

Influential Women Spotlights Denise Zermeno: Housing & Mentoring Programs Director At StandUp For Kids – Orange County

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Dedicated Nonprofit Leader Draws on Nearly Two Decades of Service to Help Young People Overcome Homelessness and Build Independent Futures

Costa Mesa, California — Denise Zermeno is a dedicated nonprofit professional whose nearly two decades of service have been defined by compassion, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to underserved communities. As the Director of Housing and Mentoring Programs at StandUp For Kids – Orange County, she leads initiatives designed to help young people experiencing housing insecurity establish stability, develop essential life skills, and move toward independent adulthood.

Throughout her career, Denise has remained deeply focused on addressing the challenges surrounding youth homelessness. Her approach extends beyond providing immediate housing assistance. She believes meaningful, lasting change requires helping young people develop the practical tools and confidence necessary to build sustainable lives. Through housing and mentoring programs, she supports clients as they navigate financial literacy, employment readiness, independent living skills, and other challenges associated with transitioning into adulthood.

Denise's commitment to this work began through volunteer service and an internship in an underserved community in Orange County. Those early experiences helped shape the professional path she would follow for nearly 20 years. Since then, she has continued working to break cycles of homelessness and hardship while advocating for young people who may otherwise struggle to access the resources and support they need.



Her academic background includes a Bachelor of Science in Child and Adolescent Studies from California State University, Fullerton and an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences from Santa Ana College. Bilingual in Spanish, Denise is able to connect with individuals and families across diverse communities. Her work at StandUp For Kids has also earned her recognition for her contributions and community impact.

Denise attributes her success to a deep passion for serving underserved populations. Throughout her career, she has been particularly committed to helping children experiencing homelessness and young people coming from environments affected by substance abuse.

For Denise, this mission has served as a guiding light. She believes society has a responsibility to children and that meaningful progress requires people and organizations to bring their efforts together to create positive change.

Although nonprofit work can be challenging and frequently underpaid, Denise's determination and resilience have kept her focused on the impact of the work rather than its difficulties. She remains motivated by the desire to help break cycles of hardship that can affect children and families across generations.

For Denise, however, the most meaningful measure of success is not an award or professional recognition. It is the relationships she has maintained with clients throughout the years.

Former clients have contacted her long after working with her simply to let her know that they are doing well. Some have called, stopped by to say hello, or left handwritten notes when they could not find her. Denise keeps a collection of these messages, viewing them as reminders of why she continues to do this work. When clients recognize that she was there for them and continue to value that support years later, Denise considers that one of the greatest rewards she could receive.

One of the most influential pieces of career advice Denise received came from her English teacher, Mr. Robinson, while she was enrolled in an English learner class.

His message was simple: "Just don't be scared, you can do it."

The advice resonated deeply with Denise. As a teenager, she understood the fear of making a mistake, saying the wrong thing, or becoming the subject of ridicule. Despite those concerns, she was the top student in his class, and Mr. Robinson encouraged her to keep moving forward rather than allowing fear to hold her back.

That lesson has remained with Denise throughout her life. She applies it not only to academics and professional challenges but also to learning new skills, pursuing interests, and taking on unfamiliar experiences. His encouragement taught her that fear does not have to determine what a person is capable of accomplishing.

For young women entering the nonprofit and social services fields, Denise emphasizes the importance of maintaining perspective and not taking difficult interactions personally.

The work can be emotionally and mentally challenging, and interactions can sometimes feel overwhelming when they are misinterpreted or internalized. Denise believes that staying grounded in purpose is essential.

Rather than focusing on personal reactions, she encourages professionals to concentrate on what they can contribute in each moment. Sometimes that means solving a problem; other times, it simply means being present and listening to a client who needs support.

Because the profession can be demanding while offering limited financial compensation, Denise believes those entering the field must be motivated by passion, resilience, and a genuine commitment to meaningful service.

One of the most significant challenges facing the homeless nonprofit sector is the growing demand for housing and supportive services. In many communities, the need continues to outpace available resources, while funding limitations can make it difficult for organizations to provide consistent, long-term assistance.

Denise also sees significant opportunities for progress. Stronger partnerships among public agencies, private organizations, nonprofit groups, and community stakeholders could expand the reach and effectiveness of existing programs. Increased awareness surrounding homelessness, combined with innovation in housing solutions, offers additional opportunities to develop more sustainable pathways toward stability.

Through her work, Denise remains committed to ensuring that young people receive more than temporary assistance. She believes they deserve opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, confidence, and support necessary to create better futures.

Integrity, accountability, and resilience form the foundation of Denise's personal and professional values.

For her, integrity means remaining true to her values and doing what is right even when doing so is difficult. Accountability means taking ownership of mistakes, learning from them, and moving forward instead of dwelling on setbacks or shifting responsibility elsewhere.

Resilience is equally important. Denise has witnessed its power directly through the experiences of her clients, particularly individuals facing substance use challenges. She has seen people continue trying to rebuild their lives despite relapses, setbacks, and difficult circumstances.

Their persistence has deeply inspired her and reinforced her belief that people should never give

up on themselves or on the possibility of a better future.

As Denise Zermeno continues her work with StandUp For Kids – Orange County, her career remains rooted in a straightforward but powerful principle: meaningful change begins with showing up for people. Through housing support, mentoring, practical education, advocacy, and compassionate listening, she continues to help young people navigate difficult circumstances while working toward greater stability and independence. For Denise, every client relationship represents an opportunity to make a positive difference—and every reminder from a former client that they are doing well serves as confirmation that the work matters.

Learn More about Denise Zermeno:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/denise-zermeno>

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