

Charities face own back-to-school woes

■ Nonprofits seek donations to help get clothes for children

By Aaron Morrison

STAFF WRITER

HAYWARD — If you ask Tracy Strahl, a single mother of four, whom she credits for helping her get back on her feet, she would name Terra Firma Diversion and Educational Services, a drug rehabilitation nonprofit organization in Hayward.

Now, Strahl, Terra Firma and Central de Servicios are in need of additional help, as the organizations want to send her preteens, and many other disadvantaged children, back to school

with new clothing, shoes and supplies this fall.

Central de Servicios is a nonprofit organization serving the Hispanic and general communities in Union City, Fremont and Newark.

"We are looking to help kids who don't have shoes or jackets for the winter," said Anita Fraticelli, an organizer of the donation drive and employee of Terra Firma. "My goal is to try to help at least 70 kids. My biggest thing is to see a kid go to school with a new pair of shoes."

Terra Firma is looking for individuals and businesses willing to sponsor one or more of the almost 70 children it has identified — at \$200 to \$250 per

child — for new clothing, shoes and other essentials for the new school year.

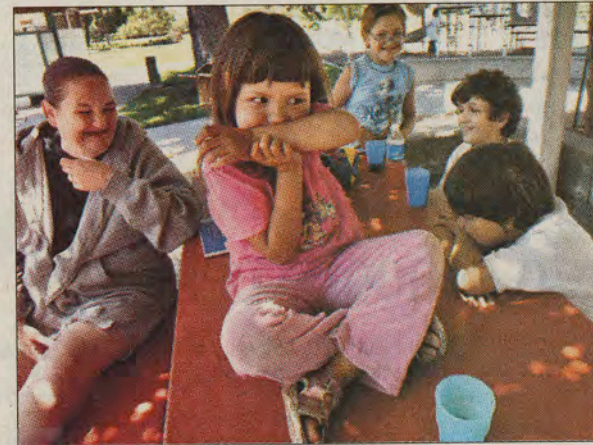
Fraticelli has been targeting community organizations and local department stores in hopes that she can meet an end-of-the-month deadline, just before school starts.

Strahl, 39, believes her kids deserve all the help they can get.

"Despite what I've put them through, they have kept up their grade levels and done really well," Strahl said.

After completing a six-month drug rehabilitation program in Los Angeles,

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TRACY STRAHL (left) and her four children, (from left) Gracie, 5; Oscar, 9; Vincent, 10 and Cisco, 7, spend time together at Meek Park.

ARIC CRABB — Staff

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► **KIDS**, from Local 1

Strahl was referred to Terra Firma. She decided to move to the Bay Area to take care of her children.

Strahl has supervised custody of all four of her children after she "got into a lot of trouble." All four of her children were placed in foster care, where they were treated terribly, she says.

With the help of Terra Firma's services, Strahl has been given a second chance at taking care of her children permanently. She must live with her mother for six months before she can have full custody.

Strahl and her children, age 5, 7, 9, and 11, live in a two-bedroom apartment on Meekland Avenue, where Strahl says they lead normal kids' lives.

"I might not have much, but I have my children and their love, and that's all that matters."

Strahl said. "I'm basically trying to give them their life back."

Terra Firma has been a non-profit organization in Hayward for 15 years and has offered outpatient drug and alcohol, domestic violence, anger management and supervised visitation counseling services to people such as Strahl, who have struggled with addictions.

"They are going to be somebody, these kids," Fraticelli said. "But some of these mothers can barely pay their rent."

For more information on how to make donations, contact Anita Fraticelli at 510-675-9362. Checks should be made out to Central de Servicios and can be sent to 30030 Mission Blvd., Suite 112, Hayward, 94544.

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