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La Cuna

Organization Spotlight

By Christina Orlovsky, May 2008



A cradle is defined as a small bed for infants, but look further in the dictionary and you'll find another definition: "the place where anything is nurtured during its early existence." Since 2003, San Diego nonprofit organization La Cuna, Spanish for cradle, has aimed to be this place of nurturing for the area's most vulnerable population: foster children ages 5 and under.

"I founded La Cuna because my history has been working with older children; by the time older foster children are able to speak about their needs, they have almost no hope," explains Rachel Humphreys, founder and executive director of La Cuna. "The statistics are so grim: Eighty percent of those incarcerated are former foster children. We're creating a whole cycle of broken people, and the heartfelt answer is to take care of children when they need your help—between 0 and 5 when it's the most critical."

Adding that the majority of babies in foster care never find a stable home, Humphreys has made it her mission to change the statistics and reverse the downward spiral caused by infant and child neglect, abuse and abandonment. La Cuna serves as a foster family agency training foster parents and focusing on a specific segment of the population: Latino babies.

“When we did a community-needs assessment, we focused on Latino children because just under one half of foster children in San Diego are Latino, come from monolingual Spanish-speaking homes and are placed with people who don’t speak their language,” Humphreys continues. “These infants and toddlers have already been traumatized and then they’re ripped away from their mother tongue. It seemed like a real no-brainer to try to find more Spanish-speaking homes or culturally respectful homes for Latino children.”

Since placing its first foster child in 2005, La Cuna has placed 65 children in foster homes and seen that 94 percent of them are staying in that home until they’re reunited with rehabilitated family members or adopted—a success that Humphreys is thrilled to share.

“We’re breaking the odds for these kids and increasing their likelihood of growing up healthy and happy,” she says.

La Cuna relies on the community for support in many ways.

“I like to tell people that they can take home a baby, but if that’s too difficult, they can sponsor us instead,” Humphreys adds.

Privately funded, La Cuna needs financial support to maintain its services. The organization also needs volunteers for office work as well as to arrange donation drives for diapers and other practical new items for babies. A career opportunity is also currently available for a social worker. No matter what capacity in which one chooses to work with La Cuna, Humphreys assures it will be a move worth making.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to work with this population,” Humphreys concludes. “You can work magic on a child when they’re so young and malleable and open to the world. The window of time is so finite and we can do so much damage, but we can also do so much good. At this age they still have a fighting chance to grow up and go to Harvard and have a family, but they’re not going to be okay unless we pay attention to the fact that they’re in crisis. This is very critical work.”

For more information, call 619-521-9900 or visit www.lacuna.org.