



Linda Contreras Resident Story **Lemon Grove HEAL Zone**

I started with HEAL Zone three years ago. It was a few days of volunteering at first giving out flyers and just learning what HEAL Zone was all about: Healthy Eating Activating Living. The name said it all and made me want to be a part of it because I had been through a difficult part of my life being diagnosed with post –partum depression. I was a stay-at-home mom with three kids so when my youngest child entered preschool, I finally had some free time. I found HEAL Zone. I wanted to be a part of HEAL Zone so I could be active and healthier, and what came with HEAL Zone turned out to be a rewarding and empowering adventure. HEAL Zone has offered me so many opportunities – to be a part of trainings, workshops, volunteer work and even travelling. All this work did however mean being away at times from my family for hours at a time. So I figured if they came along we could be together and they too would learn to be a part of our community and make changes. My husband was not interested and hesitant at first. Our first thing as a family was a clean-up day and him seeing our kids hands-on making a difference was the first step. I also started having conversations with the entire family of the importance of knowing our community, participating, and taking pride and ownership of our community. Eventually, all the family was on board. My daughter Emma joined the HEAL Zone youth group and started her own journey of community involvement and advocating. One of her most empowering moments was when she travelled to Sacramento for ENACT Day which focuses on learning advocacy in the State Capitol for health and safety equity in California.

Since I have been a part of HEAL Zone, I have witnessed many positive changes in my community due to activism for example. We brought a tobacco retail-licensing program, advocated at City Council and were able to ban alcohol and all smoking including marijuana from all of our parks. Adding signage in both English and Spanish – which is important. We have a new farmer's market, a community garden, hydration stations at our schools and many different types of fitness classes offered to the public through a joint agreement with the school district. This is all a result of advocating and the HEAL Zone. All these changes and experiences have also empowered me to become very involved in my childrens' schools and district as a volunteer. I am president of ELAC, an English Learner Advisory Committee member and a part of DELAC at the District level. I try to attend as many meetings as possible and advocate at my childrens' schools. I have tremendous gratefulness for the HEAL Zone for transforming my family for the better.