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**Interfaith Panel to Alert Council on Needs**

By Andrea Kelly

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Life is hard when the economy is down, and city-funded programs help some families get through the tough times.

The Pima County Interfaith Council hopes to get this message across to City Council members this week, so the council remembers how critical some of the programs it has funded in the past are to Tucson residents.

The Interfaith Council will present information at Tuesday's City Council study session about how programs help residents make ends meet.

The group plans to talk about:

- Kidco, the city's after-school program
- Schools Plus Jobs, a city-funded high school student job-training program
- Job Path, city-funded adult job-training program

"We're going to present our vision for the city and what would make the city a first-class city in hard economic times," said Leah Mundell, who is involved with the Interfaith Council through Congregation Chaverim.

She said she plans to point out the programs not only help people during the hard times with immediate training and assistance, but they help give people the skills to pull themselves out of those hard times. For example, she said two students in the Schools Plus Jobs program helped their families avoid foreclosure on their homes because of the extra money the students earned.

The program allows high school students to train for and work in jobs in the school district. The students gain work experience and a paycheck they wouldn't otherwise get.

"It's more than the money, but the money is crucial," Mundell said. "It's really amazing to hear those stories."

She said she hopes to persuade the city to become a "family center," a place where people can go for community resources like those provided at an event in March at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

"Many people who came to family center day were looking for job training," Mundell said.

"We had people from (Pima County) One Stop, Pima College financial aid, trying to really look at the whole needs of families. We'd like to see that model expanded."

Councilman Steve Leal said the discussion is intended to address future budget years, though neither he nor Mundell said they thought the group would be making a specific budget request.

"We don't have any money; that's why we have to focus on the (budget) cycle after this," Leal said. It is important to find out how the changes in the economy are affecting local families, he said.

"They want to work with us over the next couple budget periods and try to heighten the city's ability to focus on these things," Leal said.

"We don't fund PCIC, but we've been able to fund things that they care about."

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