

## New GED program to change tide in Los Banos

**The Salvation Army launches program in Merced County, where less than a third of residents have a high school diploma.**

*By Vivian Gatica Lopez –*

The Salvation Army in Los Banos, Calif., launched a program this month to help local individuals obtain a GED certificate.

The program is an added component to the existing HOPE (Helping Other Prepare for Employment) Center.

“With working with clients in the HOPE Center, it is evident that the job seekers without a diploma or GED were struggling to find gainful employment,” said Sandra Lemus, co-developer of the GED program. “The West Side of Merced County has limited GED services and no adult education services for high school diplomas.”

According to the 2014-2015 [“A Portrait of California”](#) report, 33.1 percent of the Merced County population—which includes Los Banos—has “less than a high school diploma.” Its median earnings are \$22,625.

“Merced County is a very economically depressed area,” Lemus said. “It is difficult to attract other companies and businesses to the area due to having such an unskilled labor force. The job market is limited already and not having a diploma makes it even harder to compete in this tight job market. Based on the amount of clients relying on the social services of The Salvation Army Los Banos Corps, it is evident that many of the residents are struggling to make ends meet. Too many of our clients...do not have diplomas or GED [certificates].”

The GED program allows adult students to work at an individual pace toward completion; individuals under the age of 17 will be connected to a high school program.

Based on the GED and California High School Equivalency (HSE) test subjects, the curriculum is taught using Common Core standards including math, science, social studies and language arts.



“The initial focus will be on developing the reading and language areas since these skills are intertwined with the other areas,” Lemus said. “Without a strong reading comprehension level, the students will struggle in the other areas in general.”

Lemus said that an assessment will be conducted on all adults entering the program. For those who dropped out of school in grades 11 or 12 or earned credits in a local adult school, the program will aim to receive a high school diploma.

“Acquiring a diploma or GED will open more doors of opportunity for residents to become more self-sufficient,” Lemus said. “Not only will it make them more competitive in the labor force, it will allow them the opportunity to take college classes and qualify for financial aid if eligible.”

Lemus said the program aims for 50 participants to start. While students work on getting a GED certificate or high school diploma, the HOPE Center will help individuals explore options to further their education or employment.

“This in turn will give the person a greater sense of worth, higher self-esteem, higher confidence levels, and additional skills to use in their personal lives,” Lemus said. “It will help them become more self-sufficient, which in turn will help them become better parents and positive role models for their families.”