

Report Documents Work of Nonprofits

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No one doubts the results when they see a charity hand a winter coat to a poor child or a hot meal to a homeless man.

But a new report from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy released Thursday shows that just as important are a charity's activities in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement.

In studying 14 nonprofit organizations in New Mexico, NCRP says, it found that every dollar invested reaped more than \$157 in benefits. That totals more than \$2.6 billion in benefits to the public as a result of the \$16.6 million of support from foundations and others sources that went to the nonprofits to support their advocacy efforts.

For example, because of efforts by nonprofit coalitions in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, a statewide minimum wage increase will be fully enacted in January 2009, making the base rate \$7.50, higher than the federal rate. The result will be that more than 200,000 low-wage workers have gained more than \$250 million, according to the study. (In Santa Fe, which has its own local minimum wage law, the base rate will be almost \$10 an hour beginning Jan. 1.)

Other efforts by local advocacy groups include: successfully pushing for the passage of the Home Loan Protection Act in 2003, resulting in New Mexico having much lower foreclosure rates than many other states; and passage of the State Affordable Housing Trust, ensuring the long-term availability of funds for permanent housing.

"Most people think of nonprofits as soup kitchens or homeless shelters," said Aaron Dorfman, executive director of NCRP. "But the advocacy role is giving voice to marginalized

communities."

NCRP dates back to 1976 and is the only independent watchdog of nonprofits, said Dorfman. The study was done, he said, because people in nonprofits wanted to see the tangible results of how supporting advocacy works.

To do the survey in New Mexico, NCRP paired with the New Mexico Association of Grantmakers. Gay Dillingham, chairperson of NMAG and executive director of the Livingry Foundation in Santa Fe, said that partnering policy and advocacy can have a profound effect as government funds shrink.

"We shouldn't overlook the opportunity to create more long-range strategies," said Dillingham. "If you give a man a fish, he will eat for the day. If you teach him how to fish, he can feed his family."

Terry Odendahl, president of NMAG, said the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has selected New Mexico as one of three states it wants to focus on in the future; the other two are Michigan, where the foundation is based, and Mississippi. New Mexico is being targeted because of the foundation's interest in serving vulnerable children.

New Mexico was the first state explored in the study partly because it was grappling with significant issues such as immigration, lowwage workers and environmental justice, according to the NCRP. The organizations studied here include:

Albuquerque Interfaith, a membership organization affiliated with a national network of interfaith organizations that organizes in congregations, unions, schools and neighborhoods to develop leaders to support community life.

Community Action New Mexico, which works to strengthen the network of community action agencies in the state to end poverty.

Colonias Development council, providing community organizing support to colonia residents in southern New Mexico. Colonias are unincorporated settlements that lack basic infrastructure such as potable water, housing and paved roads.

El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, working with Latino immigrants and allies to strengthen the community and advance immigrants' rights.

Enlace Comunitario, working to eliminate domestic violence and advance immigrant rights.

New Mexico Voice for Children, which works to eliminate child poverty and improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

New Mexico Acequia Association, advocates for the interests of acequia communities in the state.

New Mexico Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (NM ACORN), a membership organization of lower-income residents working together for social justice and stronger communities.

New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness, organizes stakeholders to advocate for housing for all New Mexicans.

New Mexico Environmental Law Center, operates as a public interest law firm providing free and low-cost legal services on environmental matters.

Santa Fe Living Wage Network, a membership-based organization of lower-income workers and their families that strives to maintain, enforce and strengthen the ordinance.

Somos un Pueblo Unido, protects and expands immigrants' rights in New Mexico.

SAGE Council (Southwest Cultural Preservation Project), an organization of indigenous people working to build power through action, education, leadership, and political action.

SouthWest Organizing Project, works to empower communities to realize racial and gender equality, and social and economic justice.

Tewa Women United, offers programs and services relating to alcoholism, suicide, and domestic and sexual violence.

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