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## Kathy Perez: Oh, Baby!

I've often thought about helping underprivileged children – once my own kids were grown, their college tuition paid, my work hours reduced. Kathy Perez had no such thoughts. About my last three items, that is. Three years ago, the single mom of Jackson, then 1, started a nonprofit dedicated to giving used baby gear to needy families.

"I had a *big* 1st birthday party for Jackson," says Perez, who works full time as director of KTTV Fox11 News. "After it was over, I looked around at all these gifts and wondered, what are we going to *do* with all this stuff?" Soon thereafter, Baby Basket California was born.

Amazing, isn't she? Yet, I found Perez to be a lot like many of us. Struggling to find a balance between work and family. Needing eight hours sleep, but typically getting four or five. The difference is the conviction, determination and strength that shine through. "I firmly believe that the babies in this city, in this county, in this state deserve to have a crib and diapers and their basic needs taken care of," says Perez. "It's all about the babies."

### You had an impressive 'eureka' moment. How did you get Baby Basket California up and running?

Even though Baby Basket is three years old, it started a long, long time ago for me. As a teenager, I lived in a residential girls' program for a couple of years. My mother had died. So I know what it's like to be someone in need. At the time, that program was run by El Nido Family Centers. Years later, I saw an article in the *L.A. Times* that quoted my former case worker. I called her right away, reconnected and they put me on their board.

After my son's party, I said to the El Nido director, 'What if people donated their gently used baby items and we passed them along to families in need?' For the first year, we operated out of El Nido. Then, I thought, what about homeless families and domestic violence shelters and everyone else? So, I took the program back and we're now serving 11 different local agencies, including El Nido.

### The agencies come to Baby Basket for donations?

Yes, we partner very well. I had one nonprofit come in [to the Baby Basket storage area] and say, 'Oh my God, you have baby wipes! We haven't been able to get these for a long time!' The happiest days of my life are when donated items are picked up and I know that *that* day, a family is going to get something critical for their baby's needs.

### Share one story you'll never forget.

I had this nice porta-crib that I had used twice, maybe. At our program launch, a woman came in and was looking at it longingly. 'Who does this belong to?' she finally asked. I answered, 'You.' Her 6-month-old daughter didn't have a crib. Case managers have told me they've seen babies sleeping in boxes on the floor. Can you imagine?

### What are you working on now?

This past January, we opened our first Baby Basket 'store' in Pacoima at the El Nido/MEND Family Source Center. I'm so proud of that!

### What kind of donations does Baby Basket need?

Everything! Almost. By law, we can't accept breast pumps or car seats. Anything else for infants to 5-year-olds is great – clothes, cribs, books, DVDs, all the baby gear, toys (infant only) and especially diapers, formula and wipes or monetary donations.

### How do we get it to you?

Call us at 818-762-2221, email [kathy@babybasketcalifornia.org](mailto:kathy@babybasketcalifornia.org) or visit the Web site: [www.babybasketcalifornia.org](http://www.babybasketcalifornia.org). And please join our Facebook group! ♦

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a 5-year-old daughter.



**Kathy Perez, founder of the nonprofit Baby Basket California, says, "Kids grow and go through things so quickly, it's common sense to pass items on to families in need."**

PHOTO BY TERESA BURGESS

Who would you like to see profiled in Chat Room? Please email your suggestions to: [Christina.Elston@parenthood.com](mailto:Christina.Elston@parenthood.com).