

“I Witnessed Something Great Tonight”

Today is Tuesday, October 25, 2005. It's 7:00 P.M. and I just returned from a resident welcoming “ice cream social” at our Casa de Paz Roeser community located at 17th Street and Roeser Rd. Yesterday at CdP Roeser there was a shooting. A teenage boy was shot in the head. Fortunately, he'll live. Two days earlier on Saturday, there was another shooting at our new community. A stray bullet entered an apartment luckily missing everyone. Later that night though, another young man was shot and killed at 29th Street and Roeser. The police say that it was a gang shooting and likely related to the earlier shots fired at Casa de Paz. One week earlier than all of this, shots were fired at CdP Roeser, the start of all of this senseless violence. You may be asking, what in the world could he have witnessed tonight that was so great? Well, let me tell you.

Helping Hands closed escrow on CdP Roeser about 45 days ago. We had this “welcoming get-together” planned for several weeks. All of our residents were invited to join us at 5:00 P.M. for a brief introduction of HHHS and to enjoy some cake and soda. But then 10 days ago the shooting started. As late as 3:30 today, we contemplated canceling the event in deference to safety for our employees. But we didn't cancel. We chose to go on with the event. OK, here's what ***I witnessed.***

At 5:00 P.M. our Programs Coordinator, Ms. Rosalind Akins began the program. The crowd was sparse and made up mainly of the children.



God Bless the children!

I witnessed Rosalind, an amazingly loving and incredibly caring individual, speak about Helping Hands and what our plans are for CdP Roeser. She spoke with emphasis on our free Program Services, but more important she spoke about “community” and how we all have an opportunity to turn things around at CdP Roeser. This totally unselfish woman who has prior experience with this community, spoke with a passion and desire to help our brothers and sisters find a better way. What a blessing! Oh yes....the crowd started to grow a bit.



Rosalind Akins



Angela Banks

Next, I witnessed Angela Banks, our on-site Manager speak about how she hopes to be of service to the community. She talked about how Rosalind would work with the social issues facing our residents, and how she'd work on the business issues. Angela's eloquence and grace demonstrated again our desire to serve the community and her commitment to make CdP Roeser a wonderful and safe community in which to live. And oh yes, a few more people dropped by to listen.

OK, here's where it really gets cool. I then witnessed in an impromptu part of the program, Rosalind invite anyone from the group to come up and speak. For several seconds that seemed like an hour, no one moved. Then all of a sudden, from the back of the group, a man stood and asked to be heard. Quincy, a 45-year-old unemployed machinist told us that although he isn't a resident at CdP Roeser, he has family living there. He knows of the crime history at the property and in fact was a “part” of the crime several years earlier. Quincy was arrested years earlier for dealing drugs at CdP Roeser. He shared with us how God had changed his life. He shared how a hit-and-run driver killed his beloved Uncle a few weeks earlier

while walking at 16th Street and Broadway. He praised Helping Hands for having the courage to come onto this troubled community and try to help and make a difference. By this time, there actually were several known gang members in attendance, and Quincy humbled himself before all of us, including these men that knew him so well. God loves a humble person!

*I thought to myself, this is really turning out pretty good, but the best was yet to come. After Quincy finished, **I witnessed** Isaac, a 6-year-old boy and son of one of the residents come to Rosalind and ask if he could sing a song. This beautiful 6-year-old child took the microphone and sang us a wonderful song about God, and what was most impressive was that all of the other children stood and sang with Isaac in perfect unison. For whatever reason, I was so surprised that these kids knew a song about God. And not just one or two kids, all of them. WOW!*

*OK, so I thought it can't get any better than this, but of course I was wrong. Next, **I witnessed** another young boy (maybe 10 years old) come up to Rosalind and ask her if he could lead us in a closing prayer. Unbelievable! This young child of God didn't hesitate; didn't stammer; didn't flinch. He asked all of us to stand and to bow our heads in prayer.*



He then graced us with a most beautiful and heartfelt prayer. He asked God to watch over his Dad and his grandparents who are in heaven. He thanked God for his Mom who is still alive and loving and caring for him. The innocence of this youngster's prayer was incredible.

I WITNESSEDa community of people that want something better; want a safe and peaceful place to live; want a chance for their children to succeed in life. I watched people get choked up with emotion as they talked about coming together as a community. I watched a group of incredibly dedicated “servants” from Helping Hands stand in awe as they listened to these wonderful CdP Roeser residents.

We’re blessed in so many ways. We have wonderful families at all of our Casa de Paz communities that want a “hand up” in an effort to make their lives and that of their children a little better. And we have an amazing group of Helping Hands staff that only wants to serve. Chela Sullivan our Programs Manager; Mark Morales our Operations Manager; Rosalind Akins our Programs Coordinator at CdP Roeser; Matt McGilvray our Coordinator at CdP Fillmore were all there to help and serve. We even had Holly Leon our Coordinator from Sahuaro and Nora Casey our Jesuit Volunteer at Sahuaro, drive all the way down from CdP Sahuaro to help us with the refreshments. What an amazing evening! And, I got to witness it all. How cool is that! Oh yes and finally, the crowd did come.



If there was ever any question about our Mission, it was answered tonight!

***Witnessed by David Hepburn
Helping Hands Housing Services***