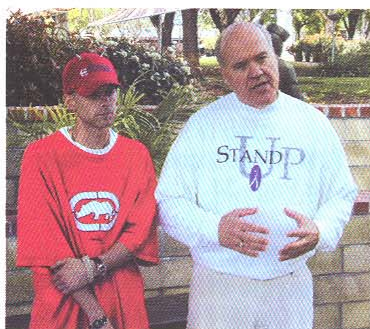


# saving kids from the street

**D****Rick Koca** is living proof one person can make a difference. From an abused childhood, Koca developed a particular compassion for children. Then when he retired from the military 13 years ago, he knew he wanted to work with kids of all ages and encourage their involvement in the community. One night, he discovered a great need.

An after dark tour of Balboa Park in San Diego educated Koca about the perilous situation of homeless youngsters. 1.3 million kids live on the streets of America. For many, child abuse drove them to leave home. But on the streets they face further victimization. Thirteen die on the streets every day from abuse, disease and suicide.



Rick Koca (right) with a street kid.

With a heart for service and the drive to make a difference, Koca founded StandUp For Kids, a non-profit outreach program for street kids. Today, his organization is operating in 30 cities nationwide with over 7,000 volunteers and is headquartered in San Diego, California.

StandUp reaches out to street kids between 12 and 18 years old to provide basic necessities such as clothes, hygiene products and food and also counseling and temporary safe havens.

In the Fall of 2003, *The New Yorker* will feature Koca and his program in their book, "40 People Who Are Changing the World for the Better."

To learn more about StandUp For Kids and to make a difference in the life of a kid who believes that no one cares, visit [www.standupforkids.org](http://www.standupforkids.org), call 800-365-4KID or e-mail [staff@standupforkids.org](mailto:staff@standupforkids.org).

This is the story of Brian, one of many whose lives have been changed because of Rick Koca and his organization:

At the age of 16, I left home. The thing I remember most about my first night on the street is how incredibly scared I was. I thought I would either become a drug addict or be killed in the first couple of months I was out there.

I found a group of kids like me and they became as close as family to me. We would spend all day every day hanging out at the mall, asking for change to get something to eat. Those were some of the most humiliating days of my life. I didn't have any identification so I couldn't get a job.

The first time Rick came up to me I remember thinking, "Oh great, here comes another dirty old man." He asked me when was the last time that I'd spoken with my Mom or Dad and offered me his cell phone to make a call. I was suspicious. God knows many others had offered the same, but were interested in more than just letting me use their phone.

What surprised me was the fact that after I made my phone call, (I called my dad and talked to him for the first time in over a year), Rick didn't want anything from me. He simply asked me if there was anything I needed and said that he would be back the next week with food and clothing. Well, I never really expected to see him again but the next week there he was, as promised.

Over the next few years Rick and I became very close and he always wanted to help me in any way he could. I remember one Christmas I asked him for a bus ticket home to Arkansas. On Christmas Eve, he took me down to the Greyhound station to buy me a ticket.

Thanks to Rick, today I am a National Trainer with StandUp For Kids. I feel proud that I can be part of the organization that made me realize that there was more in store for me than a life on the streets. That someone cared. Said that they would be there for me and then be there. It wasn't something that I'd been used to.

Today, Rick and Brian remain close. When Brian's son Tyler was christened at the StandUp for Kids Outreach Center in San Diego, Brian asked Rick to be Tyler's Godfather.

## Brian's story