

STEPPING UP FOR CHILDREN

Sixteen local Spanish-speaking parents graduate from 6-week course designed to improve communication and build leaders.

Story and photo by
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Leticia Reyes is hoping that a six-week parent leadership course she just completed at Las Palmas Elementary School can pay educational dividends, over time, for her 4-year-old daughter, Carla.

"Our main goal," she said, "is to get the parents involved in the educational system. We need to raise the percentage of children that go to the university. We need to support our kids from our house. Maybe we don't have time to come to school to help the teacher, but

from our house we can help the children. We can motivate, so when the children come to the school, they know they are coming because they need to achieve a big goal. They have a vision."

Reyes is one of 16 Las Palmas Elementary School parents who graduated last week from the Parent Leadership Institute, an academy designed to teach leadership skills to Spanish-speaking parents who want to get involved in their children's education.

Instructor Edgar Medina said the participants already formed a group, Padres Unidos (Parents United), to try to im-

prove the level of participation by Latino parents in the school system and the PTA.

Medina came to San Clemente from the Orange County Human Relations Commission to teach what is known in Spanish as the Instituto de Liderazgo para Padres. The new program is the brainchild of the San Clemente Youth and Families Task Force, a grassroots group formed in 1991.

Lee Steelman, a task force board member, said a door-to-door survey identified social needs of people living in target neighborhoods of San Clemente, primarily where apartment dwellers live. Working

through Mission Hospital and the Orange County Human Relations Commission, the task force created the leadership institute to improve the residents' voice in the broader community.

A grant from the St. Joseph's Health System will fund a full-time Human Relations Commission staff person to continue the work in San Clemente.

For info about the program or the task force, call the city's task force liaison, Denise Obrero, at 949-366-4755.

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