



Learning, Building, and Growing Together

“Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez, my great aunt and uncle, lived with the value that the community takes care of each other,” said Ana Gonzalez. In the 1970’s, natural gas was discovered on the Martinez’s ranch, leading to a small fortune, so they were able to be of service to their neighbors as their long standing values



THE JUNIOR BOARD OF THE
 GUADALUPE AND LILIA MARTINEZ
 FOUNDATION HAS A BUDGET OF
\$1,000
 TO ALLOCATE TO ORGANIZATIONS
 IN THE COMMUNITY.

dictated. Ana continued, “They donated money to those less fortunate and had a deep appreciation for education. If you were willing to put forth the effort to learn, they would help financially. When it came time to make decisions regarding their estate, they wished for their assets to continue to support their community, and enlisted my mother and father to help them figure out how to do it well.”

Setting up and running the foundation has been a family affair. Ana’s parents did all of the research

and talked with the estate planners. Ana’s brother is a “financial guy” and established policies to guide investment practices, and Ana contributed her talents in marketing and communications. Ana shared, “It is truly special to be able to use the education my uncle gifted us to work towards fulfilling his incredible vision. The foundation only has four board members, no staff, and three grandchildren ages 15, 13, and six, so we are all in this together.”

In 2010, the family adults attended the Association of Small Foundations’ (now Exponent Philanthropy) conference where Ana attended a “life changing breakout session on engaging youth in philanthropy.” As the family reviewed their conference experience, they decided they would involve their kids—the grandchildren—when the parents felt the kids were old enough. In 2014, Brendan (Ana’s son) and Nadia (Ana’s niece) had their own “life changing” moment attending the Youth Philanthropy Connect (YPC) conference in Disneyland at the ages of 13 and 11, respectively.

Brendan said, “Going to the YPC conference really helped us think about what we would



like as a goal and what we can actually accomplish. I decided I wanted to be part of the YPC leadership team because I need to learn more about the grantmaking process. The best advice I received from peers at YPC was to follow my heart to the organization I want to fund the most and the one that needs it the most.”

 Tip: Attend a youth philanthropy conference to learn from your peers and hone your grantmaking practice.

The parents and youth have worked hand-in-hand to set up the foundation’s junior board. They together established a starting budget of \$1,000 that the junior board allocates however they wish to organizations that applied for funding through the foundation’s normal process. To facilitate a focused grant allocation conversation, Ana’s generation hand-picked 13 applicants (all previous grantees) with focus areas that would be most relatable for the junior board (like autism, anti-bullying, and child illness). The junior board received the mission statements for all 13 organizations, their needs statements along with general descriptions of the organizations, and any notes from previously conducted site visits. On figuring out where to start, Brendan identified learning as the first step. He shared, “My mom sits with us and helps us to look into organizations. My mom and uncle both learn with us and help teach us.”

“When we meet as a family to decide what organizations to fund, we are going to think through who has what resources, and where and who really

needs it the most. We know south Texas and especially Laredo. We focus on this area to continue the legacy even though it isn’t where we live.” While the board was having their 2015 Thanksgiving meeting, the junior board held their first solo meeting in another room. After making their funding decisions together, they presented their vision for grants—including amounts and rationale—to the foundation’s board. Through the junior board in 2015, Brendan and Nadia said, “We gave grants to:

- Laredo Animal Protective Society (LAPS), because animals have the same basic needs as humans;
- PILLAR (a non-profit mental health organization whose goal is to reduce suicide, bullying incidents, substance abuse/use behaviors, and increase access to mental health care services) to prevent bullying, suicides, and help with interventions;
- Families for Autism Support and Awareness, because kids and their families deserve our support;
- Communities in Schools because all children should be able to graduate from high school with an amazing high school experience and be able to go onto college;
- Make a Wish Foundation, because every child deserves to have something awesome happen to them; and
- Children’s Advocacy Center of Laredo to help the children heal at a young age so the abuse they suffered from doesn’t affect them as they grow older.”

After presenting their grants to the board, Brendan and Nadia also asked for funding to attend the YPC Conference in July 2016 to help them continue to develop and hone their grantmaking skills. Brendan said “There is a lot to know and YPC teaches us so much.” The board is evaluating their request and planning to support them in their endeavors.

The junior board shares their funding allocations with the recipients directly. For those organizations receiving grants from both the foundation and from the junior board, the award letters state, “The junior board has something it would like to discuss over a conference call.” In these calls, the junior board makes sure to share the “why” of their funding, and organizations have been appreciative of the transparency and the process. After one call, Ana reflected with Brendan, “This is why we do this. Did you hear the tone in the executive director’s voice? She is telling you more about their organization because she is so excited and wants to share that with you.” The calls have deepened learning about the grantee organizations, and also about the joy of doing work in the community.

The family hopes to integrate a follow-up in-person reflection conversation, but with school schedules and geography challenges, they are using phone calls for now. The adults and youth are committed to trial and error learning, and share a mutual respect for each other. Ana shared, “We got so lucky that the kids wanted to do this. They are continuously very open to opportunities even though they may not fully understand everything. They actually feel guilty about not being able to help everyone, which they learned at a recent YPC gathering is a feeling shared by adults and youth in philanthropy alike.”

Ana said, “I am constantly in awe of our junior board. They are creative, ambitious, and confident. When you have three generations working towards a common goal, it can be a juggling act because there are different ideas, different ways of learning, and different ways of doing things. The key is to be open-minded, respect one another, and to never stop learning. It is what Guadalupe and Lilia showed towards their community. And it is our job to continue their legacy.”



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This case study was written by Lauren Hasey Maher and developed for Foundation Center’s Youth Giving project. Photos provided courtesy of the Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Foundation. Visit youthgiving.org to view other free resources related to engaging young people in grantmaking.
