

Clarissa Valdez, a member of Greater Houston Community Foundation's Latino Giving-Houston Giving Circle, and her mother, Alice Valdez, participated in GHCF's Legacy Project.



THE LEGACY PROJECT

ALICE VALDEZ

Musician, educator, advocate, and MECA founder

The Legacy Project, launched in 2019, is a program open to all current fund holders, as well as those wishing to make a legacy gift in the future. Understanding true donor intent involves understanding donors' stories, their plans, and the impact they want to have now and in the future. Our team of philanthropic advisors will help you navigate the legacy planning process from start to finish, and provide custom giving options based on what matters to you.

Part of the legacy planning process is a voluntary audio recording session. Specially trained GHCF team members help you document your story and your legacy in the community by asking tailored questions about your philanthropy, or by facilitating the process while you speak with a loved one. Read on to learn a little bit about Alice Valdez's philanthropic journey.

Alice's advocacy work started in the 1960s with her initial brush with social justice reform, after her

first public encounter with institutional racism. Alice's high school was selected to join the Texas Orchestra—part of the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA)—and invited to perform at the annual TMEA conference in Houston. A Black classmate of Alice's was barred from sharing the same hotel and from eating at the same restaurants as the other students of the Texas Orchestra. Her orchestra teacher gave his students two options: attend the conference without the Black student or protest the TMEA and advocate for the student's inclusion. Alice and her classmates chose to support their fellow musician and they succeeded in their efforts, allowing all students to attend the conference together. The incident left a lasting impact on Alice and taught her how the arts can bring people together, no matter their circumstances. Alice went on to graduate with a Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Texas at El Paso and earned her certification to teach instrumental music at all grade levels in Texas.

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When Alice moved to Houston in the early 1970s, many inner-city Houston schools did not have music education programs; this was a stark contrast to her experience growing up in El Paso, where most schools had band or orchestra programs. After becoming familiar with arts education programs in Houston, Alice quickly realized that inner-city schools of color would only receive funding for arts education if they were part of magnet programs or arts-oriented schools like the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA). Recognizing this gap in art education services inspired and influenced Alice to get involved with community philanthropy at St. Joseph Catholic Church in the Old Sixth Ward.

To build upon the spirit of the community, Alice founded and organized, along with the Morin, Salinas, and Zermeno families, St. Joseph's Fun 'n Food Fest. Following on the success of the festival, Alice founded an after school arts program, St. Joseph Multi-Ethnic Cultural Arts. She described the incorporation process as "on-the-job training" and marked her first steps into nonprofit management. In 1991, the organization became Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA). The nonprofit remained at St. Joseph for nearly fifteen years, completing several public art projects, like the *Resurrected Christ* mural inside the parish, until settling in the historic Dow School building in 1993.

MECA fosters the growth and development of underserved youth and adults through arts and cultural programming, academic assistance, community building, and support services. The organization assists over 4,000 students and their families each year through their social support services, multicultural artistic performances and events, and arts education. The goal of MECA is to cultivate self-esteem, discipline, and cultural

pride in their students. One of the unique offerings of MECA is that it is at the intersection of social services and arts education. With Alice's guidance, MECA has provided participants and families with extensive counseling for alcoholism, drug addiction, and abuse as well as social service referrals. Alice recognized the need for such services early in her teaching career, as she faced many hardships balancing her family life and professional aspirations. MECA's innovative approach to combine social services and arts education under one nonprofit is not typical for arts organizations, but Alice's advocacy efforts have impacted thousands of Houstonians over the course of her remarkable career.

Under Alice's leadership, MECA has received numerous awards and recognitions, including a Point of Light designation by President George H. W. Bush. Alice is also lauded for her contributions to the visual arts and community parks—namely, initiating the planning and directing the construction of the Old Sixth Ward Art Park in inner-city Houston, and has gone on to direct many major public sculpture and mural projects throughout the Houston area. Alice sees her nonprofit endeavors as a way of giving to her community.

Are you interested in sharing your story? We would love to hear from you!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE LEGACY PROJECT

To learn more, please contact **Jennifer Touchet**, Vice President of Personal and Family Philanthropy, at jtouchet@ghcf.org or 713-333-2228.

If you are a professional advisor, please contact **Susan Zarich**, Director of Advisor Relations, at szarich@ghcf.org or 713-333-2203.