

Hands of Hope changes women's lives

January 13, 2020

SAN MARCOS—Charlotte Evans has worn many hats since she retired from her career as an educator.



Charlotte Evans

Officially, she served first as a mentor and eventually as lead coordinator at [Hands of Hope](#), a ministry serving undereducated women in Hays County and the surrounding area. Unofficially, her roles include encourager, fundraiser and event planner.

Hands of Hope is a volunteer-operated ministry that teaches job skills and life skills in a Christian context to unemployed or underemployed women in the San Marcos-Kyle-Buda area between Austin and San Antonio.

“Most of the women who come to us do not have a high school diploma or GED,” Evans said. “They are single mothers who have experienced abuse. Some have lost their children to CPS (Child Protective Services). Some experienced addiction. And almost all have lost hope.”

Teaching life skills and job skills

Hands of Hope originally was organized about 15 years ago as Greater San Marcos [Christian Women's Job Corps](#), a ministry of Woman's Missionary Union.

The first classes began in a public housing complex. Before long, the ministry needed more space, and First Baptist Church in San Marcos opened its doors.

Hands of Hope offers ten-week sessions twice each year, providing a broad curriculum of life-skill development, pre-job training and Bible study in a setting where women help women. Four days a week from 8:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., women attend classes such as "Skills to Pay the Bills" and "Money Management," as well as individualized computer training and other courses.

Guest lecturers and certified teachers from the community speak to the women about employment opportunities and social services. With the exception of a van driver and child care workers, everyone who serves Hands of Hope is a volunteer.

Each student has a trained volunteer mentor who meets with her weekly, helps set goals and prays with her for at least six months after graduation.

Loved, accepted and affirmed



Hands of Hope participants celebrate a birthday. (Photo courtesy of Hands of Hope)

Participants experience much-needed affirmation and acceptance at Hands of Hope. For instance, the ministry throws a birthday party for each student on her special day.

“Some of the girls tell me this is the first birthday party they’ve had since childhood,” Evans said. “Volunteers bring gifts for each girl’s birthday.”

At Hands of Hope, women are loved, not judged, she emphasized.

“We see them opening up to the love and grace of God in their lives,” Evans said. “We are not successful with all. We are only planting seeds that we may never see grow. However, we work to stay in touch with our alumni. Some of those seeds develop into beautiful, successful women who have made a change in their lives and especially in the lives of their families.”

After students complete the ten-week program, Hands of Hope recognizes their achievement at a graduation ceremony, complete with caps and gowns, with formal invitations sent to family and friends.

At the ceremony, the women give testimony about their journey through Hands of Hope.

“I loved that the teachers and mentors shared their stories with us and let us know that they are human and have faced problems in their lives. But

with God on your side you can get through anything,” one Hands of Hope participant said.

Support for the ministry

In addition to the facility and van First Baptist Church provides, Hands of Hope also receives support from other churches, individuals, mission organizations, Bible study groups and civic clubs.

Materials are supplied at no cost to students, along with preschool child care, transportation and a daily meal. A clothes shop allows the women to select items for themselves and others.

Churches around the state help support the ministry through their gifts to the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#).



Each spring, Hands of Hope hosts a high tea—“Tea-N-More”—as a fund-raiser for the ministry. (Photo courtesy of Hands of Hope)

“Each spring, we host a fund-raiser that has become a favorite of the ladies of San Marcos,” Evans said. “This is a high tea known as “Tea-N-More,” where the ladies are encouraged to dress up and wear pretty hats. Volunteers decorate individual tables with their own china, crystal and beautiful centerpieces. Ticket sales and table sponsorship help support this ministry.”

Several years ago, a scholarship was set up through grants to help Hands of Hope graduates further their education. Some have attended community college. Some have completed nursing or dental assistant training. Some have begun taking university classes.

“My time at Hands of Hope is something I will carry with me forever,” one graduate of the program said. “It was a life-changing experience.”

Evans regularly speaks to local civic groups about Hands of Hope. Applicants often come from these organizations. And churches in the area help spread their story.

“After women complete our program, we want them to take this away: We want them to know the love and grace of God—to know forgiveness and that he will help them to forgive those who have hurt them in the past,” Evans said. “We want them to know he has a plan for their lives.”

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This is part of an ongoing series about how Christians respond to hunger and poverty. Substantive coverage of significant issues facing Texas Baptists is made possible in part by a grant from the Prichard Family Foundation.