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Friday, December 05, 2008

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, low-wage workers and environmental justice, according to the NCRP. The organizations studied here include:

- Albuquerque Interfaith
- Community Action New Mexico
- Colonias Development Council
- El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos
- Enlace Comunitario
- New Mexico Voices for Children
- New Mexico Acequia Association
- New Mexico Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
- New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness
- New Mexico Environmental Law Center
- Santa Fe Living Wage Network
- Somos un Pueblo Unido
- SAGE Council (Southwest Cultural Preservation Project)
- SouthWest Organizing Project
- Tewa Women United

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