



Budget: \$98K
Gifts-in-kind: \$30K
Paid staff: 1
Established: 2002
Service strategies: Higher education; financial and mentor support; strategic plan for welfare-to-work.

Helping Hands unlocks moms' futures

Phoenix, AZ

In a city known for golf courses and day spas that draws more new residents per month than any city in the nation, it is easy to overlook marginalized women who barely meet the needs of their children.

Statewide over 1.7 million Arizonans, nearly one-third of the state, live in poverty (*Poverty in Arizona Report, 2003*). If you're a single mother in Phoenix, your chance of overcoming that fate is dismal.

Chris Coffman was awakened to this plight one day in 2000 in a way that changed both his life and career. Doing a community needs assessment, Coffman saw a toddler running down a busy street, alone and vulnerable. He stopped to ask the child where he lived, and walked him home.

The boy's eight-year-old sister had lost track of him while their mother slept. The scene is not uncommon where low-skilled single moms work third shift or several jobs just to survive.

"I began to research the prevalence of this problem," said Coffman, "and found that nearly 48 percent of all single mom families in Arizona live in poverty and struggle to make ends meet."

Without an education, the Arizona Poverty Report shows, only one in ten have the chance to escape poverty. With a high school education, a single mom averages \$26,000 a year. But with a two-year associate's degree, single mothers average \$34,000.

"We saw that college education was key, and designed a program around it," said Coffman, executive director of Helping Hands for Single Moms.

Helping Hands partnered with a spectrum of community services to help 25 single mothers between 2003 and 2006 attain the education, work and life skills they needed to provide for themselves and their families.

A successful turnaround. Only a few years ago Sylvia Canizales walked her kids to daycare, worked a minimum wage job, and lived in government-subsidized housing. She had no vehicle, no career plan, and no confidence that she would ever get ahead.

Then Lorna May, 72, came into her life, a loving mother figure from a circle

"Lorna taught me everything I needed to succeed in the future," said Canizales. That included grandmotherly advice everything from parenting to self-respect.

"Helping Hands was a life-saver," said Canizales. "As single moms, we were each alone in the world, isolated. Now we have a new family of friends who care, encourage, and teach us how to better our lives."

Today Sylvia is a Phi Theta Kappa scholar and graduate in education. She is a teacher with her own car and home, and earns twice her previous wage with full benefits.

The community rallies its support. Helping Hands partici-

Only a few years ago Sylvia Canizales walked her children to daycare, earned a minimum wage, and lived in subsidized housing. Thanks to Helping Hands and friends like Lorna May, today Sylvia is a Phi Theta Kappa graduate in education, a teacher with her own car and home, and earns double that wage with full benefits.



of Helping Hands friends. A veteran teacher, May brought a "can do" spirit to Canizales, who was intimidated by the English requirements of a college education.

pants develop life plans and receive a college education from one of several Phoenix area colleges.

An impressive array of partners join in support of Helping Hands.

The Turnbow Foundation provides an annual grant, adopting a single mom each year. Arizona Saves teaches moms how to budget, plan, save, and create wealth.

The Single Moms Foundation provides a "Road to Self-Reliance" seminar. Then with savings funds matched by local businesses, participants may purchase a Habitat for Humanity house upon graduation.

Helping Hands provides financial aid and two mentors for each mom, computers, Internet service, AAA towing, and over-the-counter medicine. Other partners provide computer technical assistance, dental care and even auto repair services.

Together We Can. Valley of the Sun United Way has funded another program, designed by Helping

- No. served annually:** 25
- Ethnicity:** 64% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, 12% Native American, 12% African-American
- Volunteers:** 40
- Audits:** Available upon request
- Programs:** **Just Three.** A program designed to take 15 single moms' families from welfare to economic sustainability in just three years through a college degree from Glendale Community College, job placement, affordable housing and wealth-building skills.



Together We Can. Two single moms live together and leverage their limited resources as a team, while enrolled in college, forming a mutually supportive relationship in an experimental program funded by Valley of the Sun United Way.

Single Moms Network. A campus club is being planned for moms at Glendale Community College to gather, network and build mutual support. Moms will be encouraged to share housing, transportation, childcare, and meals as needed.

CONTACT

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been the perfect vehicle for volunteers of all kinds to serve people who are less fortunate."

Indeed, said Canizales, "Knowing there are all these people behind you who care if you succeed makes all the difference."

Helping Hands aims to help single moms become economically self-sustaining in three years, with a two-year associates degree, housing, job placement, and life skills training, said Coffman.

"We operate under the new math," he laughed. "1 (mom) + 3 (years) = 0 (poverty)."



Amy Mullenix and son Jacob

Hands, in which two single moms live together, share child care, and leverage their limited resources, working as a team while enrolled in college.

Amy Mullenix and Danee Wright were perfect candidates for this pilot program. Both in their early 20's when they broke from their childhood homes, neither had anticipated the obstacles they would face as single moms trying to "go it alone."

With few marketable skills, their vocational futures seemed grim. They

hoped to survive by seeking child support, part-time work, food stamps and welfare assistance. But living in poverty was bitter.

By working with each other and developing a better vocational plan, the women have learned valuable life skills and have hope of providing their children a brighter future.

Aworthy investment.

"The strategic importance of helping single mothers is indisputable," said Steve Capobres, head of the Collaboration for a New Century and author of Arizona's 2003 Poverty Report. "These moms both provide economic sustainability and model it for their children."

Capobres believes that Helping Hands is "the one-stop shop single mothers in our community need. It has

