

# **MAMA HILL'S HELP, Inc.**

## Mission Statement

To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry, To free the prisoners,  
To rebuild nations, To bring peace among brothers, To make music in the heart.

—Howard Thurman—

May 15, 2006

Dear Friend,

You wouldn't know to look at the full and smiling faces of Mama Hill's kids that behind almost each one there is a tragedy. Mama Hill's Help, Inc, a Watts-based after school program founded in 2001, is a refuge for these 50 or so kids and their families; a place for learning and, for once in their lives, a violence free zone.

Millicent Hill, a.k.a. Mama Hill, a retired teacher with LAUSD, has, over her 45-year career as an award-winning educator, poet, and activist, changed the lives of thousands of youngsters through her innovative teaching style. Today she and her small staff cover an array of issues within the core curricula—from anger management to teen pregnancy—as most of her youngsters are living under the cloud of violence, grief, abandonment or abuse, which all too often impedes their ability to learn.

All of Mama Hill's kids, age 6 to 17, are enrolled in Title One schools, and although a few have some of their special needs addressed, most—as a result of classroom over-crowding and funding cuts to student support staff <sup>1</sup>—don't even have those special needs identified, no less addressed. <sup>2</sup>

In addition to the mental and emotional challenges and literacy issues not being addressed during the regular school day, some of Mama Hill's kids must pass through three—four—six—or as many as ten separate gang territories to travel from home to school and to her headquarters and back using public transportation. For all of these youngsters, learning is a Herculean feat; and Mama Hill will tell you that in it, they are all Olympic champions.

The waiting list for Mama Hill's Help is long but test scores and rising grades are proof that her unorthodox techniques work. Her explanation for the room full of attentive and eager learners: "Our lesson plans encourage each child to process information in his or her own way—by listening, observing, acting or speaking—and then sharing what was learned with the others." According to Mama Hill, her teaching methods encourage engagement, and thus build a commonality between students; which leads to their full comprehension and eliminates individual frustrations.

There is volunteer tuition (for those families who can afford to pay), but most of Mama Hill's Help, a California non-profit 501(c) 3, funds are provided by individual and philanthropic donations and portions of the founder's monthly pension. The annual operating budget is \$235,000. Positive national media exposure has resulted in donations of office supplies, equipment, and computers for the students.

Under the TCWF funding priority of Violence Prevention, we are seeking \$150,000 core operating expenses over two years to expand the Safe Passages program which has allowed Mama Hill's kids for the past two years to attend leadership seminars and to build their team of speakers who perform in various venues, exhibiting their poise, confidence and expository skills. Efforts to expand the program are stifled by an inability to transport students to and from headquarters and home.

Grant monies will be used to purchase a 12-seat van, insurance and one salary for the licensed driver. Funds will also be used to pay for two additional part-time staff; one office administrator and one credentialed technology arts instructor, which will allow Mama Hill's Help, Inc. to serve this underserved population with year-round programs, instead of just the traditional nine-month school year.

With California juvenile crime statistics at an all-time low in 2006, it should be noted that within poor inner city communities, such as south Los Angeles, the drop out rate has never been higher; the prison population of blacks and browns is exploding; teen pregnancy and the AIDS are epidemic, as are joblessness and hopelessness. How long will it be before the crime statistics are, once again, on the rise?

Mama Hill's Help, Inc. is an extraordinary model program that requires the urgent attention of all philanthropic institutions and individuals who care about the condition of these endangered young adults.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Millicent E. Hill, Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> Support staff includes counselors, mentors and social workers.

<sup>2</sup> Today's inner-city classroom is a toxic stew of students suffering from bipolarism, ADD, pre-natal drug exposure, low self-esteem, depression, poverty, one or two incarcerated parents, gang intimidation, the murder of one or more family members and/or friends, molestation and domestic violence.

<http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/fbc/grantguide.html>