The St. Mary's University Neighborhood Revitalization Project was established in 2007 when the University became more actively involved in community outreach, development and improvement. St. Mary’s sought to collaborate with its neighbors to revitalize and beautify the areas around the University. The project's Task Force, together with neighbors and business proprietors, focused on commercial transformation, housing rehabilitation, education, and infrastructure and quality-of-life improvements.

With the receipt of the HUD Grant in 2008, the project was able to staff the effort to revitalize the now-coined St. Mary’s University Gateway District. The grant also facilitated the formation of the St. Mary’s University Neighborhood Revitalization Center, located on the St. Mary’s campus. It also allowed the hiring of an affordable housing counselor through a partnership with San Antonio Alternative Housing Corporation, as well as a social services caseworker and support staff. With the staff in place, the project was able to expand its focus with the hiring of Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization (NCR) program manager, once obtaining NCR partnership status through the City of San Antonio, to focus on the commercial revitalization of the area.

Through a concerted effort that involves every department at the University, multiple area neighborhood associations and strong partnerships with both nonprofit and governmental institutions, the St. Mary’s Revitalization Project has been able to make significant strides towards helping to revitalize the surrounding community.

In addition to the HUD grant, the project has been able to leverage funding for the NCR program, and partnerships that have resulted in loans for businesses in the area, private commercial investment projects and new single-family home construction in the area. The City of San Antonio has similarly made multimillion dollar investments in the area’s infrastructure that have rebuilt or improved entire portions of the commercial and residential areas of the Gateway District. More specifically, there are new pocket parks, street signs, bus stops, bike lanes, crosswalks and trees; improved sidewalks, streets, and business facades; and new construction of homes and a multi-family apartment complex. The Park at St. Mary’s, completed last year, has already attracted regional and national athletics events to campus, raising the visibility of the Gateway District.

The University’s VITA Program continues to provide tax assistance to qualifying residents in the area, and the St. Mary’s Center for Legal and Social Justice offers low-cost or no-cost legal assistance.
The St. Mary’s Small Business Institute offers free assistance to local businesses while also giving Bill Greehey School of Business students hands-on learning experiences. The institute offers in-depth consulting services in areas such as accounting, entrepreneurship, finance, human resource management, information technology, international business and marketing to small and nonprofit business clients.

In the heart of the Gateway District, the Counselor Education and Family Life Center (CEFLC) offers quality counseling for individuals, couples and families on a sliding scale. Clients receive the highest quality of services from clinicians-in-training under the supervision of University faculty. Spanish-speaking clinicians are available.

St. Mary’s has contributed thousands of service hours in the past eight years to improving the neighborhood. The University received the President’s National Service Award in part due to the work of the Revitalization Project, and HUD has commended St. Mary’s for its exemplary work, as well.

The grant funding ended last fall; however, St. Mary’s continues to look for additional sources of funding, and the University is hopeful the federal government will renew the HUD Program. Until then, St. Mary’s will focus its efforts on special projects, such as reducing the stray animal population in the area and building community through a 5k run/walk event to promote health and fitness.

The neighborhood will continue to improve as St. Mary’s strives to reach its vision, as a Catholic and Marianist institution, to become one of the finest private universities in the region.