

Breath of Life: Changing Lives In The Gorge

Article by Esther Estey, Director of Breath of Life (Aliento de Vida)

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The audience of 300 youth screamed and clapped as the dancers came on stage. The strobe light filled the auditorium with a maze of colors as Aliento de Vida, a hip-hop dance, drama, and mime group, performed with DJ Pablo and featured rapper, Quest. The concert, sponsored by CDP Productions in Beaverton, Oregon, was a success.

Nearly two weeks later, another concert featuring Aliento de Vida was brought to the Hispanic community of Portland and met with equal enthusiasm. The crowd of 500 adults and youth watched, mesmerized and enthralled, as the group presented two powerful songs featuring lyrical dance and mime. The songs presented were written and recorded by that night's guest artist, Alex Campos, a Columbian singer whose fame extends across Latin America. Once the last picture was taken, the last autograph signed, and everything was packed up, the dancers left for their homes with joy. Each one knew that their message had found a place in the heart of each youth and adult that had attended.

Thousands of youth changed, transformed into powerful leaders of their community. Respectful, perseverant, loving, and kind, these leaders will ultimately impact their world for the good of humanity. This is the vision of Aliento de Vida (translated "Breath of Life"), a new Latino dance, drama, and mime group based in Hood River, Oregon. In February 2006, the group's members, 8 youth, decided to impact their community and make a difference in the lives of youth across the Northwest through dance, drama, and mime. Their purpose is to reach the Hispanic community of 6,000 of the Columbia Gorge with a message of hope, life, and through mime, dance, and drama. Breath of Life seeks to promote abstinence, family values, and drug and alcohol prevention through performances at community events, schools, churches, parks, and anywhere the message will be received.

Though they might appear to be normal teens and young adults, there is definitely something different about these eight Hispanic youth. They are the beginning of a new generation who will do anything to bring about a positive, life-transforming change to a world full of violence, disrespect, hate, illicit sex, drugs, and alcohol. The group is made up of Yuria and Tonantzin Ibarra, Evelin and Andres Herrera (sister and brother), Noel Sanchez, and Esther, Angelica, and John Estey. The youth, whose ages range from 12 to 26, are out almost every

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night of attending leadership, teaching, and dance classes in addition to holding a weekly community group where they mentor elementary, middle, and high school students, in addition to young adults. They call, visit, and help struggling youth who are dealing with issues such as drugs, alcohol, peer-pressure, low self-esteem, difficult relationships with parents, sex, etc.

The group is directed by Esther Estey and co-directed by Angelica and John Estey. These three young adults have more than 10 years of experience in dance, mime, and drama. Over the past, ten years they have performed at countless parks, community gatherings, churches, fairs, parties, conferences, workshops, and events. Angelica and John also have attended Mimistry International, a school for the arts founded by Todd Farley (a leading expert in the art of mime), Drama Improvement Conference, and numerous other lectures and seminars on the arts.

Since February, the group has performed on many occasions for the Hispanic community of Beaverton and that of Hood River. They were featured as guest artists at the concerts of Quest and Alex Campos and at events sponsored by Hope and Life church. The events at Hope and Life included "Training", an event on perseverance and purpose for youth, "Heroes", and Kidz Trek.

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