

# Charity's Giveaway Gets Rushed

Nation Children Inc.'s stock of food, children's items wiped out in a few hours.

**B**y the time volunteers from Nation Children Inc. opened the doors of the community center at Lake Anne for the nonprofit organization's summer giveaway, 150 people were already lined up to get in, said Esther Afia Armah, the group's executive programs director. "It was a rush."

Anyone in need could show up for free food, children's clothing, books and toys, although many had been referred by social services. The Friday, June 26 event was scheduled to run from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., but the food was gone by about 1 p.m., and at 3 p.m., volunteers were folding up tables and preparing to leave.

"Everything is finished. That means there are people in the community needing help," Armah said. She said people had come not only from Reston but also from Herndon, Chantilly, Loudoun County and even Washington, D.C.

Nation Children started in Baltimore and has its Northern Virginia office in Herndon. The organization conducts two major giveaways each year, one before Thanksgiving and one in early summer, in order to provide seasonally appropriate clothing. Armah said the event was especially helpful to people waiting to get on food stamps, which takes about a month.

She said organizers would like to offer more giveaways but lack the resources to do so. "We don't

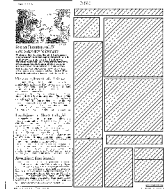
get as much support as we would wish," she said. Nation Children takes donations and receives food from the food bank, but its five directors pay many of its expenses out-of-pocket.

A professional artist, Armah helped to found the organization in 2001, when she lived in Baltimore, as an arts program for poor children with special needs. She soon decided she wanted to help the children's families to care for them and got some friends on board to help fund charity efforts. In 2003, she moved to Reston, and she opened the office in Herndon three years ago.

The organization hosts art programs at the Lake Anne Community Center from spring through fall, "and it's free for every child that wants to do it," Armah said. "We're coming out with one program that allows children to sell their artwork and keep the money." That program will begin in November and will also be run out of the community center. "We're very grateful to RCC [Reston Community Center] because they don't charge us anything for using their premises," Armah said.

The Herndon office also provides some emergency food and clothing year-round, outside of the semi-annual events.

In response to the recession, Nation Children has also started a program that connects laid-off domestic workers to customers who need housework or yard work



done. The service is free, although any customer who wants the organization to conduct a background check on a potential employee will have to pay for it.

On Aug. 29, the group will stage the Just Walk fund raiser in Reston, which will raise money for the Embry Rucker Community Shelter.

— MIKE DiCICCO

## Get Help or Help Out

To contact Nation Children, call 866-533-6629 or 703-463-9698. More information, as well as a volunteer form, is available on the Web site [www.nationchildren.org](http://www.nationchildren.org). The office is located at 603 Carlisle Drive, Herndon.



PHOTO BY MIKE DiCICCO/THE CONNECTION

**Friday's charity outreach event, like all Nation Children efforts, was staged by volunteers. From left, standing, are Swathi Mogili of Reston, Joyce Boateng of Herndon, Vivian Nguyen of Aldie and Melisa Melendez of Herndon. Seated is Nation Children director Esther Afia Armah of Reston.**

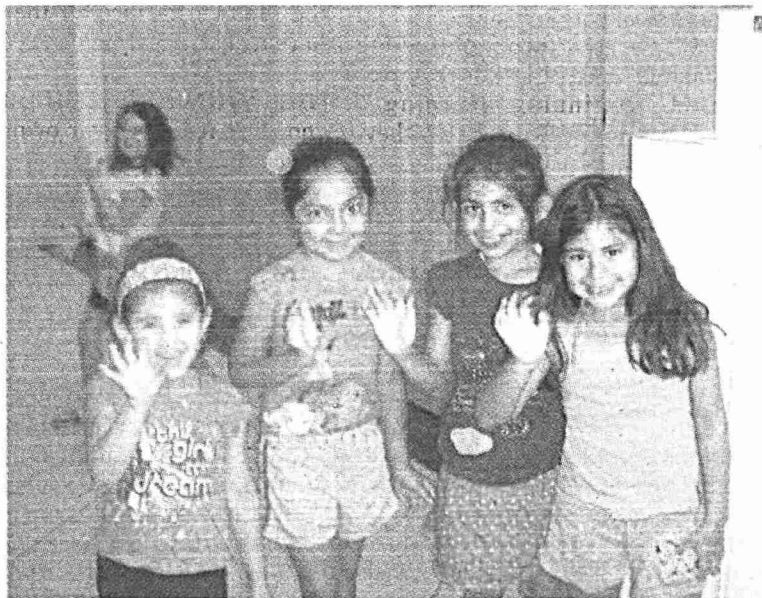


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**Among the foodstuffs given away at the event were 30 boxes of fresh vegetables.**