The Spirit of Giving

During the holiday season Casa de los Niños hears from many parents looking to find a way to teach their child about “giving”. And many of them come up with the admirable idea of having the child collect some of their toys and clothing and give them to needy children.

Where it goes a bit awry is that many people, with the best intentions, have the idea that they would like their child to be able to give these items directly to the child in need. While the intention is good, we must take into consideration the comfort, embarrassment, and feelings of the child on the other end of the transaction. And, the parents of that child too, may feel some embarrassment, daresay even humiliation.

There are so many ways to instill the concept of giving for a child and to help them to embrace helping others.
CEO’s Perspective

Dear Friends,

The holidays are a time for reflection and time to give thanks for the blessings received throughout the year. At Casa de los Niños we’re grateful for the support of our friends, donors, staff, and volunteers who continue to help transform the lives of thousands of children and families.

The holidays can be a very stressful time for many families in Tucson. And, as you know, we work with thousands of families that are struggling to maintain stability and to provide for their children. It is an incredible example of kindness when this community comes together to provide clothes, toys, and household items for families in need. It is truly the spirit of giving! And, this year we are seeing so many groups of young people looking for ways to help. During this time when we seem to be bombarded with bad news, this shines as a very positive beacon of hope! There is much to be grateful for.

The new year is almost here and 2018 will be an exciting time for Casa de los Niños! A long held dream for a family center will become a reality when the Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center opens in the spring. And very soon we will have information to share with you about plans to help even more children and families in the space that was once the crisis shelter. I want to thank you for your continued support and commitment to children and families! Together, let’s make 2018 a great year!

From our family to yours, we wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Susie Huhn, MA
Chief Executive Officer
Vital Need for Mental Health Services for Foster Children

Being taken away from parents at a young age, no matter how dire the situation, and placed in the foster care system can produce lasting, detrimental effects that can carry over into adulthood. According to a report by the Urban Institute, children in foster care have significantly higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems, and are more likely to have mental health challenges. Statistics vary, but close to 80% of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to approximately 20% of the general population. These include major depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and oppositional defiance disorder. As a result, foster youth are prescribed psychotropic medications at a much higher rate than non-foster youth. This costs the state, through fee-for-service programs such as Medicaid, millions of dollars a year. (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016)

Foster children often struggle to cope with the events that brought them into the child welfare system, such as abuse, neglect, homelessness and exposure to domestic violence. Many foster kids experience unpredictable contact with family, multiple placements, and an inability to direct their own lives during these crucial times when they are seeking reassurance, understanding and stability. It has been well documented that foster children struggle in school, and with every move or new placement they lose months academically. Close to 50% of foster children will not graduate high school by the time they are 18 years of age. (Atlantic Monthly Magazine, Feb. 28, 2014)

Did you know that the Behavioral Health Services Program of Casa de los Niños helped 3832 Tucson youth this past year to manage and treat their mental and behavioral health issues? This area of work is of utmost importance in our community, and our team is working closely with foster families and multiple school systems to bring mental health support to our vulnerable youth. We encourage parents and caregivers to seek help when they have concerns, and not to wait until things get really bad. It’s ok to ask for help!
Bringing Youth Mental Health First Aid into Schools

It’s common for children and young adults to experience anxiety, or even short periods of depression, but when these symptoms persist, it’s important to find professional intervention. Children with mental health issues face enormous obstacles in school, and their teachers and counselors are frequently overwhelmed with the burden to assess, intervene, and connect to meaningful interventions for these kids, all at the same time of carrying out their daily obligations to hundreds of others students. Thanks to financial support from Cenpatico Integrated Care, Casa de los Niños Behavioral Health Services partners with local school districts to support these teachers and counselors to ensure that school staff are ready to respond to kids who may be struggling with mental health issues.

A partnership with Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) was established and trainers from Casa de los Niños recently held several sessions teaching Youth Mental Health First Aid to TUSD faculty and staff from across the district. The 8-hour course teaches how to identify, understand and respond to a young person who is experiencing a mental health challenge, crisis or substance use disorder.

This evidenced based training focuses on the mental health challenges for youth ages 12 to 18 years old, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Topics covered include:

- anxiety
- depression
- substance use disorders
- disorders in which psychosis may occur
- disruptive behavior disorders
- youth suicide prevention

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness:

- 20% of youth ages 13 to 18 live with a mental health condition
- Approximately 50% of students age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of school
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youth ages 10 to 24

Some warning signs to watch out for with kids that may indicate it’s time to seek professional help include:

- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing
- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Drastic changes in behavior, personality or sleeping habits
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that can lead to failure in school

The mental health and well-being of children and young adults is a cornerstone of the work of Casa de los Niños, and we are ready to help. You can reach the Behavioral Health Service office at 520.881.1292, or through the 24-hour crisis line at 520.326.1365.

Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center Update

The Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center is an impressive sight as it rises on the corner of Speedway and 5th Avenue! In a few short months, several thousand Tucson families will be receiving services in this new building, made possible by this generous community.

Keep watching for details about the opening and other community events this Spring!

For the last 15 years, Casa de los Niños has worked with focused intent to create in-home programs that help over 4000 families each year, right where they live... providing parents with resources and skills so they can keep children home, in a safe and healthy environment. And the good news is that the results of this work are being realized! More children are able to stay in their homes, and families are able to stay together. We are enormously grateful to the Tucson community for the support that has enabled us to move beyond housing kids in shelters to keeping them in their own homes safely, or in a caring and nurturing foster home.

Over the past several years, Casa de los Niños introduced programs that facilitated visitation services to help families reunify after children had been removed, along with services designed to help children deal with trauma experienced at an early age. Outreach and education programs have grown to offer positive parenting strategies, including working with new moms before their babies are born, and helping parents prepare their toddlers to succeed when starting school. Casa de los Niños is focusing a large part of our efforts on the mental and behavioral health needs of kids in the foster care system, and those in Tucson that are struggling. By providing therapy, psychiatric treatment, and case management we are meeting a crucial need for kids that can dramatically change the course their life will take. It is well understood that untreated psychiatric disorders and mental health issues result in poor, and even traumatic, outcomes. This has become a critical need in Tucson as we witness more families struggling with the impact of poverty, and Casa de los Niños is responding with dynamic mental health treatment resources for all families.

With decreasing numbers of children being removed from homes, we are working even more diligently to address issues and provide resources in those homes! In just the past year the number of child removals across the state has significantly decreased from over 19,000 in March 2016 to just over 16,000 in June 2017, according to Department of Child Safety reports. We will continue to respond quickly and thoughtfully to make sure we are helping kids in the most meaningful way to ensure safety and well-being.

Many have asked, “If there is no shelter, where will these children go?” And quite simply, by the end of the summer, children were not being placed in shelters in our state. Shelters in the Phoenix area have also closed. In cases where children do need to be removed, there are enough emergency foster care placements available, as well as kinship placements with other, appropriate relatives.

Just as in health care and public health, the way we work must always be flexible, responsive, and impactful. And the goal is still the same, and just as critical as ever. Together, we want kids to have safe and stable homes and to thrive. In the coming months we will be moving ahead with transition plans for our campus to help even more vulnerable children and families, so stay tuned! And the Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center will open in early spring 2018, and we will provide more integrated and essential services to children and families in our community.

How You Can Help Children and Families in Need This Holiday Season

Stop by a Holiday Wish Tree and adopt an ornament or two. Each contains a wish for a needed item for the children and families we help. Holiday Wish Trees are located at:

- OLD NAVY
  All 4 Tucson stores
- MACY'S
  Park Place and Tucson Mall
- ALLIANCE BANK
  200 S. Craycroft or 4703 E. Camp Lowell
- SHOE CARNIVAL
  El Con Center
- MY 92.9 RADIO STATION
  3202 N. Oracle Road

Help “Pack the Covered Wagon” for Casa de los Niños at Trail Dust Town (6541 E. Tanque Verde). Now through December 23rd they are collecting:

- New clothing, up to adult size XL
- Hygiene items: shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, etc.
- New toys, including board games for older children
- The kids can enjoy a free ride on one of the attractions, like the train, or merry-go-round when you bring a donation for Casa de los Niños.

Please drop off a new, unwrapped toy, at any Christie's Appliance Co. in Tucson, now until Christmas.

ACE Hardware at 9581 E. Golf Links is collecting donations to support the children in our Foster Care program, now through December 20th.

FE Fashion Eye will donate $5 for every eye exam they perform in the month of December. Have you had your eyes checked recently?

Thank you to MY 92.9 radio, and Cyndi & Chris in the Morning for supporting the Holiday Wish Tree this year.
Thank You to Our Partners

Successful partnerships are essential to supporting the vulnerable children and families served by Casa de los Niños. These caring groups have partnered with us to provide critical resources to serve kids and families. Thank you for your support!

The Arizona Association of School Business Officials presented Casa de los Niños with an amazing gift in November from their annual “Duck Race” that was held at their recent annual conference. “Nothing makes hard work more fulfilling than to make sure what you do helps those most in need!”
- Ricky Hernandez, AASBO Board President

We are grateful to the Armstrong McDonald Foundation for their incredible generosity and vision to help kids in the most meaningful way! This foundation continues to make an incredible impact in the Tucson community and we are so fortunate to partner with them!

Thank you to the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Suns Charities for supporting Casa de los Niños with a generous grant! Your gift will go a long way to further the impact of the critical work we do...helping kids and healing families.

We appreciate the support of Cenpatico Integrated Care for our recent Focus on Families: A Community Conversation series focusing on kids, teens, families and mental health. Cenpatico Integrated Care believes in supporting community focused programs and initiatives to help improve the lives of people in our community.

Thank you to Shivansh Srivastava (a Junior at Catalina Foothills High School) and Shreya Srivastava (an 8th grader at Orange Grove Middle School) who have been extraordinary in helping the kids served by Casa de los Niños over the years.

Back in May, they did a toy/board game drive for Casa de los Niños and then in August did a very successful Back 2 School drive. They bring such enthusiasm and energy to these great drives—and they are truly helping kids to have better lives. THANK YOU so much to you both! We appreciate you so very much!
NFP is Making a Difference for Generations

Maricela Reynaert, RN

I have had the privilege of being a nurse home visitor with the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program for over 5 years. In my 25 years as a nurse, I have worked in clinical as well as management positions. I have worked in hospitals, home health care and community health, and I can truly say that the NFP program, although emotionally taxing at times, has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my nursing career.

Working with new moms and their children has allowed me to witness firsthand how the work of Casa de los Niños is changing lives, and how the services I am providing extend to future generations of families. Typical nursing care is usually short term…hours, days or at the most months, but the design of NFP encourages long term relationships, on average 2 and a half years, allowing time to care not only for that first time mom, but her new baby too, in a very holistic way. Nurse-Family Partnership truly addresses the root of what it takes to empower the young, first time moms we serve, impacting generations to come, and the community as a whole.

I am truly humbled and grateful for all of the young moms that have allowed me to be part of their transformation of bettering their lives and the lives of their children. There is nothing more rewarding for me than to know I am making a difference in someone’s life. My passion has always been caring for others and making this world a better place and Nurse-Family Partnership has given me the opportunity to do this one mom and one baby at a time.

A Message from Angelita, Recent NFP Graduate

When I was just a 15 year old freshman, I found out some news that I knew was going to change my life forever; I was just too young to understand how deeply since I was terrified. I was 15 and pregnant.

I knew the road ahead of me would be even more challenging than the rest of my peers, but from the moment I held my little baby boy in my arms, I knew all I wanted to do was love him, protect him, and give him the absolute best life possible. I just didn’t know how I was going to do that.

I first heard about Nurse-Family Partnership when I was going to school at TAPP (Teenage Parent Program), a school designed for teen moms. I was contemplating how I was going to be the role model I wanted to be for my unborn child when a couple of nurses came to TAPP to inform us about the many benefits of this program.

I decided to join because I wanted to do anything I could to prepare myself and be the best mom I could be for my son. Well, my nurse—Maricela Reynaert—helped me beyond that. She has helped me excel not only as a student but also at what to expect as a mom, and how to be a good mom with a strong bond with my son. Maricela is always so kind and encouraging in everything I have chosen to do.

Maricela taught me many things, such as what to expect during child birth, early childhood development, and how to pick my battles with an independent 2 year old who knows what he wants, and how he’d trick me into giving it to him. I’d like to say that “no means no”, but that cute little face gets me until “no” becomes “fine…here!” Maricela has also helped me find my way to several resources.

Now I have been with this program for more than 2 years. I will be graduating from both high school on time, and with my certification as a physical therapy tech. But I know I would not be here today without the help of my nurse, Maricela, and this program. I hope that many other young moms—who I know are just as scared as I was about what the future will have in store for them and their children—will get to have the same wonderful experience I have had with Nurse-Family Partnership. I am truly blessed to be given this opportunity and I can’t wait to begin a career helping people in need as you all have helped me. Thank you.

Casa de los Niños is a Qualifying Foster Care Charitable Organization.

To claim a 2017 tax credit for your gift to Casa de los Niños, donors can use the Foster Care Charitable Organization Tax Credit using Form 352.

The Qualifying Foster Care Organization Tax Credit allows for double the impact: $500/individual and $1,000/couple.

Your gift changes lives for generations!

Please consult with a tax advisor for guidance on your personal tax situation.
The mission of Casa de los Niños is to promote child well-being and family stability in our community.

ACCREDITED BY:

The Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services

PUBLISHED BY:
The Development & Community Relations Department:

LISA WEBSTER, Director
DAN GREGORY, Community Relations Coordinator
AMADA MENDOZA, Development & Community Relations Assistant

Better Futures is the official publication of Casa de los Niños, a non-profit, nonsectarian agency.