

Budget: \$187K**In-kind:** \$700K**Paid staff:** 2**Strategies:** Child rescue; mentoring; education; ESL; school drop-out prevention

Rescue mission gives refuge to neglected children

Phoenix, AZ

Eve Nunez still recalls dreadful evenings, as a child, when her alcoholic father would raise his voice at her family, and she would run out of the house, fearing what would happen next.

“I’d go to a tree and talk to the stars because I knew that whoever made them could hear me,” said Nunez. “I said, ‘Please, help my daddy!’”

Still today Nunez has dreams of children being beaten and Eve coming to their rescue.

“I hear the cries of children calling out for help – only today it’s no longer a dream,” said Nunez, who directs Help4Kidz, a faith-based child rescue mission that has served over 40,000

ter life, said Nunez. Yet many find the educational, language and unemployment barriers insurmountable.

Hence families turn to drug sales, theft and prostitution to survive, and parents are arrested, she explained. More than 65 percent of Help4Kidz children have a parent who is in prison. “Then it is typical for the single parent to go to work leaving children without proper supervision.”

“We get 40 calls a day for food boxes,” said Nunez, whose home garage in the poorest section of Phoenix is lined with 75 five-gallon water jugs. Her home has become an infirmary for children and adults during Phoenix’s life-threatening 100-degree days.

Abandoned children. During daily outreaches Help4Kidz finds children without shoes or in only diapers, being raised by grade school siblings, said Outreach Director Carl Portillo.

“One day we found an infant in a diaper who stood still next to a busy street, crouched like a statue, sweating in the Phoenix sun,” explained Portillo.

“One of our workers picked him up. The boy stayed motionless in this crouched position and his feces fell

out of his diaper as we took him to the nearest house.

When we got to the door, his older sibling was putting stones in his mouth, he was so hungry.”

Public assistance for the swelling population of Latino children in Phoenix has been overwhelmed, said Steve Capobres, head of Collaboration for a New Century and author of Arizona’s 2003 Poverty Report.

“A few years ago the state knew of over 300,000 latchkey kids under the age of 13, but could only subsidize child care for 35,000 of them,” he said. “The help of ministries like Help4Kidz are desperately needed.”

“I ask children, ‘Where are your parents?’ and they don’t know,” said Portillo, who pleads for added support. “These kids are God’s workmanship. They are our future, and they have been forgotten.”

Public/private partnership needed. Partnering broadly in the community, Help4Kidz has become a forerunner in Phoenix to facilitate a city-wide response to the needs of children in the city’s poorest neighborhoods.

Nunez leads a coalition of a dozen Latino leaders and collaborates with the Mayor of Phoenix, the City of Glendale, Goodwill, Glendale Community College, 38 regular volunteers and many



homeless, abused or abandoned kids, youth and adults since 1995, most of them Latino children.

Plign of Latino families. Most Mexican families come to the United States for the promise of a bet-

churches to reach 600 kids a week. (See programs on back side). But resources are scarce.

“We have nine buses,” said Portillo, “but only half of them are functional. Then we need drivers. It means a ton to these kids that we visit them weekly, take them to sports events, remember their birthdays and call them by name,” he said.

Often kids come with bruises on their faces. Nunez calls the Phoenix Police or Child Protection Services (CPS) on behalf of children daily, she said.

“We rescued a 13-year-old prostitute who had been on the streets since age 10,” said Nunez. “It was eight weeks before Child Protection arrived to her house.”

Without blame, Nunez simply calls on public and private sponsors: “We must open a new child rescue shelter.”

Transformed lives. Help4Kidz has a storied history of providing stepping stones to desperate lives. The ministry even housed the once-homeless New Jersey Nets basketball star Richard Jefferson and his family.

“Many children in our neighborhoods, without Help4Kidz, are immediately pulled into gangs,” said Teen4Kidz Program Manager and grant writer Dr. Mary Askew.

“We know many who were saved from a life in prison, which saved Phoenix thousands of public dollars,” she said. “Like Peter, who lived with Pastor Eve and her husband, who they sent to college and today is an accountant; or Mary, who received an award for her military service in Iraq.”

Andrew’s story. Mary’s favorite story is about Andrew, who

No. served annually: 4,500

Ethnicity: 86% Latino; 8% African-American; 6% other.

Audits: Available upon request

Programs: **Child Development Class.** Up to 60 children, ages 2-4, receive brain development exercises, reading and school readiness, and memorization skills by a certified teacher.

Help4Kidz. Up to 600 kids receive mentoring, encouragement, and recreation, joining in prayers and worship at a youth group service each Saturday. Children receive care bags with health supplies, back packs, clothing, music lessons and English tutoring.

Help4Teenz. A weekly high school drop-out prevention class offers 120 teenagers help with homework, social skills, and job readiness. Teens receive financial incentives for school accomplishments and receive talks from successful leaders.

Computer Lab/ESL/Literacy. Tutoring is available in a 10-computer after-school homework lab; 60 parents each year receive English tutoring.



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Nunez saw one day sitting outside his home smoking marijuana. “Andrew’s mother had left the family and his father worked overtime to make ends meet, so Andrew was left behind,” said Askew.

“He lacked social skills and got into the wrong crowd, started doing drugs, and dropped out of school at age 16,” she said. After chronic school absences, Andrew was expelled. Finally he gave up.

Preventing school

drop out. Andrew is not alone. In fact, Arizona, where nearly 5,000 kids left school in 2004 alone, ranks dead last nationally in high school drop out.

Enter: Help4Teenz. Eve’s husband, Joe Nunez, works with 120 teenagers each week, many of them expelled students, runaways, gang members, or kids on probation. The

program assists with homework, social skills, and job readiness.

Andrew’s life was up for grabs until the ministry invested in him personally. He had no transportation or money, so Askew found a school with free tuition that he could pursue by mail.



“I said, ‘We will check up on you every day,’” said Askew. “He was so excited he said, ‘You won’t need to. I’ll push myself.’”

In Andrew’s words, “I’ve set goals for my life with Help4Teenz. They actually care about me and my future. They help me think twice about my actions and think positive about school. I actually feel good about myself.”

“Now Andrew and his brother, who had dropped out, have turned around 180 degrees,” said Askew. “It’s awesome.”

