



# SAVES



## A Colombian Couple Finds Happiness & Success with SAVES

# Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Victor and Myriam—A Happy SAVES couple

Victor Benavides and Myriam Paez are both Colombian. They met, fell in love, got married, and settled in Bogota, the capital of Colombia. The couple gave birth to two children, Fernando and Diana Benavides. Those were good times for the successful Benavides family. Victor was the president of a bank in Bogota, and Myriam was the financial administrator of an airplane parts manufacturing company. The family also owned and operated a small business.

The Benavides had everything that a family could want, but the political climate in Colombia has led to a civil war that has lasted for the past 50 years. This internal war has killed millions and displaced thousands and thousands of Colombians, like this family, who fled their country to seek political asylum in the U.S.

Victor recalls that the first months were very difficult. "Everyone had good advice for us, but with so much of it, we became confused." Myriam was initially frustrated about being unable to provide her children with all the necessary information about schools and the educational opportunities provided in our country. So the family decided that the best option was to study English by enrolling in ESOL classes.

Victor, Myriam and their son Fernando visited American Adult Center to learn about the classes offered at this school. This is where they learned about the SAVES Program, and where they met Ms. Isabel Perez and Ms. Tatiana Patarroyo. At American, the Benavides family enrolled in the SAVES Targeted ESOL Classes. These classes are paid by the SAVES Program, and therefore, only SAVES students qualify for them. Most of these classes have between 10 to 15 students; dramatically improving the teacher-student contact, and helping students in their academic and English language achievement.

After lots of hard work and perseverance, and with the help of the SAVES Program, Fernando Benavides enrolled in Saint Thomas University. Today, he is one of the premier golfers in the school. His talent is so great that he is considering a professional career in the sport.

As for Victor and Myriam, both decided to enroll in the Business Computer Programming vocational class after passing the first three levels of ESOL. They have found the classes to be extremely helpful. They decided to use what they learned in this class to develop and launch their own magazine, Universal The Magazine. The Benavides saw the need for a publication that can help orient new arrivals by providing information about local services, and that provides coverage of international news. Their goal is to publish the magazine in both Spanish and English.

According to the Benavides, it is extremely important for all asylees and refugees to enroll in school, not only to learn English, but to gain state certificates and licenses through vocational education to establish a foothold in the American workplace.

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