



May 2008

Dear Supporter:

Early on Saturday mornings, children in Calpulli Mexican Dance Company's program are already hard at work, wide skirts swishing and sneakers tapping as they learn the vibrant dances of their parents' birthplaces. From Michoacan, there is the humorous *baile de los viejitos*, in which children dance a tribute to their elders; and from Jalisco, the graceful *el jarabe tapatio*. On another day, teachers demonstrate a sacred dance of the Raramuri natives of Chihuahua. Calpulli is one of the only groups in the tri-state area offering children a chance to learn these dances in a professional, nurturing environment—yet, classes are offered practically free.

The vast majority of families would not be able to afford dance classes elsewhere, where children's programs typically cost at least \$100 per month per child, and can be as expensive as \$400 per month. Calpulli is dedicated to continuing the program for that reason, and for this one: Numerous studies of Latino children show they're most successful when they develop a strong bicultural identity, and have access to adult mentors--both of which Calpulli's children's program provides. The findings:



- A study published recently in the Harvard Educational Review tracked over 100 Latino families for 15 years. Study author Dr. Estela Zarate found one clear trait of high-achieving students was adopting a "hybrid identity...that they are American and they are Latino." On average, students in the study who embraced their parents' cultural heritage, instead of casting it off, were also the students performing best in school. Calpulli teaches students to *bailar al estilo mexicano*—to learn traditional Mexican dance with all its influences, nuances, passions, stories, symbolism, rhythms, and history—thus instilling great pride in the students' roots.
- A set of University of California at Santa Cruz studies tracked 200 high-achieving Latino and Latina doctoral students. The studies found some of these students struggled in elementary or high school, but that relationships with adult mentors had turned them around. Calpulli's teachers provide strong role models for younger students. Through well-structured classes, uniforms, and goal-setting, the program also teaches discipline and determination.
- Nationwide, Latino boys are in especially dire need of mentors. By some counts, about half don't finish high school in four years. Dr. Zarate's study found that long before dropping out, many boys reported "no relationship with teachers" leading them to "disengage" from school. Less than two percent of U.S. teachers are Latino men, creating a dearth of role models. Calpulli provides both male and female teachers in each classroom, offering boys a chance to connect with male mentors.
- One in five Latina teens has attempted suicide. In addition, Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy rate of any group. Experts at Harvard have found participating in extracurricular activities and having a strong bicultural identity are two of the most important factors in keeping Latina girls safe and healthy. At Calpulli, pre-teens and young teens build self-esteem, learn to value their heritage, and become part of a positive peer group.



TESTIMONIALS

"I could not be happier to have my daughter enrolled in Calpulli. In a nurturing environment, she learns about her parents' culture and gets to know other kids like her. Now my daughter realizes she's Mexican, and when she hears a song, she says, hey that's our song! It's also a great experience for the parents. I'm always running around working, so I don't even have time to sit down and breathe. At Calpulli, while our kids are in the class, the parents have time to connect. I met so many strong mothers, and I honestly feel that their support got me through some hard times in my life."

- Mother of a seven-year-old student in the program

"My daughter's Headstart teacher noticed she had a special talent for dance, and urged me to find a dance program for her. But when I began to look around for programs, all them were unaffordable for me as a single mother who had recently lost my husband. I felt so sad thinking that I couldn't develop her gift because of our economic situation. Then, by chance, I found Calpulli. Even during weeks when we were struggling to pay for food and rent, I knew we would be able to go to class. The program provided a constant for my daughter every week. I feel like Calpulli has been an angel for our family."

- Mother of a four-year-old student in the program.

YOUR DONATIONS HELP

Calpulli is eager to expand the children's program and asks for your help. Even small donations make a big difference:

- \$10 pays for one child's dance uniform
- \$30 pays for one girl's rehearsal skirt made by one of the instructors
- \$100 pays the cost of studio rental for one Saturday
- \$350 pays all of the instructors for one day
- \$2,000 pays the cost of storing costumes and program supplies for one year
- \$10,000 pays the cost of a costume purchase from a former children's program in Juárez, México

MAKE YOUR DONATION TODAY!

- Credit cards
Please visit www.nycharities.org and search for "Calpulli." There, you will be prompted through a few easy steps to make a donation.
- Checks
Please make your check payable to: Calpulli Mexican Dance Company

Mail your donation to:
Calpulli Mexican Dance
91-10 34th Ave., 5B
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

¡Muchas gracias!
Thank you very much!



BRIEF HISTORY OF CALPULLI AND ITS CHILDREN'S DANCE PROGRAM

Alive with vibrant choreography and beautiful costumes, Calpulli Mexican Dance Company quickly became one of the city's premier *ballet folklórico* troupes after its founding in October 2003. Within months, the company was in high demand to showcase traditional Mexican dances at schools and community centers across New York.

But as much as Calpulli's dancers enjoyed giving each workshop, they realized they were only serving a small number of families, and only for short periods of time. In addition, few local Mexican families were able to attend the programs in public schools, which were not open to the general public.

In November 2004, the company hit on an idea: Why not create an ongoing children's program and make the classes affordable so all children would be able to participate?

Beginning with just six pupils and two instructors, Calpulli's children's program started out by charging a flat fee for all families. But the company soon realized that for large, working-class immigrant families, even that fee posed a barrier to participation. The company soon switched to a voluntary donation system, in which parents can choose the amount they are able and willing to donate in support of the program.

Now, the question remains: With such low tuition, how will the company pay for program rental space, storage space, supplies, and teaching artists? In 2007, the Union Square Awards became Calpulli's first "angel," with a grant that allowed the children's program to grow to over 50 pupils. These students, ages 4 to 14, went on to perform at local libraries, the Alvin Ailey Studios, the famed Carnegie Hall, and Calpulli's annual summer festival- *Mexico Vive*.

The program has since expanded to include five instructors in two classes teaching Mexican folkloric dances from various regions, as well as ballet and dance movement fundamentals.

Calpulli's diverse group of families—coming from many different walks of life and ethnicities--have meshed into a positive, supportive community, organizing children's parties on traditional holidays, chipping in to craft props for dances, and often trading resources and school information as they wait outside classes.

