



Nominee: Mercy Hinojos, AmeriCorps State Member – Texas HIPPY Corps (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)

Eligibility: AmeriCorps State Member (through OneStar TX Commission Portfolio)

Award Category: Most compelling member experience in building an ethic of civic responsibility or having positive change in their life

Nominator: University of North Texas – Texas HIPPY Corps and OneStar Foundation (Texas State Service Commission)



Texas HIPPY AmeriCorps member Mercy Hinojos grew up in Odessa, TX moving from one low income neighborhood to another. A remote town in West Texas best known for its depiction in *Friday Night Lights*, Odessa's economy is tied to the oil industry and fluctuates between "boom" and "bust." Growing up, Mercy's family was poor and could rarely afford luxuries like birthday and Christmas presents. Her single mom did what she could to keep Mercy and her sister housed and fed: she worked two jobs, took in ironing, and refused to go on welfare.

In school, Mercy was always shy and didn't catch on as quickly as other kids. She spent her elementary years hiding in the back of the classroom hoping the teacher wouldn't see or call on her. Then in 4th grade, Mercy was assigned to the infamous Mrs. Lock, the strictest teacher in school. That was the year something changed for Mercy. Even though Mrs. Lock was stern, she was fair and self-composed – a true supportive adult who believed in her students' abilities. She began to admire and trust Mrs. Lock, gaining confidence in her ability to achieve. Through secondary school and even after graduation, Mercy kept in touch with Mrs. Lock as one of her role models.

Mrs. Lock has since passed away, but Mercy has dedicated her adult life to giving back to others. She aspires to have that same positive, lifelong impact on the parents and children she now serves as a proud AmeriCorps member with Texas Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-School Youngsters (Texas HIPPY) in her hometown of Odessa. Having grown up in the same neighborhoods where she now serves, Mercy has firsthand knowledge of how to help families like hers with their issues and concerns in order to further their children's educations, continuing to "pay it forward" by channeling Mrs. Lock's example to inspire HIPPY families to believe in themselves as home educators.

One of the first HIPPY parents Mercy visited with, Sandra, was wary and reluctant to let an outsider in. During Mercy's initial home visits, Sandra withheld, citing that she didn't feel she could ever learn to teach her child. But just as Mrs. Lock hadn't given up on Mercy, Mercy didn't give up on Sandra. She met with Sandra weekly, persistently, and the two women eventually built a strong rapport.



Over time, Sandra was so successful in preparing her daughter for school that she is now performing at the top of her first grade class. In Sandra's own words, "Mercy showed me how to teach my daughter. My daughter now loves school and wants to keep learning. The Pre-K teacher was surprised that she could already write her name, knows her colors, speaks very well and asks questions during story time!"

With Mercy's encouragement as a HIPPYCorps member, Sandra is now also taking GED classes to finish high school. Mercy hopes that one day Sandra will become a HIPPY AmeriCorps member, paying it forward yet again by helping parents like herself.

Mercy Hinojos recently completed her final AmeriCorps service term. She began serving with Texas HIPPY in 2012 and completed four consecutive, Half Time terms of service.