

# The Almanac

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## **Holiday Fund: Parents in need have a friend indeed in the Learning Together program**

by [David Boyce](#)

Back in 1972, the United Negro College Fund and the Ad Council launched a fundraising campaign with a slogan that has held up well and that few would argue with: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Such a fate is unlikely for Karina Carlos, 5, of East Palo Alto and her 15-month-old brother, Juan. Their mother, Lizbeth, is in her third year participating in Learning Together, a San Mateo County program that matches case workers with parents wanting to help their young children with social and emotional development and get ready for school.

"I've learned how to raise my kids in the right direction," says Ms. Carlos in an interview at Green Oaks Academy in East Palo Alto. "I'm a better mother."

Among her new skills: choosing more nutritional foods, helping her kids with reading, and reducing the time they spend in front of a TV.

"Karina used to watch a lot of TV, but then she got into books," Ms. Carlos says. "She picks up books and reads and reads and reads and tells you every story."

Karina, once extremely shy, is also increasingly outgoing and bilingual, her mother said. Initially, she communicated only in Spanish with her mother, but began to respond in English after a home visit from Learning Together case-worker Lisa Moody.

Ms. Carlos, Ms. Moody says, is a sponge for new information. "I'm definitely learning to learn," Ms. Carlos says. "I think you never stop learning when you're a mother."

Asked about her hopes for her children, she replies: "I hope for them to look at life differently and for them to be able to express themselves as to what they need and what they want and what they expect of people when they're older."

Learning Together, in its third year as part of Youth and Family Enrichment Services in San Mateo County, employs three case workers to work with 20 families each, Ms. Moody says. Using a defined curriculum, the case worker makes twice-monthly home visits to impart best practices to parents until the children are 6 years old.

"If we can start the kids off early, with early education and training for their parents, we can see a community transforming to a community of success for their kids," Ms. Moody says.

The harshness of low-income living can intervene. For a family short on food, the case worker can refer them to a food bank. If rent money is a problem, the case worker can start the ball rolling for rental assistance.

**Information:** Youth and Family Enrichment Services has offices at 610 Elm St., Suite 212, San Carlos, CA 94070. Call 591-9623.