

# Texas WMU builds bookcases for the Borderlands

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GEORGETOWN—Members of [Woman's Missionary Union of Texas](#) may have been surprised to discover their annual meeting conducted against a background roar of electric drills and sanders. But when the sawdust settled, 70 bookcases stood ready to benefit impoverished children, thanks to their efforts.

At the Woman's Missionary Union of Texas Annual Meeting in Georgetown, Jo Hans of San Antonio, who turned 90 April 21, participated in building bookshelves to promote literacy among low-income families along the Rio Grande. (PHOTO/Literacy Connexus)

As part of Texas WMU's Unhindered 101 campaign, members joined Books for the Border, a project of [Literacy Connexus](#), to provide print-deprived homes with books and bookcases. Unhindered 101 challenges women to move beyond church walls to meet needs and share Christ. For many, taking up hammer and drill in a stand against illiteracy was a first step in accepting the challenge.

"We didn't know how it would go over," WMU Executive Director Sandra Wisdom-Martin said. Women arrived dressed for a conference, not a construction site. Considering many participants lacked familiarity with carpentry tools, it was impossible to predict how the project would be received.

"But, it turned out to be a good partnership," Wisdom-Martin concluded.

During three conference breakout sessions, women flooded the Books for the Border workstation. Most were surprised at how quickly and simply the bookcases came together, and several groups opted to stick around to build a second and sometimes third unit.

“An exciting thing about this ministry is its appeal to all ages and backgrounds,” Literacy Connexus Executive Director Lester Meriwether said.

Jo Hans of San Antonio, who turned 90 April 21, can attest to that. She built her first bookcase on the first day of the annual meeting and returned the second day for a second opportunity. But Hans noted she found no challenge operating power tools. World War II, she worked on B-17 bombers as a member of an all-women repair crew.

Her steady hands today can probably be attributed to the service she regularly provides at home. “I’m very involved with WMU in my church,” she said. “We make teddy bears from scratch for the Ronald McDonald House and other organizations, and it is my job to paint the eyes and noses.”

In addition to building bookcases, WMU members donated 2,000 children’s books to be distributed through Books for the Border projects. The new and gently used books will go toward beginning home libraries, which include a Bible, a health literacy book and an assortment of children’s books.

Books for the Border has provided more than 700 bookcases and beginning home libraries to families in the past three years. The goal is to improve educational outcomes for children and adults, as a first step in seeking long-term solutions to rural poverty in Texas.

WMU members made progress toward this goal by sending bookcases and books in three directions. [First Baptist Church of Athens](#) picked up one-third of the bookcases for delivery to colonias near Laredo, where they will

be distributed at family reading fairs. The second group stayed in Georgetown for a mission action project with the Boys and Girls Club. The final third went home with annual meeting participants as starting points for Books for the Border projects in their own churches.

The bookcase project was a joint effort of WMU through the [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#), Literacy Connexus, and Texas Baptist Men, who paid for the lumber. McCoy's Building Supply of Georgetown supported the event by pre-cutting the lumber.

But the key players were the WMU members themselves, who embraced the Books for the Border vision, took up their power tools and proudly wore sawdust as evidence of their unhindered service.

"Next year," said Janie Salazar as she prepared to head home to Littlefield, "we can do better. Next year I'm bringing my nail gun."