

HERNÁNDEZ, OLIVIA (1947–)

Hernández was born in Zacatecas, Mexico but lived much of her life in Chicago's Southside. A single mother with three young children, Hernández faced discrimination in housing, employment and even from social services but these experiences helped to make her a vocal advocate for social causes. Distressed by economic decline, sub-standard living conditions, crime, violence and drug abuse, she began to work with the Bilingual Council at Thorpe Elementary School, the United Neighborhood organization, and the Immaculate Conception Church. Involved in anti-gang and anti-drug programs, Hernández also worked to provide bilingual social services through the Juan Diego Center which she helped to found. The center spawned a sister group, Flor del Río, in Chiapas, Mexico. Hernández exemplifies how much can be done to bring about social change at the grass roots level.