

*“The goal is for this committee to keep working. New projects will come.”*

— Lidia Contreras, Parents and Children Growing Together

# Program fosters growth

*Contreras works to help kids, parents*

By VÍCTOR ALMAZÁN  
For The Salinas Californian

Living in Chualar, a community with many needs, Lidia Contreras has devoted the past several years of her life to meeting them.

Among other activities, Contreras, 51, organizes the program, “Parents and Children Growing Together.” The bilingual program attempts to strengthen the bond between youths and their parents.

“It seeks to reinforce the relationship among neighbors, too,” Contreras said. In her capacity as a teaching assistant at Chualar School, she held a meeting in February with parents of pre-school students to apply for a grant from the Community Foundation to finance the program. The foundation replied in May with a \$3,000 grant.

“Parents and Children Growing Together” will present a series of six workshops: Creativity, Reading Together, Discipline, Security and Family, Quality Time and a final wrap-up meeting.

“This is only the beginning,” Contreras said. “The goal is for this committee to keep working. New projects will come.”

Contreras, a native of Michoacán, México, who has lived for 26 years in the United States, also has been organizing her neighbors in Chualar, where she has lived for more than 20 years, to demand better services in the neglected hamlet.

“I started to get involved when my children were in pre-school,” she said.

“I have been a member of the school council, member of teachers and parents groups and member of the community committee which seeks solutions for problems like the water,” she said.

About one year ago, Cal-Am, the water company that supplies Chualar, increased the cost of the water. From a monthly flat rate of \$21, some bills shot up to \$300. Chualar residents organ-



SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Chualar School students surround teaching assistant Lidia Contreras on Dec. 1

## LIDIA CONTRERAS

■ **AGE:** 51

■ **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT:** Organizes the program Parents and Children Growing Together.

■ **WORK:** Teaching assistant at Chualar School.

■ **EDUCATION:** Associate's degree in teaching from Hartnell College in Salinas.

■ **PERSONAL:** Lives in Chualar with husband, Arturo, and their children, Alberto, 15, Arturo Jr., 21, and Claudia, 26.

ized and the community committee negotiated a better deal.

“Now we are paying the rate of \$21 plus 67 cents for each gallon,” Contreras said.

The cost of the water is only one problem; the lack of recre-

ation space is another concern. “Over here, there's nothing; there's no parks, no recreation spaces,” she said.

Another triumph of the community committee is the new gym at Chualar's only school,

which serves as community center, too.

Contreras hopes that a development in Chualar the committee has been working on for several years becomes a reality in the future, because it will mean more services for the community's residents, young and old.

“If some developer builds a development, it must include a park,” she said.

In 1998, a developer cancelled the project called Rancho Chualar II, after strong opposition from residents of nearby Chualar Canyon. The project would have included a park, a new school and a new sewage system.



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