



# KAREN POWERS

When asked if she has lived in El Paso all her life, Karen Powers replies, "Not yet." During early education at Loretto Academy, she learned the value of service on behalf of others.

Activism in her family began with her grandmother, Edna Shields, who advocated for women's equal rights and education for Native American children. Karen's mother, Francine Ernst, supported voting rights, was an avid anti-segregationist via ACLU and NAACP, later serving AIDS patients and their families. She was also a rabid vegetarian. Karen recalls spirited meetings and meals as being a natural part of home life.

In seeking her niche in service and activism, Karen began volunteering for Democrats at about age 18 as a runner collecting donations under the direction of Tom Diamond and Brunson Moore. Through the 1970s, while much attention was taken up by Karen's expanding family, she worked to pressure hospitals to accept prepared childbirth and principles of the La Leche League. This and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty led Karen to learning the ropes about petitions. In the 1980s, Karen became a working member of Amnesty International for whom she traveled across the US conducting workshops, working to free political prisoners, and later focusing on "desaparecidos" in Mexico. After making friends with a representative of the Catholic Conference on Refugees, the two helped put together both organizations to assist asylum seekers.

The G.W. Bush Administration motivated Karen to volunteer for the first Joe Moody Campaign in 2008. She learned phone banking which skill was put to use in President Obama's first campaign. It was in Anthony, TX where she became acquainted with a group of enthusiastic volunteers, the embryonic stage of what has become known as the Usual Suspects. She participated in many phone banks in support of the Affordable Care Act, petitions and voter registrations at bus stops, parks, musical events, and new citizen swearing in ceremonies. Canvassing was the normal progression to encompass the action and work in support of candidates.

She applied herself at the direction of Jeanette Walker, Head Wrangler and 2018 El Paso Democratic Party Hall of Fame honoree, to the 2012 Obama Campaign, 2016 Hillary Campaign, and 2017-2018 (and now 2020) campaigns for Veronica Escobar. These skills and efforts were also brought to the Beto O'Rourke for Senate Campaign, Democratic Party Unity walks, various City Council campaigns, and the most recent EPISD campaign which elected Freddy Klayel Avalos in 2019.

Karen attended a meeting with Ruben Garcia where he said, "If you're going to volunteer, show up. If you can't, tell the truth about it." With that, Karen and some members of the Usual Suspects promised to provide 300 burritos per week for traveling migrants, doing so for the next four years. She has also promised to work with the Border Network for Human Rights, Fair Maps, and sane gun legislation. At the present time, Karen is Chairwoman for Precinct 26, teambuilding with Sylvia Searfoss, Precinct Captain, to organize for the next primary and 2020 elections.

Karen Powers says, "How fortunate, at this age and stage, to get to know inspiring people—Veronica Escobar, Fernando Garcia, Beto and so many others—who let me go out in the community on their behalf. It's the last chapter that I get to write and it's the most exciting of my life so far."

Her work continues, shoulder to shoulder with others of like mind and action, walking and supporting Progressive Democrats, Dreamers, immigrants, Annunciation House, League of Women Voters, and values she holds dear as Democrats.