



Mentoring Programs Reunite Families



A TIME TO BOND Parents spend two to four hours of supervised time with their children each week to help strengthen their relationships at Aviva Children's Services, which is dedicated to reuniting broken families. Angelica Elias, top left, has battled substance abuse and temporarily lost custody of her daughter, Isabella, above, and another child.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT
BY PAULA OSPINA

It is a place for second chances – a center for parents and children to make a fresh start together after the scourge of neglect, poverty or parental abuse that have made home life untenable.

The one-story brick building in downtown Tucson houses Aviva Children's Services, a secure area where children and parents can spend quality time together.

Aviva's goal is to gradually reunite broken families by offering guidance and support to help them maintain positive relationships with their children. Parents visit the center to spend two to four hours a week with their children under supervision.

The Aviva Divas are a group of volunteers who meet at the center each Thursday to sew and create quilts, duffle bags and doll clothing for neglected children in the community. The volunteers do not know who receives their handiwork, but they said they were satisfied knowing that they were helping children who range from newborns to 18-year-olds.

A crucial service offered at Aviva is the Parent Peer Support Program, where parents who were separated from their children have been paired with parents who were successfully reunited with their children.

Here, parents share their experiences and offer encouragement to others who are currently struggling to reunite their families.

One of the parents, Angelica Elias, shared her story of substance abuse and the temporary loss of custody of her two children. She said the group was a perfect fit for her because she was able to relate to parents with similar issues.

She said, "Knowing exactly what they're thinking – from what I felt and what I thought, and being able to be like it's O.K. I went through it, and I am here for you."

"You're really doing something that's satisfying to you," said Chris Morris, an Aviva Diva, "to know that you've helped children, small children who are in a really rough spot and your heart goes out to all these little kids."

Services Center Helps Parents and Neglected Children



GIFT OF GIVING Aviva Divas, a group of volunteers, meet weekly to make quilts and doll's clothing for local children in need.