

GROWING COMMUNITY

GROW's supporters include local law enforcement. "This past summer," Gonzalez recalls, "we distributed nearly 3,000 bags containing balls and other sporting equipment to police departments, for the officers to give directly to kids."

She hopes GROW inspires others to help disadvantaged people. "If you see a need in the community," she says, "meet it."—MD



ANNA JANNOTTI



ERIC PADGETT



MIGUEL CRUZ

## Go, go GROW

Colleen Gonzalez's kindergarten son was getting distracted during class. "I felt pressured to medicate him," says the Seminole County, Florida, resident. But she thought more exercise might help.

Approaching his school, she discovered that it hadn't joined a running program offered by their district. The principal blamed a lack of funding and volunteers, but said the school would join if Gonzalez mustered enough resources.

Gonzalez established a nonprofit called

GROW Central Florida (Grass Roots Outreach Within). In its first year, 2015, with \$6,000 raised and 33 volunteer coaches, GROW engaged 3,337 students in cross-country. "GROW's programs are free. Most of the students involved came from low-income homes," she says.

GROW has since engaged more than 56,500 youths in sports and contributed over \$528,000 in goods and resources—including recess activity and running event supplies, athletic shoes, sports balls and more—to the community.—Milly Dawson

**Clockwise from top:** Colleen Gonzalez fits a student with shoes; at the start line of an elementary school race; helping a runner as a "turtle."