

## Poverty in America

By David Bradley

The current understanding of poverty in America has been on my mind lately. Over the holiday break, I spent time with a couple of Congressional Members. One Republican,

one Democrat. Both are senior Members of the House. They were around during the break, so we took advantage of the extra time we had. We had relaxed meetings while we talked poverty, politics, and a little baseball. I laid out what I thought was a persuasive case as to why Congress should be investing more in our programs right now. I argued that we should not be thinking about elimination of our programs at a time when the poverty business is booming. I realize there is a disconnect between what people are facing in their daily lives and how elected officials understand those struggles. Families are falling out of the middle class and are turning to our agencies in record numbers for a lifeline. Yet there continues to exist a general impression of poverty that is very different from what people experience - and many elected officials seem to not care. Many elected officials seem to not really care about poverty. Why is poverty not part of the Administration's agenda? Why are we not concerned about what is happening to one out of every two Americans?

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The

# BRAVO Newsletter

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## Project BRAVO Battles Increasing Poverty

El Paso resident **Vignette Mallouf** was in a near panic when she called Project BRAVO last fall. A series of financial setbacks had left her unable to work and unable to pay her rent in Central El Paso. Attempts by District 3 City Representative **Emma Acosta** to help her proved difficult. Project BRAVO staff members promptly made a referral to the El Paso County General Assistance Agency where she received temporary relief. But the long-term prospects for residents who find themselves in dire need appear grim for one reason: Many social service agencies are increasingly hard-pressed to help the growing number of residents who are joining the ranks of the poor.

"Project BRAVO is working very hard to help the residents in El Paso County to become self sufficient by providing referrals to other various help agencies, and acting as advocates on their behalf when contact-

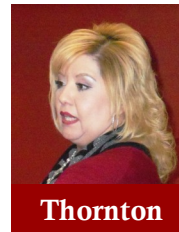
ing the utility companies," said Project BRAVO Community Services Manager **Trisha Thornton**.

One of the programs administered by Project BRAVO is assistance to low-income residents to help pay their utility bills. The bill-pay programs use funding from various sources including the **Texas Department of Housing and Community Services (TDHCA)**. Thornton said there is a huge number of clients that are either elderly, disabled or both who are in great need of the assistance provided by Project BRAVO. "In many

cases if we did not provide the assistance they would have to pull from money they would otherwise use to eat or feed their families in order to pay their utilities," said Thornton.

According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, the number of families who are now living below the poverty line is growing at a rate not seen in several generations. In El Paso County, 33.2-percent of children under the age of 18 are now living in poverty, according to the Census figures. Additionally, 19-percent of adults over the age of 65 are living in poverty in the County.

Despite the higher poverty numbers, Project BRAVO continues to serve as an important resource for residents in El Paso County who need a helping hand while they work to return to total self-sufficiency.



Thornton

## Employment Programs And Adult Education Classes Remain In High Demand

Project BRAVO's Employment Department remains one of the most active departments within the agency, according to Department Manager **Angel Vargas**. During 2011, the department succeeded in finding gainful employment for 180 individuals.

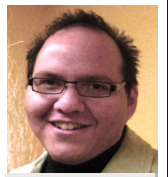
Project BRAVO's Adult Education Program also graduated a total of 64 individuals all of

whom received their General Educational Development (GED) certificates during the year.

"We will be offering citizenship classes on Mondays and Tuesdays from 3 to 5pm and we will begin with Basic Computer Courses on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> and consequently every Friday after that," said Vargas. Employment orientation

sessions will continue every Monday at 9am and at 2pm at the agency's main location at 2000 Texas Avenue.

During times of economic stress, the number of residents seeking employment and adult education services generally increase.



Vargas

We're on



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I am convinced now that we need to be integral in advancing the conversation about poverty in America. We need to be seen as relevant to whatever attacks, solutions, responses are discussed. We need to part of the discussions. These are huge issues facing our country and our communities. We need to advance America's awareness of poverty and fuel their desire to civic response. How does Community Action play a role in that?



*David Bradley is the executive director of National Community Action Foundation in Washington, D.C.*

## Wider Funding Support Sought for Housing Services

Increasing demands for housing services in El Paso County have prompted a move by the Project BRAVO Housing Services Department to seek additional funding support from the federal Housing and Urban Development Agency (HUD) and other resources.

So far, two major proposals have been submitted for the continuation of housing counseling services to help low-to-moderate income residents deal with numerous housing issues. The additional funding will be used to address matters related to foreclosure prevention, rental payment delinquency and homebuyer assistance.



counseling services as a component of Project BRAVO's goal

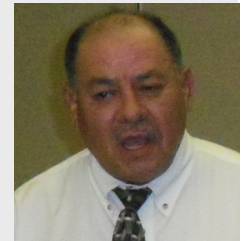
"The number of people unemployed in El Paso who need our services is at new high," said Project BRAVO Housing Manager **Apolonio Montejano**. "Project Bravo's long-term mission is building prosperity, thus it is vital to seek funding for

to improve quality of life, protecting assets, combat poverty and achieving a sustainable community," said Montejano.

Under grants from various governmental resources, Project BRAVO provides numerous housing services. The agency also partners with the City of El Paso and the El Paso Collaborative to provide various housing counseling services to low and moderate income residents.

Montejano said the additional funding support would also help local homeowners avoid foreclosure. According to RealtyTrac.com, a total of 153 homes in El Paso County were thrust into foreclosure in December, 2011.

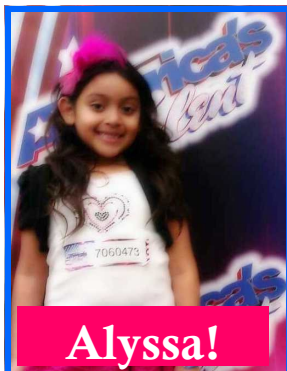
Project BRAVO also manages 36 housing units specifically for low-income, elderly and disabled residents of El Paso County. However, Montejano notes that the demand for affordable rental housing is now at an all-time high. Currently, the waiting period to secure a typical apartment unit at Project BRAVO is nearly three years.



**Montejano**

## ¿Que ondas? Project BRAVO Staff News

Congratulations to Caseworker **Veronica Ibarra** and her family on the birth of her FIRST granddaughter **Aubrey Lynn Amaton** born on December 22. The baby weighed in at 7-1/2 pounds, 12 ounces and 19 inches long!



**Alyssa!**

Congratulations to Caseworker **Cindy Magallanez's** daughter, **Alyssa Magallanez**, who made it to audition for the show "America's Got Talent". She auditioned January 14th in Austin, Texas. Alyssa was interviewed for being the youngest contestant of over 2,000

people auditioning. Alyssa states "I'm proof, you're never too young to win". Results are expected sometime in February for the next round. Good luck Alyssa !!!!

Happy Birthday to long-time Project BRAVO Adult Basic Education Instructor **Mr. Alfredo Munoz!**

