

## LOCAL HERO

# THE GIFT OF DIGNITY

**WHO:** Julie Brown, a New York City social worker.

**HER MISSION:** To provide children in need with new or gently used clothing, books, and toys.

**HOW SHE'S DOING THIS:**

In 1997, Brown conceived the idea for the nonprofit group Room to Grow—a place where low-income parents, referred by social-service agencies, can pick out donated items without feeling like they're receiving a handout. "She makes each client feel as if he or she were a customer at a boutique," says Julie Yamin, a donor and volunteer at Room to Grow, which is located in a storefront in New York City's Harlem. "She helps parents sort through the racks, listens to what they need, and suggests different colors or sizes." Says Brown, "I try to let the clients decide what to take."

Educational toys, baby bedding, and equipment such as strollers and carriers may be included in the "baby bundle" each family gets. Parents can return every three months until their kids turn 3.

**WHY SHE'S A HERO:** Brown decided the best way to assist children living in poverty is by helping parents help their kids. "If we can get into the lives of children at the early stages and foster a



**A warm place to get necessities**

more stimulating or comfortable environment," she says, "then we might be setting them on the road to healthier development." She hopes to distribute 1,000 baby bundles this year, as well as offer story hours (including free books) and parenting seminars.

—BETH JOHNSON

**KNOW A LOCAL HERO?** Is there someone in your area who's helping children and families? We'd like to hear about it. Write to: Local Hero, PARENTING, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019; fax to 212-522-8699; or e-mail us at [local\\_hero@timeinc.com](mailto:local_hero@timeinc.com).