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**Project Description**

Since 1989, the Teens in Transition (TNT) program has helped youth ages 13-21 who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. TNT is an innovative case management program which works to remove barriers for homeless, near-homeless, and pregnant/parenting youth, allowing young people to stay in school, obtain job-readiness and life skills, and prepare for successful, productive and self-sufficient futures. Teens in Transition works with local high schools, charter schools, and magnet schools, as well as middle schools and elementary schools that request help for pre-teen youth. The goal of TNT is not only to provide essential human needs assistance, but to help these youth and their children avoid lapsing into life-long cycles of homelessness and reliance on government entitlement programs. Young parents in the Teens in Transition programs are often survivors of childhood trauma due to domestic violence, child abuse, absentee parents, or any combination thereof. The parenting they received as children did not prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life and parenthood; the majority of youth entering our programs have shockingly low levels of knowledge of basic life skills. TNT addresses this by requiring participants in our housing and residential programs to attend Life Skill classes in order to remain eligible to stay in the program. As a component of the TNT Life Skills curriculum, nutritional education is one of the most important – and difficult – to teach because it often contradicts a lifetime of poor eating habits and misinformation about food and nutrition. It is well documented that low income people often consume greater amounts of less expensive, high-calorie and high-fat foods to guard against hunger, and rely on fast food chains which promote "value" meals containing oversized burgers, extra-large servings of fries and buckets of soda – all of which contribute to poor health, disease and obesity. Healthier foods – such as meat, fish, fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains – are often more expensive than alternative junk food, and take more time to prepare. Current research suggests that hunger, poverty and obesity may be intricately linked. University of California (UC) researchers found that more than three-quarters of low-income Latino women in California were overweight or obese, while 22 percent of their young children were overweight. Yet about 60 percent of those living in low-income households were food-insecure, meaning that the families lacked access, at varying degrees, to nutritious foods at some time during each month. Work from Cornell University and UC Davis also suggests that obesity among poor women may be linked to their habit of periodically going without food so that their children can eat, and/ or because they developed a feast or famine eating pattern dependent on the availability of food. In Life Skills, TNT staff teach sound nutritional concepts, offer practical experience in the kitchen, and suggest time-saving strategies for young parents juggling children, school and work. The aim is to show parents that it is possible to provide good nutrition to their children on a limited budget and tight schedule. The \$750 provided by the Partnership bought enough meat, milk, eggs, cheese, vegetables, grains, beans and many other items for at 12 community meals at the Common Unity Program (CUP), a residential program for young homeless mothers and their children. It also provided healthy snacks and canned goods for homeless youth contacted through TNT's Street Outreach efforts.

**Amount Received**

\$750.00

**How did this project make a difference in reducing childhood hunger in Arizona**

Through a combination of nutritional education and practical, hands-on experience in preparing nutritious meals, we encourage behavior changes in parents that improve the nutritional outcome for their children. Children exposed to the positive social interaction involved in preparing and eating meals with their family are more likely to develop good eating habits and form nurturing bonds with their parents. Parents discover that good nutrition can be affordable, and providing healthy meals for their families can be manageable. This project was a valuable tool in reinforcing behavior that will make continued healthy food choices more likely in the future.

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| <b>Number of children served</b>  |
| 22 children (unduplicated); 24 young parents (unduplicated); snacks for 25-30 street youth (approximate, unduplicated)  |
| <b>Number of meals served</b>   |
| 12 community meals (dinners and Sunday brunches).   |
| <b>Number of snacks served</b>  |
| Approximate number of snacks provided: 100  |
| <b>Description of meals/snack served</b>  |
| Community meals served were lasagna, tacos, pot roast, chicken – all accompanied by salad, vegetables, bread and milk. Desserts and soda were kept at minimum levels. Brunches consisted of meat, eggs, juice and toast. Snacks for homeless youth contacted on the streets and for CUP and transitional housing children included crackers, raisins, granola bar, applesauce, fruit cups and ‘Lunchables’ (for street youth), etc.   |
| <b>Description of most popular meal/snack served</b>  |
| Lasagna, salad, garlic bread  |
| <b>What improvement/impact was made</b>   |
| Several encouraging outcomes were achieved by implementation of this project. First, \$750 bought an amazing amount of healthy food. Second, we were able to continue the process of education intended to change the attitudes and behaviors of mothers with children who are at high risk of repeating the cycles of poverty and hunger affecting their parents. We determined that the best strategy would be to provide community meals prepared by staff and program residents. We hoped to accomplish several things this way: 1), to compliment the life skills classroom instruction with practical experience in nutrition and food preparation; 2), to foster a greater sense of community and support within the CUP residential community; and 3), to engage fathers in positive family functions. By all accounts, the project has been a huge success, both educationally and socially. The Teens in Transition CUP program emphasizes clients building reciprocal support networks and relying on these relationships as a key element of success. The goal is for the young women to rely on one another for support and resources, and find empowerment in the knowledge that they can seek answers within themselves. Social events like congregate mealtimes can greatly enhance that process. For the meals made possible by the Partnership, CUP residents helped with the food preparation and clean-up, and watched each others’ children while trading off kitchen duties. Four fathers accepted the invitation to attend – an almost unprecedented and very welcome outcome. The teen fathers in this population are historically either absent or involved with their families in a negative way, and are notoriously difficult to engage in taking on the responsibilities of partner and parent. Recent federal demonstration projects have shown that program outcomes for single teenage mothers and their children dramatically improve with positive father involvement; the community meals at CUP helped engineer positive social situations that strengthen family bonds, and contribute to overall success in life. |
| <b>How did you measure the success of the project</b>   |
| In terms of numbers, we provided 12 meals to 20 young mothers, 22 children and 4 fathers. In qualitative terms, interest and enthusiasm in learning more about cooking has risen, and plans for more congregate meals beyond this funding are underway. We are also very encouraged by our success in including fathers, and the longer-term implications that presents.  |
| <b>Will the program continue</b>  |
| Yes, as long as there are funds to provide this assistance, we will continue.   |
| <b>Additional Information</b>   |
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