

IN
THEIR
CORNER

ABC Youth
Foundation
puts out a
heavyweight
effort for
local kids

BY DEAN NELSON

It's a 1.7-mile walk from the old ABC Youth Foundation boxing gym at 36th and National to its newer location at 31st and Market. But it's not the distance that matters. It's what you have to pass through to get there.

"That walk takes you through four different gang territories," says Billy Moore, director of ABC and son of light heavyweight champion Archie Moore. "By the time you get through the fourth one, you've been nearly convinced to join at least one of them, just for your own protection."

He explains that ABC, which stands for Any Body Can, exists so young people can make that walk—and any other difficult walk they'll face in life—with courage and dignity. Through boxing, tutoring, mentoring, and after-school programs, the foundation is all about prevention. Prevention instead of rehabilitation. "Trouble won't ever go away," Moore says. "But you can walk away from trouble."

The foundation was started in 1957 by Archie Moore, who spent the later part of his life in San Diego. Its purpose was to provide a more disciplined and hopeful lifestyle to young people who were vulnerable to gang influence and drug use. That purpose remains as strong—and necessary—today as it was then.

Young adults stop in at the gym on their way to and from work to pound on some punching bags and get instruction from seasoned boxing coaches. Late afternoon, the younger kids start arriving after school. They get help with homework, they get their fists wrapped, they get self-defense training, and they beat the heck out of the bags hanging from the rafters. Then they get in the ring.

"This is old-school boxing and old-school values," says Tom Courtney, executive director of ABC. He leans on one of the ropes in the warm gym, speaking over the *wap-wap-wap* of a punching bag getting a workout from a young man a few feet away. "It's a safe haven for anyone who comes in here."

Lizzette Corrales started coming to the gym when she was 13. She would be there from 4 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, trading in her ballet slippers for boxing gloves. "What made me stay was the interaction I had with the coaches," she says. "The way they cared about me kept me coming back." When it was time for her to get serious about going to college, she made use of

the tutors at ABC. She ended up as a Regents' and Chancellor's Scholar at UC Berkeley, an honor offered to less than 1.5 percent of the incoming class. She's now in her first quarter there, studying electrical engineering.

There is no charge for the services provided by the ABC Youth Foundation. It's run on grants, generosity from private donors, and

volunteers. It's also in the middle of a fundraiser called 1,000,000 Punches from the Heart, for which kids, cops, politicians, and anyone else can punch a bag for 60 seconds, with donors sponsoring every jab to "punch out racism, gang violence, and mistrust of the police."

"What could you do if you had more money?" I ask, thinking maybe something like air conditioning or a sound system.

"We could increase the number of programs we offer the kids," Courtney says without hesitation.

"We could offer them more options than violence and drugs."

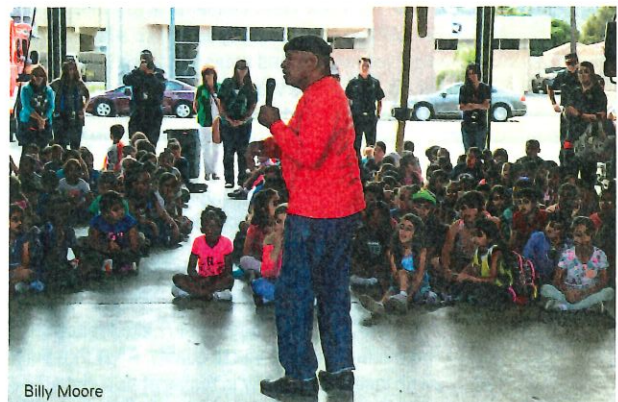
For Corrales, at least, the ABC Youth Foundation did more than just show her how to walk away from trouble—they taught her what to walk toward. "They encouraged me to stay out of trouble and to invest in good things," she says. "They put me on a platform that I can step off and achieve my goals." ♦

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ABC kids get self-defense training and after-school tutoring.



Billy Moore