcome technology barriers. Our career counselors help participants access resources for the online learning components of their education

while ensuring they have the support needed to succeed in hybrid learning environments. During the pandemic, this became even more critical, and we've continued to enhance our support services based on participant feedback.

Most importantly, we're working to create sustainable solutions through our partnerships with employers and educational institutions. Our team actively builds relationships with employers to understand their needs and connect our participants with job opportunities in their communities. We also advocate for expanded educational offerings in rural areas to create more accessible pathways to high-demand careers.

Q: Your statistics from Hispanics in Philanthropy are startling. What is VIDA doing to serve as disrupters of the current system?

A: The stark reality that less than 2% of philanthropic dollars reach Latino-based organizations--despite our community representing nearly 19% of the U.S. population--demands bold action. At VIDA, we're actively disrupting this inequitable funding system through several strategic approaches.

We're changing the narrative around Latino-led organizations by showcasing our proven impact through robust data and compelling success stories. We meticulously track and communicate our outcomes, from the 300% increase in participant earnings to our \$15.69 return on investment for every dollar invested. This data-driven approach challenges traditional funding biases and demonstrates the exponential impact of investing in Latino-led organizations.

We're also building new funding models that challenge conventional philanthropic practices. Rather than simply accepting traditional funding structures, we're developing innovative partnerships with private sector employers, creating fee-for-service programs, and establishing sustainable revenue streams. This helps reduce dependency on traditional

philanthropic sources while demonstrating our community's capacity for self-sustaining economic development.

Additionally, we're actively working to develop a pipeline of Latino philanthropists within our own community. By engaging our successful alumni and local business leaders, we're creating a new generation of donors who understand the importance of investing in Latino-led organizations. This "grow our own" approach to philanthropy helps ensure resources remain within--and directly benefit--our community.

Most importantly, we're using our voice and platform to advocate for systemic change in philanthropic giving. Through our participation in national networks and leadership roles in organizations like the Forbes Nonprofit Council, we're pushing for greater transparency in philanthropic giving and calling for specific commitments to Latino-led organizations.

Q: The idea of building a Giving Circle Network that cultivates Latino and Latina philanthropists sounds compelling. Do you foresee the creation of one in the RGV?

A: Absolutely! The potential for a Giving Circle Network in the RGV is not just compelling, it's transformative. Our region has a strong culture of collective support and community investment, making it naturally suited for the Giving Circle Model. What makes this particularly exciting is how it could reshape local philanthropy by leveraging our community's existing strengths.

I envision a network that starts with our VIDA alumni, professionals who have experienced, firsthand, the impact of community investment in their careers. Many of our graduates have tripled or quadrupled their income through our programs, moving from earning minimum wage to over \$50,000 annually. These individuals understand the power of strategic investment in education and workforce development, and many are eager to give back.

Q: You asked Julian what advice he had for Latinos in public service roles and those who want to mobilize more Latino voters to use their voting

power. What is your advice?

A: My advice stems from both personal experience and our work at VIDA, where we've seen how economic empowerment and civic engagement are deeply interconnected. First and foremost, I encourage Latinos in public service to remain authentically connected to their communities. Your lived experience and cultural understanding are strengths, not limitations. Use your unique perspective to bridge gaps and create meaningful policy changes that reflect the real needs of our community.

For those working to mobilize Latino voters, I emphasize the importance of connecting voting power to tangible community impacts. At VIDA, we've observed that when people understand how policy decisions directly affect their educational and economic opportunities, they become more engaged in the civic process. Make the connection clear between voting and kitchen-table issues like health-care access, educational opportunities, workforce development, and economic mobility.

I also strongly advocate for a year-round approach to civic engagement. Voter mobilization shouldn't just happen during election cycles. We must build sustained relationships within the community, develop young leaders, and create ongoing opportunities for civic education and engagement.

Most importantly, it is imperative that we demonstrate the power of collective action through concrete examples. Share success stories of how community advocacy has led to positive change, whether it's increased funding for education, improved workforce programs, or better community services. When people see their participation making a real difference, they're more likely to stay engaged and encourage others to do the same.



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

VIDA COLLABORATES ON GROUNDBREAKING NURSING INITIATIVE



Individually we're one drop, but together we're an ocean.
— Ryunosoke Satoro

VIDA, in collaboration with South Texas College (STC) and Intelligent Video Solutions, proudly hosted the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the installation of VIDA Nursing Simulation Centers at STC. This groundbreaking initiative marked a significant milestone in enhancing clinical training capacity and accessibility for underserved areas through cutting-edge virtual reality technology.

VIDA's investment in this innovative equipment reflects a transformative approach to workforce development, providing nursing students with unparalleled opportunities for immersive and hands-on learning. These state-of-the-art centers are setting a new standard for clinical simulation in the Rio Grande Valley.

A heartfelt thank you to the team at Intelligent Video Solutions for their expertise, guidance, and support in bringing this vision to life. Special gratitude also goes to South Texas College for their unwavering partnership and dedication to improving access to quality education for underprivileged communities.

This collaboration is a testament to the power of partnerships in creating lasting impact. Together, we will continue to transform lives and strengthen the workforce across the Rio Grande Valley, one individual at a time.





VIDA HOSTS **GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES**

VIDA AWARDED \$620,000 GRANT TO EMPOWER JUSTICE-IMPACTED YOUTH

If someone is going down the wrong road, he doesn't need motivation to speed him up. What he needs is education to turn him around.

—Jim Rohn

VIDA was awarded a \$620,000 grant from FHI 360's Compass Rose Collaborative (CRC), funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. This grant enables VIDA to expand its services to justice-impacted youth, ages 18-24, in the Rio Grande Valley. Through job training, mentorship, and educational support, VIDA helps participants overcome barriers to employment and education, equipping them with the skills needed for meaningful career opportunities and economic stability. This partnership strengthens VIDA's commitment to empowering young adults and fostering long-term success in high-demand fields.

VIDA would like to extend a special thank you to Judge Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt of the 449th District Court for her continued advocacy and for serving as our keynote speaker at this event.



You're off to great places. Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting. So ... get on your way.
—Dr. Seuss in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

VIDA GRADUATES STEP INTO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

South Texas College Graduation Ceremony

VIDA proudly celebrated the accomplishments of our Spring 2024 graduates during a grand ceremony held at South Texas College (STC). This event marked the culmination of months of dedication and hard work by our participants, who earned degrees from one of the Rio Grande Valley's and Texas' premier higher-education institutions.

The STC ceremony served as a powerful moment to recognize the academic milestones of our graduates, as well as the bright futures that lie ahead. Surrounded by faculty, staff, and supporters, this celebration was a testament to the perseverance and commitment our students have demonstrated.



Texas Southmost College & Texas State Technical College Graduation-Stole Ceremony

In addition to the STC ceremony, VIDA hosted an intimate graduation-stole ceremony for graduates from Texas Southmost College (TSC) and Texas State Technical College (TSTC). This smaller, personalized event allowed graduates to be celebrated in a more intimate setting, surrounded by their closest family and friends. It offered a heartfelt moment to honor the graduates' perseverance, achievements, and the bright futures that await them.

This ceremony reflected the deep connection between the graduates and their families, creating a space for reflection and celebration of the hard work that led them to this moment.



A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Partners

VIDA extends its deepest gratitude to South Texas College and Texas Southmost College, along with Dr. Ricardo Solis, President of STC, and Dr. Jesus Roberto Rodriguez, President of TSC, for their continued partnership and unwavering support of our mission to improve educational outcomes. Their commitment allows us to provide customized wraparound services that empower individuals to achieve academic and career success.

Congratulations to Our Graduates

We wholeheartedly congratulate all of our Spring 2024 graduates.

Your determination, resilience, and commitment to success inspire us all.

We look forward to the lasting impact you will make in your families, communities, and beyond!



VIDAS CAMBIADAS

LIVES CHANGED

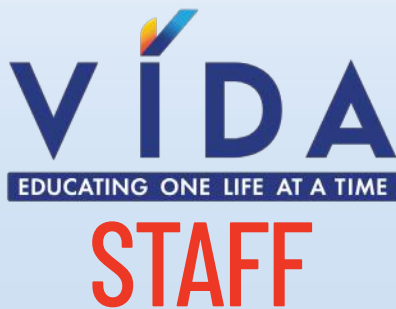
You are the only person on earth who can use your ability. —Zig Ziglar

In FY 2023-2024, VIDA served 746 Rio Grande Valley residents. Oh, how we wish we could share every story with you; however, this is an Annual Report...not the novel their stories would fill.

Their stories are about vidas cambiadas—lives changed. They are stories of perseverance; determination; falling and getting back up; tears of fear, frustration, and joy; accepting help; showing gratitude; and crossing

finish lines they never thought possible. Their stories reflect the realization that there does not have to be just one finish line in life. As their eyes open to their inherent abilities, many VIDA participants set new goals, knowing there are more lines to cross.

The stories we are sharing within this Annual Report are representative of the people in our community we are so honored to serve.



*No one can whistle a symphony.
It takes a whole orchestra to play it.*

—H.E. Luccock

FELIDA VILLARREAL | President and CEO

IRMA GARCIA | Chief Program Officer

ISIDRO RAMOS | Director of Workforce and Economic Development

VERONICA MONTEMAYOR | Director of Finance

AMANDA RODRIGUEZ | Director of Development and Communications

HONESTY MARTINEZ | Program Services Analyst

PRISCILLA ALVAREZ | Career Advisor

SAN JUANITA SANCHEZ | Senior Career Counselor/Case Manager

CLAUDIA MARTINEZ | Career Counselor/Case Manager

FELICIA ADAMS | Career Counselor/Case Manager

KATHIA MARTINEZ | Career Counselor/Case Manager

LAURIE CRUZ | Career Counselor/Case Manager

JOANNA DELGADO | Accounting Support Specialist

ALEXANDRA PARAS | Employment Coordinator

JORGE CONTRERAS | Industry Outreach Specialist

KLARISSA VARELA | Industry Outreach Specialist

MARYLOU SAENZ | Case Aide/Program Specialist

ARIANNA ZAMORA | Intake Specialist

CRISTINA YANES | Intake Specialist

SABRINNA INFANTE | Intake Specialist

CLARISA MAGAÑA

VIDA HELPS CREATE NEW LIFE FOR MOM OF SIX

When friends of Weslaco resident Clarissa Magaña told her about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, her goal suddenly seemed more viable. Acceptance into VIDA would allow her to obtain the degree she always wanted. Earning an associate degree in nursing would also be an important lesson for this single mother's six children.

Already a licensed vocational nurse, Magaña longed to return to school to become a registered nurse (RN).

"I had always wanted to one day become an RN to have more job opportunities and more pay," she said.

In 2022, Magaña felt the time was right. She gained acceptance into the ADN program at South Texas College and VIDA.

For nearly 30 years, VIDA has provided financial assistance, individual and group counseling, soft skills training, and other comprehensive services to unemployed and underemployed residents of the Rio Grande Valley ready to pursue a degree or certificate in a high-paying, high-demand field.

To thank the communities that have kept the nonprofit thriving for almost three decades, VIDA participants engage in a wide range of community service activities.

Providing Creates a Provider

Magaña graduated in December 2023, studied intently for the National Council Licensure

Examination for registered nurses and passed. She reached her goal of becoming an RN.

"VIDA made it possible for me to attend school, financially," Magaña said. "The ADN Program at STC is a fast-paced and time-consuming program that made it impossible for me to work and provide for my children. Let me not forget the support I received from my counselor, Kathia Martinez, checking up on me to see how I was doing in my classes – and mentally."

Magaña works for Aveanna Healthcare, putting her knowledge to use serving home-health patients. The significant increase in pay has made the intensity of the ADN Program well worth it.

"I will forever be grateful for all the support I received from VIDA," Magaña said. "Now, with this degree, I will be able to provide more for my children."

**Clarissa's story first appeared on the Valley Business Report website, valleybusinessreport.com, in September 2024.*



GEORGE IBARRA

DAD CHANGES LIFE THANKS TO DAUGHTER AND VIDA

According to the United States Census Bureau QuickFacts 2018-2022, in the four-county region of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties, an average of 67 percent of adults over the age of 25 hold a high-school diploma. A paltry average of 16 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.

While the financial burden of higher education — including tuition, books, room and board, tools and equipment, uniforms, transportation and child care — remains staggering for many American families, there is also a psychological aspect that can prove daunting when working toward a degree or skilled-trades certification. Budgeting time can be as important as budgeting money; study skills and anxiety also affect outcomes. Numerous other variables play into whether or not a person graduates. For many, completion offers the opportunity to end generational poverty.

George Ibarra knows about generational poverty, growing up in a financially impoverished home. Nevertheless, his parents understood the power of education. Ibarra graduated from high school, but the pressures of life prevented him from furthering his education.

Spanning Generations

Ibarra earned an associate degree in 2022 but knew a bachelor's degree in computer information technology would significantly increase his opportunities and his income; however, the potential barriers remained. In 2023, in his early 50s with a wife and four adult children, Ibarra learned about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement in an unusual way. His daughter, Jenavy, was already a VIDA participant.

VIDA is a nonprofit organization in the Rio Grande Valley designed to end generational poverty and create a new path of generational higher-education completion in high-demand fields. Families with greater financial stability lead to a more robust local

and regional economy, which often results in the growth of industries already in the region and the enticement needed to attract new companies to the area.

Ibarra applied and gained acceptance into VIDA, immediately taking advantage of the beyond-financial-assistance support the organization offers. He actively participates in group sessions, intentionally created to address the psychological aspects of higher education; volunteers as part of VIDA's commitment to show gratitude to the communities that support their work; and offers support and guidance to his fellow VIDA participants.

“VIDA has helped me financially and educationally,” Ibarra said. “The group sessions are very helpful in preparing us to become better students and to reach our goals.”

Ibarra will graduate from South Texas College in 2024, proving that persistence pays off and that it's never too late to pursue and achieve your goals.

“I want to be an example for my siblings to continue their education,” Ibarra said.

“I also want to make my parents proud after they made a lot of sacrifices for me in order for me to continue my education.”

**George's story first appeared on the Valley Business Report website, valleybusiness-report.com, in February 2024.*



MARIA QUINTANA



YOUNG FAMILY FINDS STABILITY WITH VIDA

Parenting happens to be one of the most difficult jobs of all. Single parenting increases that difficulty exponentially. The story of Maria Quintana exemplifies this, but her story is also one of triumph.

Quintana has two young children. Unemployed, she received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for her and her children's meals. Homeless, she and her children stayed with a friend three days a week. They then lived in her car the other four. Her father's passing in 2020 and family issues, she said, led to this situation. Although Quintana and her children lived with her grandmother previously, that ended with her grandmother's passing in 2021. The children's father, Quintana said, is not in their lives.

A Determination to Change Paths

Desperate to change the trajectory of her life and the lives of her children, Quintana applied to the Associate Degree Nursing Program at South Texas College and the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. Almost 30 years ago, leaders of Valley Interfaith joined forces with regional business leaders to create VIDA, with the vision of providing comprehensive support services that would allow adults in the Rio Grande Valley to end the cycle of poverty and create a better vida, or life, for themselves.

The founders knew the ripple effect of producing a well-educated populace trained in high-demand, high-paying fields. Success for the individual, they knew, would lead to a better outlook for their families, as well as increased spending power and the ability to end public assistance.

VIDA accepted Quintana, and she began the ADN Program in the spring of 2022. She said she knew for years she wanted to work in the field of allied health. She was first inspired by her grandparents, who suffered with a range of medical conditions. In high school, she earned certification as an emergency medical technician.

Now, Quintana's primary motivation is her children, determined to provide for them while fulfilling her dream of becoming a nurse.

Finding and Building a Home

As part of its comprehensive support services, VIDA referred Quintana to Christian's Manor in San Juan, a nonprofit organization for single parents pursuing higher education. Christian's Manor accepted Quintana and her children, ending their desperate attempts to find places to live and to sleep. VIDA also provides participants with financial assistance for tuition, books, uniforms and equipment, and other needs that, if left unmet, could become a barrier to education--a barrier too steep to scale.

Quintana is scheduled to graduate in December. Upon graduation, she qualifies to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses, a test nursing graduates are required to take and pass to become licensed registered nurses in the U.S.

"After graduation, I see myself being a nurse, working at a local hospital, helping take care of our community," Quintana said. "And, most importantly, once I am financially stable, I plan to buy a home we can finally call 'Our Home.'"

*Maria's story first appeared on the *Valley Business Report* website, valleybusinessreport.com, in August 2024.

MARISOL MUÑOZ

FUTURE NURSE FULFILLING DREAMS WITH VIDA

The second oldest of five girls, Marisol Muñoz has always felt, and embraced, the responsibility to serve as a role model to her younger sisters. When she graduated from the Academy of Health Science Professions in La Joya ISD, Muñoz felt the true weight of that responsibility.

Daughter of immigrant parents. First-generation college student. The pressure was on.

In high school, Muñoz completed training as a certified nurse assistant and a medical assistant, taking full advantage of these opportunities. At the age of 17, she worked part time as a CNA at a McAllen nursing home.

Graduating among the top 10 in her class, Muñoz then accepted a medical-assistant position at DHR Health in the Oncology Department.

“My parents’ hard work has always motivated me to work hard and make sure all their sacrifices were worth it,” Muñoz said. “Caring for others has always been one of my dreams – since I was little – so I knew that being a nurse was going to fulfill my dreams.”

Taking the Next Step

Muñoz applied to the Associate Degree in Nursing Program at South Texas College and was accepted. She started the program in Spring 2023.

Muñoz heard about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement and submitted her application. For nearly 30 years, VIDA has changed the lives of Rio Grande Valley residents by helping them earn often-elusive degrees and licenses in high-demand, high-paying industries. Financial assistance with tuition, books, equipment, uniforms and more is critical to the individuals VIDA serves. Yet the mandatory individual and group counseling and the opportunities to participate in community service

projects have proven to be equally imperative in overcoming the challenges of higher education.

VIDA accepted Muñoz, and in the fall of 2023, she began reaping the benefits they provide.

“Once I started the nursing program, I stopped working, making school my priority,” Muñoz said. “VIDA has helped me cover all of my extra costs for school, allowing me the liberty to not work and to be a full-time student, considering my dad is the only provider in my household.” She continues to work as a CNA during the summer months.

A Brighter Future

Muñoz will graduate in December, adding another title: First-generation college graduate.

“After graduation, I see myself being a nurse, working at a local hospital, and helping my community receive the proper care they need,” Muñoz said. “I want to work at a hospital as a Labor and Delivery nurse or as a hospice nurse. I also want to continue my education and obtain my BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) and later become a DON (director of nursing).”

Fulfilling the dream of a little girl, Muñoz clearly recognizes the impact of VIDA in making this happen.

“VIDA has granted me an opportunity to succeed as a student and as a community member,” she said.

*Marisol’s story first appeared on the Valley Business Report website, valleybusinessreport.com in July 2024.



MELBA GUTIERREZ

VIDA HELPS LOCAL NURSE HELP OTHERS

When friends told Weslaco resident Melba Gutierrez about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, she listened intently. At the time, financial struggles made it difficult for her to attend nursing school full time because she had to work to help with basic necessities for herself, her partner and their two daughters – a pre-teen and a teen.

Gutierrez, in her early 40s and a first-generation college student, applied to VIDA and was accepted.

VIDA is a nonprofit organization that has helped residents across the Rio Grande Valley jump over the hurdles they have faced in their pursuit of higher education. For nearly 30 years, VIDA has provided financial assistance, in addition to individual and group counseling to address hurdles such as stress, finances and time management. VIDA also teaches study skills, how to create a resume and interview skills. Additionally, VIDA invites guest speakers to support and educate participants on a variety of topics and offers opportunities for these students to participate in community-service projects as a way of showing gratitude to the region for its ongoing commitment to reversing poverty, underemployment and unemployment.

When Gutierrez applied to VIDA, she had a job with a health-benefits company, earning \$16.50 per hour. While she knew she wanted to work in health care, her vision involved directly helping--and advocating for--patients.

VIDA helped Gutierrez cover the cost of tuition, books and uniforms she needed for the Vocational Nursing Program at South Texas College. VIDA's assistance went far beyond this financial assistance.

"The moral support from VIDA, since day one, has given me the opportunity to engage with the community, as well as giving me networking opportunities," Gutierrez said. "They have fostered an environment where encouragement has been given to pursue my academic and career aspirations."

She took advantage of everything VIDA offers, attending individual and group counseling sessions and workshops and volunteering for community-service projects.

Gutierrez graduated in December 2023 with a certificate in vocational nursing. According to the STC website, the average wage for a licensed vocational nurse is \$25.41 per hour. She took the National Council Licensure Examination and passed, earning her license. In May, she plans to begin the Associate Degree Nursing Program at STC.

"I have made a lot of sacrifices while in nursing school," Gutierrez said, "and it hasn't been easy on me or my family."

But she soared over those hurdles, with VIDA's help.

"As for the financial support, it has significantly alleviated the financial burden associated with my education, making it more accessible to me during economic challenges. I did not work while attending nursing school full time. I was able to focus on my studies 100 percent."

*Melba's story first appeared on the *Valley Business Report* website, valleybusinessreport.com, in March 2024.



MICHAEL CASTILLEJA

A CLEAR EYE ON THE GOAL

Life hasn't been easy for Brownsville resident Michael Castilleja. Raised by his grandfather, he learned the value of money at an early age because it was hard to come by. When he completed high school, he faced a number of obstacles in his pursuit to break free of the cycle of poverty but Castilleja possesses a clear understanding of the value of education.

"Being in a Hispanic family in the United States, a good education has always been our golden ticket to the American dream," he said. But one of the greatest obstacles he faced involved getting the financial assistance he so desperately needed.

"Many institutions have failed to deliver aid to a student with big aspirations and dreams," he said during his struggle for financial freedom. Nevertheless, Castilleja remained determined not to let hopelessness win.

Castilleja, a first-generation college graduate, earned an Associate of General Studies, which allowed him to take one foot out of the cycle.

In March of 2023, he applied to Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. For nearly 30 years, VIDA has worked with its participants to teach them how to face – and overcome – obstacles that get in the way of their dreams. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization does this with financial assistance for tuition, books, tools and uniforms and with much more. Individual and group counseling provide all VIDA participants with resources on topics like how to manage their time and stress and with important skills, such as creating a resume and rocking a job interview.

VIDA participants get to attend sessions with guest speakers who are experts in their fields, educating and inspiring them. One day, these students may become guest speakers to future VIDA participants. VIDA staff and participants perform community service

across the Valley, too, learning the importance of civic engagement while supporting the communities that help fund the work they do.

Castilleja currently attends Texas Southmost College, where he is pursuing a degree in construction management. He works at a local car wash to help his grandfather with the bills.

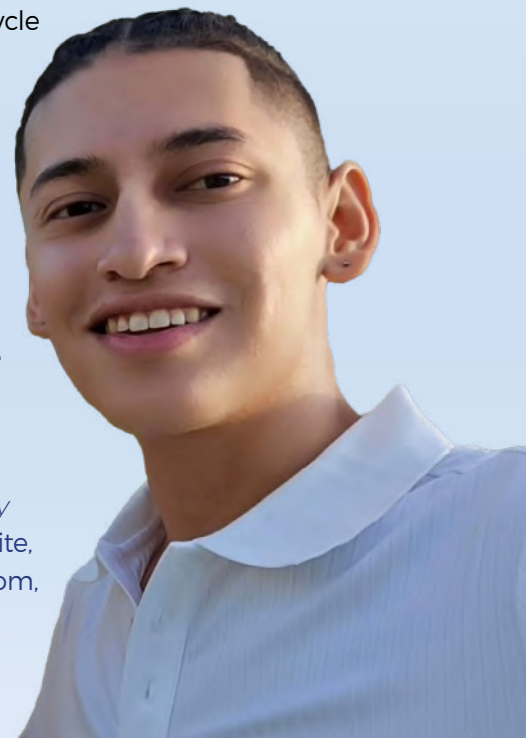
Through VIDA, Castilleja has received assistance with tuition and the tools needed for his coursework. He has taken advantage of the counseling sessions and guest speakers and has volunteered for community-service projects.

"VIDA has changed every conceptualization about aid institutions for me," Castilleja said. "VIDA has provided a new opportunity that will allow me to fulfill my goals without having to worry about any financial burdens." He added that this financial assistance has provided another "golden ticket" for him.

Next month, Castilleja will lift his other foot out of the cycle of poverty when he graduates from TSC.

As Henry Ford once said, "Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." For Castilleja, the coast is clear.

*Michael's story first appeared on the *Valley Business Report* website, valleybusinessreport.com, in April 2024.



SAMUEL ARGUELLAS

VIDA CHANGES SETBACKS TO COMEBACKS

Samuel Arguelles had excellent role models and grew up witnessing the importance of higher education. Unfortunately, that provides no guarantee.

"I am a second-generation college student; however, I lost my parents at a very young age and have been trying so hard to make them proud," Arguellas said.

His parents passed away from different forms of cancer, his dad while working on a PhD and his mom while working on her master's. Their passing changed the course of Arguellas' life.

In his early 30s, he was living in Mercedes, married and unemployed. Often, people don't know how to change the direction where they are headed. But Arguelles has a friend who changed directions with the help of Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.

Based in Mercedes, where Arguellas lives, VIDA has helped scores of Rio Grande Valley residents find their way out of underemployment and unemployment and into high-demand jobs, through education. Nearly 30 years ago, leaders of Valley Interfaith and the business community came together to create a program designed for this demographic, knowing that while financial assistance is critical, it must come with mental and emotional support.

VIDA offers individual and group counseling, educating participants about study skills, stress relief, resume building, and a number of other topics that can prevent roadblocks along their way to graduation and fruitful careers.

Arguellas applied and was accepted by VIDA in the summer of 2022. He enrolled in the Radiologic Technology Program at South Texas College last fall.

"Money was always a big challenge," Arguellas said. "I was not able to afford schooling. VIDA is helping me, not only financially but in many other ways, such as how to manage my time and setting clear priorities."

On the Right Track

Arguellas said he now has a routine and structure, both of which have helped him stay on the right track. And that's not all.

"I have made many friends in my program," he said, "and I have many goals I look forward to meeting."

Graduation and a promising career are within sight, scheduled for Summer 2024.

"I'm very thankful for VIDA," Arguellas said. "VIDA is making the impossible possible. Once I graduate and get a job, I'll be able to do things I wasn't able to before. Without the help of VIDA, I wouldn't be where I am now."

While most of his goals center around his career, Arguellas sees a bright future personally, as well.

"One thing I'm looking forward to is starting a family," he shared.

Arguellas will always carry his parents with him. With VIDA's help, he is back on the track they prepared for him.

*Samuel's story first appeared on the *Valley Business Report* website, valleybusinessreport.com, in December 2023.

PROSPERITY TASKFORCE PARTNERSHIP

THE LATEST FROM THE HIDALGO COUNTY

*A candle loses nothing of its light
when lighting another.
—Kahlil Gibran*



JUDGE RICHARD CORTEZ
HIDALGO COUNTY JUDGE

In our ongoing commitment to addressing systemic poverty in the Rio Grande Valley, VIDA proudly participates in the Hidalgo County Prosperity Taskforce, a groundbreaking initiative led by Hidalgo County Judge Richard Cortez. This collaborative effort is structured through four strategic focus groups that address the multifaceted challenges of poverty:

This innovative system enables Taskforce partners to seamlessly refer individuals to various support services while ensuring accountability and effective follow-up. Through UniteUs, we can now:

- Coordinate care across multiple service providers
- Ensure no residents fall through the cracks
- Generate data-driven insights into community needs
- Monitor service-delivery outcomes
- Track referrals in real-time

Basic Needs Focus Groups

- Food Security
- Healthcare Access
- Housing
- Transportation

Economic Empowerment Focus Groups

- Economic Development
- Financial Literacy
- Higher Education
- Workforce Development

Support Services Focus Groups

- Case Management
- Counseling
- Mentoring

Strategic Leadership Focus Groups

- Administrative Oversight
- CEO Leadership Council
- Policy and Advocacy

A significant milestone in this initiative has been the implementation of the UniteUs platform, a sophisticated referral database that revolutionizes how we connect residents with essential services.

The multi-sector approach of the Taskforce, enhanced by the UniteUs platform, aligns perfectly with VIDA's holistic vision of workforce development. By working alongside industry leaders and community partners, we contribute our expertise in career pathway development and workforce training while gaining valuable insights from other sectors. This collaborative framework enables us to better understand and address the interconnected challenges our participants face--from transportation barriers to health-care access.

Through our involvement in this initiative and our utilization of UniteUs, VIDA strengthens its role as a catalyst for economic mobility in the Rio Grande Valley.

The Taskforce reinforces our understanding that sustainable poverty reduction requires coordinated effort across all community sectors, and we are committed to supporting this vital mission through both strategic partnership and technological innovation.

VIDA TESTIMONIALS

EDUCATING ONE LIFE AT A TIME



AMBROSIO HERNANDEZ, MD
HONORABLE MAYOR, CITY OF PHARR

As a proud partner of VIDA, I have seen firsthand the incredible impact this organization has on the lives of our residents. Through our partnership and the Pharr EDC's \$100,000 contribution, **37 Pharr residents have gained access to the education, training, and resources needed to secure meaningful careers with competitive salaries.**

This collaboration is more than just an investment in workforce development; it's an investment in our people, our families, and the future of Pharr and our region. Seeing our residents achieve their dreams

and build brighter futures for themselves and their loved ones is truly inspiring. I am deeply grateful for VIDA's dedication to empowering our community and for the opportunity to work together toward a stronger, more prosperous Pharr.

I am excited to continue this partnership and witness even more success stories unfold. VIDA's unwavering commitment to transforming lives is felt every day, providing hope, opportunity, and a brighter future for so many in our community. The City of Pharr is honored to support this incredible work, and, together, we are creating lasting change that will benefit generations to come!



JUDGE EDDIE TREVIÑO
CAMERON COUNTY JUDGE

Judge in 2016. While we have seen growth in many areas of industry, the Pandemic certainly highlighted

"Increasing economic growth and job opportunities for our Cameron County residents has been a goal of the Commissioners' Court since I became County

the need to further support our Public Health infrastructure.

The work that VIDA has done in this area is commendable. We are honored to have been able to collaborate with VIDA in providing a response to workforce shortages with career training in healthcare fields. By providing education, student support and industry partnerships, VIDA is making a positive economic impact in Cameron County and helping residents establish lasting careers in healthcare."



Hon. Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt
449th STATE JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT JUDGE

As a District Court Judge presiding over the majority of juvenile cases in Hidalgo County, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of our partnership with VIDA in expanding workforce development opportunities for justice-

impacted individuals. Through this collaboration, we have not only provided participants with critical skills and employment pathways but also fostered a sense of hope and empowerment that can break the cycle of incarceration. Looking ahead, I am committed to deepening this partnership, ensuring that more individuals have access to the tools they need to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.

*Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits
of good put together that overwhelm the world.*

—Desmond Tutu

OUR PARTNERS IN CHANGING LIVES

Collaborative Partners

Angels of Love
ARISE Adelante
Brownsville Independent School District Continuing
Adult Education Center
Buckner International
Christian Manor RGV
Decibel Communications
DHR Health
Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley, Inc.
Hidalgo County Prosperity Taskforce
Hispanic Executive
Judge Adolfo E. Cordova Jr. of the 197th District Court
Judge Eloy Cano Jr. Justice of the Peace, Precinct #5-2
Judge Renee R. Betancourt of the 449th District Court
Judge Rodolfo "Rudy" Gonzalez, County Court #1
Judge Sallie Gonzalez, Justice of the Peace, Precinct #5-1
Knapp Medical Center
La Unión del Pueblo Entero
Latino Media Network
Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC)
Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Solutions
McAllen Public Library
Mission Regional Medical Center
Nexstar Media
Pharr Housing Authority
RGV Focus
Rio Grande Guardian
Rio Grande Regional Hospital
Rio Progress
Royal Anchor
South Texas Health System
Telemundo 40
Texas Border Business
Texas Workforce Commission
The GEO Group, Inc.
The Monitor
Unidos Contra la Diabetes
Unidos US
United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. (UMOS)
Valley AIDS Council
Valley Baptist Health System
Valley Business Report
Valley Interfaith
Valley Regional Medical Center

Educational Partners

Go Pharr Youth Build
Rio Grande Valley Laredo Electrical JATC
South Texas College

STX Metal Trades
Texas School of Health Sciences
Texas Southmost College
Texas State Technical College
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Fundraising Partners

Amel Zamora
Bubba's 33
Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages
Conzepto Magazine
Eduardo Anaya Law Offices
EKR Attorneys
Falcon International Bank
IBC Bank
Judge Richard Cortez
KWS Financial Group
Lone Star National Bank
Micheal Garcia
Pharr Economic Development Corporation
Pharr Housing Authority
RBC de Mexico
Rio Grande Valley-Laredo Electrical
Senator Morgan LaMantia
Southern Industrial Careers Center
South Texas Health System
TagleRock IT Solutions
Texas Regional Bank
TrillaVision
Villalobos Law Firm

Investment Partners

Adult Career Education (ACE) Program
Alamo Economic Development Corporation
American Electric Power Foundation
Bank of America
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas
Cameron County
City of Alamo
City of Mercedes
City of Port Isabel
Communities Foundation of Texas
Compass Rose Collaborative
Development Corporation of McAllen
Edinburg Economic Development Corporation
FHI 360
Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation
Harlingen Economic Development Corporation
Hidalgo County
Intelligent Video Solutions



Junior League of McAllen
 Knapp Community Care Foundation
 La Feria Economic Development Corporation
 Land O'Lakes Foundation
 Laura and John Arnold Foundation
 Mercedes Economic Development Corporation
 Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.
 Pharr Economic Development Corporation
 Pharr Housing Authority

South Texas Health System
 Texas Mutual Insurance
 Texas Talent Connection
 The Moody Foundation
 Trellis Foundation
 United Way of Southern Cameron County
 U.S. Department of Labor - Nursing Expansion Grant
 Weslaco Economic Development Corporation

EMPLOYERS WHO HIRED VIDA GRADUATES

FY 2023-2024

When opportunity presents itself, grab it. Hold on tight and don't let go. —Celia Cruz

1st Fire Protection Services
 Accuhealth Technologies, LLC
 AFSC Developers, LLC
 Aveanna Healthcare
 Bechtel
 Big State Electric
 Blue Oval City
 Brownsville ISD
 Cache Valley Electric
 Charter Communications
 CLM Enterprise Tax Services
 Colonial Manor Advanced Rehab
 & Healthcare
 Conti, LLC
 D&F Industries, Inc.
 DFG Solutions, LLC
 DHR Health
 DHR Health Urgent Care
 Dr. Darlington Udeh, MD
 Elevance Health
 Florida Power & Light Company
 Happy Valley Home Health Care
 Hidalgo County WIC Program
 Hidalgo Nursing and
 Rehabilitation Center
 Hometown Child Care
 IDEA Public Schools
 Jamestown C O Keppel Amfels PO
 Knight Health Holdings, LLC

Laredo Medical Center
 Lower Rio Grande Valley
 Development Council (LRGVDC)
 Marcus Drywall, Inc.
 Maximus, Inc.
 McAllen Refrigeration, Inc.
 Midland Women's Clinic
 Mission Regional Medical Center
 Mission Vascular & Vein Institute
 MVM, Inc.
 Palacios Family Medicine
 Panda Restaurant Group
 PayneCrest Electric, Inc.
 PALS Home Health
 People, Inc.
 Performance Energy Services
 Platinum Surgery Center
 Presidente Home Care
 Primoris Renewable Energy, Inc
 Primoris Services Corporation
 Rio Grande City Nursing and
 Rehabilitation Center
 Rio Grande Regional Hospital
 Rio Grande Valley
 Orthopedic Center
 RNWBL
 Seatrium AmFELS
 Shore Construction, LLC
 South Texas Foot and

Ankle Doctors
 South Texas Health System
 South Texas Health System
 Children's
 South Texas Health System Heart
 South Texas Specialties
 Southern Skill Trades
 Southwest Key Program
 SpaceX
 St. Luke's Baptist Hospital
 Submar, LLC
 Texas Southmost College
 The Medical Center of
 Southeast Texas
 TORMAX
 Tropical Texas Behavioral Health
 Valdovinos Welding
 Valley Baptist Health System
 Valley Regional Medical Center
 VHS Valley Management
 Company, Inc.
 Village Healthcare & Rehabilitation
 Welding Works International
 Windsor Atrium
 Windsor Nursing and Rehabilitation
 Center of Harlingen
 WIT Industrial Services
 ZF Sachs

Thank you!

WITH YOUR SUPPORT OUR WORK CONTINUES

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, VIDA relies solely on our local, state, and federal government; grants; private foundations; and donations from generous individuals and companies across the Rio Grande Valley.

The Economic Impact Study inside this Annual Report reveals that every dollar invested in VIDA converts to a return on investment of \$15.69. We've made it easy for you to support our work. Go to vidacareers.org and click on the "Donate" button. Fill out the simple form and make your one-time or recurring donation. Because of you, our mission of educating one life at a time is possible!

VIDA OFFICES

Mercedes Administrative Office | 417 S. Ohio Ave | Mercedes, TX 78570 | (956) 903-1900

SATELLITE OFFICES

McAllen Public Library | 4001 N. 23rd St. | McAllen, TX | (956) 681-3000 | (956) 903-1900 ext. 135

Pharr Housing Authority | Youth Build CED Center | 1003 W. Gore Ave. | Pharr, TX 78577

South Texas College Mid-Valley Campus | Building F - Office 136 | 400 N. Border Ave. | Weslaco, TX 78596

South Texas College Nursing Allied Health Campus

Building A - Office #128 | 1101 E. Vermont | McAllen, TX 78503 | (956) 903-1900 ext. 120

South Texas College Pecan Campus

Building K - Office #2.932 | 3201 W. Pecan Blvd. | McAllen, TX 78501

Texas Southmost College Campus

Lightner Center Building F - Office #100U
80 Fort Brown | Brownsville, TX 78520 | (956) 295-3670

WWW.VIDACAREERS.ORG

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 Instagram.com/vida_careers

 Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement - VIDA

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