

Together.

Juntos 4-H – where families, communities, challenges, dreams, and opportunities grow together.

However, much like all 4-H programs - the revived smiles, improved grades, and home life milestones accomplished thus far didn't bloom without the support of exceptional volunteers. Nathaniel and Irene Flores have poured into the *Juntos 4-H* program as parents and dedicated leaders for three years.

"*Juntos* in general means together," Nathaniel said. "Here, everybody comes together in the community."

Juntos 4-H has been impacting Latino youth in Bexar county since 2015 when a 3-year partnership grant between National 4-H Council and New York Life ignited the program at Armando Leal Jr Middle School.



"My husband and I, we take the kids to community service events, we give them rides, we help with family nights, setups and breakdowns," Nathaniel's wife Irene said. "Whatever the kids need – we're there."

After quickly seeing the impact *Juntos* made on not only their daughter Jewelianna, but their family as a whole, the Flores couple stepped into volunteer positions to ensure that other kids and families would be able to reap that same benefit.

"It's an indescribable feeling when you see these kids smile when three years ago they didn't do that," Nathaniel said. "Fast forward three years later and they won't shut up and it's not a bad thing – I love it, hearing them laugh and play around."



Studies have shown that at-risk youth are likely to drop out of school in tenth grade, so *Juntos 4-H* targets those students in 8th grade by giving them opportunities for educational and personal growth with hopes of involving their families as well.

"Some of the families are broken and what's missing in a lot of those families for so many of the older young men in our group is the male figure, so they have Mr. Flores there to talk to them and help them through challenges," Irene said. "I help the young ladies with anything they need moving forward in life."

“Mr. Dad” and “Mrs. Mom” push their Juntos youth to not only make strides in improving their educational or family habits, but to seek out additional opportunities for personal growth and life-changing experiences.

“I had the privilege of winning an essay contest how this program impacted my life and I got flown out to Florida to shoot a video with an astronaut,” Juntos youth and National 4-H ‘Day in the Life’ contest winner, David Tierranegra said. “It was so cool and it just goes to show that if you take opportunities, it can benefit you in the long run.”



After a few road bumps along the Juntos leadership road, the Flores couple fully embodied the meaning of togetherness and decided to keep the opportunities for youth rolling - no matter what it took.

“You can’t even imagine, they’re always there,” Tierranegra said. “It’s not even a question, you can just go to them and talk to them and they’ll answer you with maturity and it’s just great.”

The Flores’ daughter Jewelianna Flores not only reached top-student status in the early stages of the program, but is following her parents’ selfless example by serving her 4th term as the Juntos 4-H President, and seeking any opportunity to give back to her community.

“They care about all of us, me because I’m their child, but the other kids too, they just love and adore them,” Jewelianna said. “They just really love and care for the children and they just want to see them grow and graduate and make it to college.”

The grant for the Juntos 4-H program has ended, but Texas A&M University San Antonio isn’t letting that sense of togetherness fade by offering a classroom space for meetings to be held and a gardening program to bloom.



“We told the students before the year was over what could happen this year for Juntos,” Nathaniel said. “With the students aware of what was going on, they made the effort to make sure everyone showed on our first family meeting for the year and with so many showing up, that gave us the hope that we may still be able to continue Juntos.”