# Milestone on a Long Road to Success

## By Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Edith Arreguis can already picture herself and her son, Leixander, enjoying their new home, built with the help of Self-Help Enterprises. This remarkable ability to envision the future is matched by a dogged determination to make that future happen. Those traits kicked in when she found herself pregnant her senior year of high school. “Before I was pregnant I didn’t want to go to college, but when I got pregnant I decided to go straight to college and give a better life for my son.”



Before long, Edith had completed her medical assistant certificate and had a steady job at a local clinic. The search for suitable housing was more of a challenge. The waiting list was long for government subsidized housing. The cost of a mortgage on a house in a safe neighborhood was out of the question. So Edith and Leixander live in a small room in an apartment shared with Edith’s mom, stepdad, and three siblings.

The dream of providing a better life for her son carries Edith through the many hours of hard work required in building a Self-Help Home. It’s not always easy, she admits. “Sometimes I’m here [working on the house] from 7 to 11 and then I run home and shower and get to my job. I might not see my baby till ten at night. It’s hard, but it’s worth it.”

Caption here….

Friends and family have rallied around. Her babysitter doesn’t charge her for the hours when she is working on the house. A neighbor, also a single mom, comes to help 2 or 3 mornings a week. Edith’s two brothers have also chipped in.

For Edith, finishing and moving into her house is more of a milestone on her journey than an end goal in itself. She is eager to get settled because it means there will be time again to pursue her education. Her goal: to become a surgical nurse.

Building her own house allows Edith to provide a secure home for her son, and continue toward her career goals. “If I’d get a normal house, I wouldn’t be able to go to school because it would be too expensive,” she reflects. “There are a lot of people like me who can’t afford going to school, having a job, and paying their mortgage.”

With these ambitious goals, Edith is well on the way to fulfilling her dream of providing a good life for her son. “Even though I am so tired,” she says, “I will never regret this opportunity.”

Self-Help Enterprises is largely credited with pioneering the concept of organized Mutual Self-Help Housing in the United States. Since 1965, SHE has served thousands of low-income, rural families in San Joaquin Valley, California and has served as the model for similar organizations around the world. Over 45 years, SHE has assisted over 5,779 families build their own homes in over 90 communities.