

We know each student individually, building strong mentoring relationships and dishing out unconditional love. That's what makes this work.

**LISA FIELDER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
COLLEGE FORWARD**

Six years ago and after 19 years as a stay-at-home mom, Lisa Fielder had more in mind than simply re-entering the workforce. She wanted to make a difference.

Fielder had a vision for an organization dedicated to making college accessible to low-income students in Texas – inspired by a similar program in Minnesota and by having helped her sons get through their college applications.

She founded College Forward (initially called Admission Control) in 2003 and has led the nonprofit to triple-digit growth since then. Today, College Forward has a nearly \$2 million budget, with a staff of 60, and serves more than 900 students at 10 local high schools and 425 students at more than 40 colleges across the country.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU CAN OFFER SOMEONE THINKING OF STARTING THEIR OWN NONPROFIT?

First, be passionate. If it's worth doing, then go at it with all you're worth. Never slow down, never give up, never register the word "no," never listen to the critics.

Second, don't wait. Get started, even if you don't have enough information or resources or infrastructure. Get started and figure the rest out along the way.

Third, and most important, have fun.

WHAT IS THE NEXT BIG MILESTONE YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

College Forward has a lot of exciting things in the works. We're concluding our first research study, developing new programs, and looking carefully at student advocacy. We even have a documentary film in the works. But I'd say the most immediate milestone is an expansion of our program beyond Central Texas.

HOW HAS THE RECESSION HELPED OR HURT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Honestly, College Forward has become much stronger because of the economic downturn. Fortunately, we haven't yet suffered economically. In fact, we've benefited from Recovery Act funding. But developing worst-case contingency plans made us focus on our mission and our strengths, and to subsequent improvements in our systems and efficiency. We're leaner, better and tighter, and we're poised for explosive growth at the first sign of an economic upturn.

PERSONALLY, WHAT ARE YOU MOST



**LISA FIELDER
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PROUD OF WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Beyond a doubt, I'm most proud of our students. Though we cheer them on from the sidelines, it's they who do the hard work of being successful college applicants and successful college students, often despite financial, familial or academic hardships that would bring most of us to our knees. They're heroes to me.

In April 1999 a dream of Alan Graham's came true. That was the month when the first Mobile Loaves & Fishes truck hit the streets of Austin to deliver food, clothing and supplies to the homeless. Since then, the nonprofit's mission has become the dream of many others, and the former real estate developer has watched his one-vehicle effort become an armada rolling through six cities, backed by 12,000 volunteers and a nearly \$2 million budget. They'll deliver



**ALAN GRAHAM
MOBILE LOAVES & FISHES INC.
President and CEO**

more than 550,000 meals this year alone.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT BIG MILESTONES YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The development of the Jennifer Gale Village. This is going to be a paradigm-shifting new method for how we approach the profound problem of chronic homelessness; to be able to look beyond merely providing shelter and coming to an understanding of what home really means. For more than four years now we have been lifting brothers and sisters off of the streets into gently used recreational vehicles. Today, we have more than 45 people living in 32 RVs throughout Central Texas. We are witnessing miracles in the making; to just understand what it means to have a home.

Complementary to this effort is our [effort to employ the homeless]. We do this by creating small, scalable businesses that fit the personality and abilities of those who, for whatever reason, find themselves to be chronically homeless.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU CAN OFFER SOMEONE THINKING OF STARTING THEIR OWN NONPROFIT?

Dream dreams and then be willing to work hard and pay the price to make them come true. It's almost that simple. Of course, you have to infuse sound principles into your efforts. First is the creation of the idea. Mostly this comes from some form of inspiration as opposed to formulating a new business strategy. Second, you have to develop a plan. Include others in that process. Third, you need a strategy that is scalable and has accountability embedded in it; who is going to do what and when.

HOW HAS THE RECESSION HELPED OR HURT MOBILE LOAVES?

Recessions are not good for anyone, but we choose to mine the good from the bad. First, it is an opportunity for all of us to reorder our priorities. You realize, when surrounded by poverty and need, that the definition of a "recession" is radically different on the street than it is up on Wall Street. Those living on the streets are not feeling the impact; it is merely a continuation of the same. For those of us impacted economically by the recession, we quickly realize that there are always folks who have it worse than we and perhaps a little more sacrifice on our part will make it a little easier on those living on or near the streets.