

# Buckner, volunteers make dream home a reality for Valley family

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Every day for several months, the DeLeon family walked together to the edge of their lot, where the sparse grass and dusty soil meet the street. They turned around and stood together, admiring their house as it took shape, eagerly anticipating the day they could move in.



Ofelia and Jaime De Leon and their four children moved out of a tiny one bedroom trailer and into their new home in the Rio Grande Valley this past year thanks to the support of Stonegate Church of Midland, Texas. (PHOTO/Chelsea Quackenbush/Buckner International) The DeLeons celebrated Christmas in that new home, thanks to volunteers from [Buckner International](#) and [Stonegate Fellowship](#) in Midland. The marigold-colored house provides a stark contrast to the dusty, brown landscape—not to mention the tiny, mint-green trailer house behind it where Jaime and Ofelia DeLeon and their four children used to live.

The mobile home had no bathtub or water heater, so they bathed outside in

the summer and heated water on the stove for the children's baths in the winter. With no sink inside, they had to carry water in from an outdoor spigot. There were no closets, so clothes were piled up on tables. All six shared a bedroom, with half the family in one bed and half in another.

When Buckner International staff first met the family, they could see living conditions in the mobile home posed a health risk. The roof had a leak, and a swath of black mold grew across the ceiling. Banelly, the DeLeon's 5-year-old daughter, suffered from allergies and coughing fits. She had an inhaler to manage her symptoms, but Buckner staff knew they needed to treat the root cause.

### **Permanent solution**

They started by getting rid of the mold and patching the leak, but the family long had outgrown the cramped trailer. They needed a more permanent solution.

"The DeLeon family has many strengths," said Andrew Trujillo, case manager at the Buckner Community Transformation Center in Penitas. "They are attentive and involved parents, and they are highly motivated to pursue a better future. They just needed some help along the way."

Jaime DeLeon is a seasonal worker in the orange orchards, earning \$200 to \$250 a week working six days. When citrus season ends, he takes odd jobs in construction, and money gets even tighter. Ofelia DeLeon stays at home to take care of their children, who range in age from 1 to 9.

As she talked about the family's struggles, the tears welled in her eyes. She recalled her children often asked: "When will we have a house where we can run and play? When will we have a bathtub to bathe in like other people?" It tortured her not to be able to give them an answer or provide them with what they wanted and needed.

Things started turning around last year when, through the help of Buckner, Stonegate Fellowship, a Texas Baptist church in Midland, began to work with the family and start construction on a new house. The DeLeon family secured a building permit and prepared the foundation of the home with the help of their neighbors.

### **Volunteers arrive**

Volunteers from Stonegate worked together with Jaime DeLeon and a dozen youth leaders from the Buckner community transformation center to build the exterior structure of the home in fewer than five days. Stonegate volunteers returned to the Rio Grande Valley to install the bathroom, plumbing, water heater, insulation and sheetrock in two of the rooms.

Settled in their new home, the DeLeons have adapted to their new way of life. Ofelia DeLeon attends sewing classes and parenting classes at the Buckner community transformation center, and Jaime DeLeon is working in the citrus harvest.

“Their daughter, Banelly, is excelling in school,” said Andrew Trujillo, case manager with Buckner Children and Family Services. “Jaime Jr. is doing well in school but struggling a little in reading. ... Ofelia said that the family is doing very well, and that they are advancing.”