

# Dignity in Action

JULY 2015

GROW TOGETHER PROJECT



## Reaping the Rewards

For many MEND clients, the path to self-reliance is gradual but constantly evolving. That's certainly the case with Martha Lopez, her husband Marco Armadillo and their children: one-year-old daughter Jessica, six-year-old son Max and daughter Dana, eleven.

Marco is a chef at a Mexican restaurant in Valencia, and while culinary talent clearly runs in the family, MEND wasn't on the family's radar until October 2014, when Max received a brochure about the organization's Christmas Basket Program at his school.

Martha's interest was piqued, so she visited MEND to find out more. Intrigued by a display of plants set up on tables on the day she stopped by, she made inquiries and learned about the Grow Together Project, which launched in spring 2013. She signed up for gardening classes, received all the supplies needed to build a home garden, and was soon welcoming the program's volunteers into her yard to prepare the gardening area.

Nine months later, Martha and her family are enjoying the fruits—and vegetables!—of their labor. She reels off an incredibly varied list of home-grown produce: three types of tomatoes, beets, onions, green beans, squash, carrots, eggplants, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, chili peppers and strawberries, as well as herbs such as sage. "It provides everything we need to make salads, rice dishes and so on," she explains.

When asked how MEND has improved their lives, Martha replies: "It has been so useful for us. We don't have to go to the market as often as before, so it saves time and money, and our food tastes better too. Plus, the kids love being involved—they get excited when they see stuff growing. They pick what they want and we use it the same day."

And the benefits don't end there: the family also visits MEND's food bank once a month, and Martha has received low-cost eyeglasses at the Center too. And she recently started taking cooking classes to help her make the most of her family's fresh bounty.

Another memorable MEND moment for the family: May's Christmas in Spring event, sponsored by Universal Studios Hollywood. "It was like a fiesta," enthuses Martha. "Santa Claus was there—and Max really loved meeting the Minions!"



Max checks out this year's eggplant crop

“It provides everything we need to make salads, rice dishes and so on”

—Martha Lopez



**\* Water-wise gardening tip from MEND's Home Garden Training Coordinator: Cover your soil! Use straw or mulch to suppress weeds and prevent evaporation, and water early in the day.**



Follow us on Facebook & Twitter Join our efforts to go green by signing up at <http://bit.ly/1rle8n6> to receive email Program Updates

