

I Contact Person and Organization

Rodolfo F. Reyna
Executive Director
309 Cantu Street
P.O. Box 964
Del Rio, Texas 78841-0964
rody1992002@yahoo.com

Familias Unidas de Val Verde County
P.O. Box 964
Del Rio, Texas 78841-0964

II Purpose of Organization

Familias Unidas de Val Verde County is a community-based, non-profit organization dedicated to empowering and enhancing the lives of low income residents of Val Verde County. The current emphasis of Familias Unidas is to provide safe, healthy, attractive, and affordable housing for low-income residents. Familias Unidas believes that home ownership is one of the core values of the American Dream. Home ownership is that one element that has the attributes of stability, safety, family, community, and growth. When a family owns their own home they are building equity and establishing a source of capital. Familias Unidas strives to enable all families to be able to enjoy those attributes of home ownership.

III

a. Description of Innovative Project

Familias Unidas utilizes local, state and federal programs to provide the funds needed to build affordable, safe, and healthy housing for low-income families. Local governmental entities have provided properties which were formerly on the delinquent tax rolls for Familias Unidas to develop.

Participant families are selected from a pool of possible eligible applicant families using a point system designed by the board of directors. The point system favors families that have low-incomes, disabled members and elderly family members. Prospective applicants are required to complete a screening application. This is a "Sweat Equity" program and participant families are required to provide 60% of the labor to build the homes. Applications must state the family

members who will be responsible for providing the required labor. Upon selection the participant families are provided with the technical assistance necessary to complete applications for low interest or no interest loans (depending on the funding source) with which to build their homes. Most of the loan will go toward the materials for construction of the home and for licensed sub-contractors, when required, such as electrical and plumbing work. Skill and safety instruction and assistance are provided by a construction supervisor who is on site during the construction phase. In our current program design families are grouped in teams of four to enhance teamwork and facilitate construction. All the houses are completed at nearly the same time to provide the incentive for the families to work together.

b. Description of significant problems solved by innovation

There was a catastrophic flood in Del Rio in the fall of 1998 which destroyed approximately 200 homes in the neighborhood of San Felipe. Many families from the poorest part of town were displaced from their homes. Most of the families that lost homes were of low-income or very low income. The homes in which they lived had been occupied by their families for generations. Some of these homes were rental properties and many were sub-standard.

Part of the recovery process was the buy out of flooded properties by FEMA. These properties were then donated by FEMA to the City of Del Rio with the requirement that buildings could not be placed or erected on them. Families were placed in mobile homes located in quickly prepared mobile home parks. While this alleviated the immediate situation to some degree, it is only intended as a temporary solution and created an extremely dense population in an undeveloped area with no trees, no parks, and no playground.

This temporary solution it is not the most preferred solution. Children need to grow up in a more stable and permanent environment which includes a clean healthy living situation. Additionally home ownership is one of the core American Dreams and is central to building our great economy.

c. Description of demonstrated success and achieved outcomes for at least one year

Familias Unidas, families who came together to help solve their own problems, has the vision that all families can live in their own safe, clean and affordable homes. The united force of a group of families working together for a common good can produce tremendous results. Immediately after the flood Familias Unidas began the process of incorporating, obtaining tax exempt status and petitioning the city for housing solutions. Because the City's plan to develop low-income housing did not materialize, the City awarded Familias Unidas \$110,000 for self-help housing. The City also provided four contiguous lots to construct the homes. Nueva Esperanza I, our first project began in 2003. It consisted of four homes built by the families using "Sweat Equity". These homes consisted of three bedrooms, two baths, a laundry area, central heat and air-conditioning with ceiling fans in each bedroom and living room. The homes were completed in 2004 at a cost of \$27,000 each. Two of the homes have been successfully transferred to the participant families while the other two are still in the process of qualifying for

loans and will be transferred soon. All of the families make monthly payments which are placed in escrow for them. This improves their credit worthiness and will provide an additional down payment for the final transactions.

d. Examples of how this project is unique

Familias Unidas is a unique project in that it seeks to partner with local government entities and utilize non-productive properties which are owned by the entities. The list of government owned properties are provided by the local appraisal district and are searched for suitable properties which are then requested from the governmental entity. Upon transfer of properties to Familias Unidas, families are matched with the properties and development begins. Because the City or County provided the properties, the cost of each home is reduced by \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Since the families do most of the construction the loan goes primarily toward building materials and necessary sub-contracting.

Familias Unidas also uses volunteer help from a wide range of sources. In the past project volunteers were provided from the GEO Correctional Facility, Laughlin Air Force Base, churches, religious organizations, and civic organizations. Local suppliers have been very generous in supplying materials at very reasonable cost. Local sub-contractors, for those licensed skills necessary, have also provided services at substantially reduced rates.

IV Evidence that project may be duplicated in other rural areas of the state

Most governmental entities own undeveloped land from which they collect no taxes. These properties can be transferred to organizations such as Familias Unidas for redevelopment into neighborhoods for low income persons who want to build their homes through a self-help housing program. Housing development funds can then be obtained from USDA, TDHCA Colonias Initiatives, private lenders, or the entities themselves. Once the homes are completed and sold the entities can collect taxes and sell utility services.

The Community Council of Southwest Texas, Inc. has been studying our model and is looking for land in their service area to replicate the process that Familias Unidas uses. There is always a shortage of adequate and affordable housing for low-income persons in rural areas. We believe that our model can be used in other rural communities to alleviate this problem.