



MARY'S CENTER FOR  
MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE  
WASHINGTON, DC

*FAMILIES COUNT celebrates Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, one of four organizations recognized in 2007 for helping America's most vulnerable children have what they need most: strong, capable and economically successful families.*



LISTENING TO FAMILIES

Families who need support in reaching their goals will tell you exactly what they need. You just have to listen hard enough.

This philosophy is the driving force behind Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, the groundbreaking Washington, DC, agency that since 1988 has used health care as the entry point for helping thousands of immigrant families acquire the skills, supports and connections they need to succeed.

María Gómez, Mary's Center's founder, president and CEO, began listening as a teenager emigrating from Colombia. She listened hard to her mother and other parents as they struggled in an unfamiliar culture.



As they always have, Gómez and her fellow health professionals transform what they hear into a clinic that provides health care and more in low-income neighborhoods, primarily to immigrant families. “We’re not just health specialists,” Gómez says. “We feel a responsibility to give mothers and families every opportunity to succeed.”

Mary’s Center first meets the most pressing health issues of mothers, mothers-to-be and their families. Next, staff engage families in programs that give them the additional supports they need to be civically engaged and economically stable. “We involve parents in developing every program,” says Gómez. “Parents really want to build a support system among themselves.”

The results form an impressive list of community-inspired initiatives: services for women suffering from depression complicated by language and cultural barriers; playgroups for mothers and children; an Even Start family literacy program incorporating parenting education; and support for teens at-risk for unplanned pregnancies. The Mama & Baby Bus mobile unit brings health, dental care and outreach expertise into neighborhoods that have limited access to those services. A home-based child care licensing program equips mothers to develop a source of income for their families while they expand the community’s day care options and safety for their own children.

## CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER

**CARE THAT CROSSES THRESHOLDS** At intake, Mary’s Center pairs parents with case managers to discuss all the issues impacting their families. “Many times they come for a reason that goes beyond health,” says Gómez. “Sometimes there is enormous stress in the family because a new baby means another mouth to feed.”

Case management may lead to the Healthy Start Healthy Families program, in which support workers go into homes where families can put new information to use immediately. These specially trained staff work with families to set goals and establish routines to meet them. From “baby-proofing” a home to brainstorming job options, workers empower parents to improve their family’s well-being.

Mary’s Center has achieved stellar outcomes for its families. Birth weights and immunization rates among children exceed regional and national averages, while rates for child abuse and neglect are lower. To serve more families, Mary’s Center opened a second DC location in 2005. Soon the Center will expand into Maryland and Virginia, reaching the many immigrant families moving to the suburbs for more affordable housing. Mary’s Center is saving lives, creating stronger communities, one family at a time.

# COMING TO MARY'S CENTER

*For 14 years, Fathema Johra told her sons they would some day leave Bangladesh to join their father in America. Last year, that day arrived. Mohammed Alamgir beamed as his family stepped off the plane, but then the reality of life in a different culture set in. When Johra became pregnant again, Alamgir turned to Mary's Center for help.*

*From their first appointment, Johra and Alamgir felt embraced. In one place, they could access primary and prenatal health care and language acquisition help for the entire family. They welcomed home visits, and family support worker Bethany Sanders was soon checking*

*in regularly. Sanders helped the family enroll the children in school. When baby Amir arrived prematurely, she found subsidized health care options. "Bethany is always there for us," says Alamgir. "She shows us how to take the best care of our baby. Without her, we'd have \$75,000 in hospital bills." Such debt would have crippled the family's chances of long-term success. Instead, the older boys now thrive at school, and Johra is building new skills and earning power in the child care licensing classes. "They are good people," she says of Mary's Center. "They give us hope."*

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### MAJOR FUNDERS:

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WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES



“We reach mothers and families early in their American experience  
and build on their eagerness to succeed.

They're here for the reasons immigrants have always come—for a better future.”

— María Gómez, President & CEO, Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care

#### FAMILIES COUNT: THE NATIONAL HONORS PROGRAM

celebrates organizations that improve the odds for vulnerable children by helping them have what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families.

The 50 organizations honored since the program began in 2000 connect families to the resources, supports and opportunities they need to succeed. FAMILIES COUNT honorees provide compelling evidence that we can change the outcomes for children in some of the nation's toughest communities when we build on their families' strengths.

Millions of low-income families continue to find it extremely difficult to get by and get ahead, even as they work harder and longer than ever before. Their communities too often lack the most basic elements that allow parents to fulfill family aspirations: strong social networks, good schools, safe streets, responsive services, affordable housing, and jobs that provide adequate support and opportunities for advancement.

These families are not without hope because they are not without champions—the people and organizations working side by side with them every day. The FAMILIES COUNT honorees remind us that the continuing challenge for our nation is less about know-how than it is about will—the willingness to care enough and do enough so that all families can realize their dreams for their children.

#### 2007 HONOREES

ECD/HOPE (Enterprise Corporation of the Delta/  
Hope Community Credit Union), Jackson, MS

Family Service Association of San Antonio, Inc.,  
San Antonio, TX

Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care,  
Washington, DC

Southern Good Faith Fund, Pine Bluff, AR

To learn about previous honorees,  
please visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

Cover photo ©Jim Graham: At Mary's Center, Dr. Karen Mazie shows Eulalia Flora and her daughter Jennifer that good health and early learning go hand-in-hand.

Interior photo ©Jim Graham: Toddler Amir Alamgir is growing up strong thanks to his parents, Mohammed and Fathema, and the support of the Healthy Start Healthy Families home visitation program.