

Project Cariño

Project Cariño is an on-site, school-based; faith-centered behavioral health program sponsored by McCurdy Ministries that works collaboratively with McCurdy Charter School to provide counseling and therapeutic services for McCurdy Charter School students and their families as well as McCurdy Ministries program participants and their families. Project Cariño started in 1984 with a grant from the United Methodist Women Prayer and Self-Denial Offering.

For 30 years Project Cariño has provided school-based counseling services emphasizing and directed toward supporting healthy student development with a focus on issues critical to young people's lives. Services begin with a referral from students themselves, a family member, or a teacher or administrator. Several sessions can render information that can be helpful in assessing the nature of the issues at hand and then services may center on collaborating with families, school personnel and off-campus service providers to focus on and address behavioral symptoms and other mental health barriers to learning.

Project Cariño therapists provide the necessary support to students to help them adjust to challenging circumstances and to learn to become more successful in school. Services include: individual, family and group counseling, peer conflict mediation, empowerment training, and on-campus crisis support to deal with issues that are keeping students from being successful in school. They also offer support and specialized skill enhancement training to teachers and school staff to support students' therapeutic gains. Consultations and classroom presentations are also available in areas regarding safety, bullying, and circumstances in the home that may interfere with student success, such as alcohol and substance abuse and other special topics. Information and referrals to appropriate extended services in the community are also provided as needed.

Service learning is one of the goals of McCurdy Charter School and McCurdy Ministries Project Cariño supports this goal in numerous ways. The Big Buddy Mentorship Program and the Peer Mediator Program are two examples in which this is done. The Big Buddy Mentorship Program matches high school students with elementary school students to establish relationships throughout the school year which help both the big and little buddies grow and develop socially. Peer Mediators are students trained in the delicate work of conflict mediation and lead their peers toward peaceful resolutions. These "peace keepers" answer the call to be activists in reducing violence on campus and help create a culture of safety.

Project Cariño services are provided by two full-time therapists as well as post-secondary interns training in the fields of counseling and social work.

Amanda Trujillo-Gonzales, LISW is director of Project Cariño. Along with providing therapy to students, Amanda supervises several interns and projects throughout the school year. Her specialties include infant mental health, trauma-informed therapy and play therapy. She earned her degrees from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, NM, and has been working with children and families in the Española Valley for the past twenty years.