



Community educator
Maria Gomez-Murphy

Promotora de salud

As a child growing up in Los Angeles, Maria Gomez-Murphy watched her mother and father, both factory workers, labor through injuries, even pneumonia, without ever consulting a doctor.

Two years ago, the Tubac, Arizona, resident quit her job as a medical clinic director to create The Way of the Heart: The Promotora Institute, a nonprofit resource center that trains women to teach their peers about healthy living. "It's like I'm healing [my parents'] past," the 45-year-old says. "I'll do anything to make sure no one suffers like they did."

Gomez-Murphy started the institute with no money, living off the salary of her husband of 13 years, Michael Murphy, a personnel director. She sought grants and donations with the same stubbornness that gained her entry to Stanford University in the 1970s even though her high school principal discouraged her from applying. Eventually a local philanthropist invested \$11,000 in Gomez-Murphy's cause.

Today, her staff of *promotoras* spends afternoons in the living rooms of residents in southern Arizona and Nogales, Mexico, teaching them about everything from diabetes to domestic violence. All the counselors have undergone

a three-month training program to learn about health issues, active listening, and counseling techniques. The idea, explains Gomez-Murphy, is to gain trust and then encourage the women in these neighborhoods to take on the role of *promotoras de salud* in their own communities.

Gomez-Murphy plans to expand the program statewide, and then, she hopes, nationwide. "It's like a snowball effect," she says. "You get one person healthy, and that person becomes a role model for someone else." *Laura Trujillo*

En Los Angeles, donde creció María Gómez-Murphy vio como sus padres sufrían accidentes en la fábrica donde trabajaban sin recurrir a un médico, ni siquiera cuando tenían pulmonía.

Hace dos años, esta residente de Nogales, Arizona, dejó su empleo con la ayuda de su esposo, para fundar The Way of the Heart: The Promotora Institute, una entidad que tiene como objetivo mejorar la salud de los residentes del área. Gómez-Murphy comenzó el instituto sin recursos, pero buscó donativos y fondos con mucha perseverancia hasta lograr su meta. Ella trabaja de promotora no sólo en Arizona, sino también en Nogales, México, donde le explica a la comunidad temas como la diabetes y la violencia doméstica, con el fin de alentar a las mujeres a convertirse en promotoras de salud también.

P.S. Personal goal: Change the world by helping one individual at a time.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MORGAN