



## Ampy Suarez



### HOPE Youth Ranch

Born in Cuba, Ampy Suarez emigrated to the U.S. with her family in 1967, settling in the Miami area. Early on, Suarez knew she wanted to work with abused children but it wasn't until her then 8-year-old daughter brought home a friend from school who was in an abusive situation that her call to work with abused children came to fruition.

This experience reawakened her calling. She was already involved with feeding the homeless and soon began to see the homeless as hurting children who had never had the opportunity to deal with the hurt of child abuse and had turned to drugs and alcohol to dull the pain. Having heard foster care so often in conversations with the homeless, she and her husband, married now for 29 years, became foster parents.

Her family was forever changed, growing from 3 to 11 children within a few short months. Within a few years, the dream was to help hundreds, possibly thousands, of children. And HOPE Youth Ranch was born.

HOPE, which stands for Helping Overcome Past Experiences, has been in operation since 2004 serving teens in the foster care system through counseling, equine therapy and private schooling. In 2009, HOPE opened its doors to children in the community with learning disabilities, ADHD and autism through a day program.

Suarez is a licensed minister and as the director of educational services at HOPE Youth Ranch, she works with children who have known much heartache. Yet she feels fortunate to do so. "I couldn't think of doing anything else with my life."

*What do you think is the secret to your family's success?*

The best thing we ever did as parents was to involve our children in our life's work and instill in them a pursuit of purpose for their own lives. Focusing our children's eyes on the needs of other children has helped them mature to caring and loving adults who are striving themselves to build careers of service to others.

*What is your biggest fear?*

Fear has the power to cripple our lives. I have learned to overcome my fears and trust in the Lord even when I don't understand my circumstances.

*What advice would you give to other women?*

Live with passion. Dare to take risks and pursue your dreams. You can't reach for the future while holding on to the past and, as difficult as it may be to face that past, you must do it and find the healing you need. You have a great purpose to fulfill that no one else is meant to fulfill.

*What is your proudest moment?*

Reading my oldest daughter's essay for a college English course where she shared her point of view on sharing her childhood and her parents with foster children. I had worried about the toll that our ministry may have taken on our children. I found that she had received more than she had given.

*What is your biggest achievement?*

The calling to work with victims of child abuse came from a place of hurt in my own life. The abuse I experienced was emotional and verbal at the hands of a schizophrenic mom who I have come to realize may not have known the pain she was inflicting. Being able to forgive, move on and turn that pain into something good for others has been the best thing I have ever accomplished.

*What makes you happy?*

I treasure my moments with my children and my grandchildren. At the end of the day, I love coming home and I love to provide that feeling to our children.

*How do you relax and take time for yourself?*

My husband and I take a week-long honeymoon cruise every year to keep the fire of our marriage alive and refocus on our own relationship as husband and wife away from the stress of ministry and obligations.

*What kind of message would you like to give women in the area or in this community?*

In the midst of bad times, financial struggle and pain, look for a way to be of service to others. Focusing on the needs of others will make your own situation seem less daunting and keep you from a place of self-pity and fear.

*What else would you like to share with our readers? About being a mom, about your work?*

Our school is undergoing expansion as word has spread about the success children with autism and learning disabilities are experiencing. Our enrollment has doubled each year since 2009 all by word of mouth. Our work with the foster care program also continues to expand and last month we expanded our services for children in foster care by opening the first of many sibling homes to provide a home for foster children to live together as siblings. In the past year, HOPE was made aware of a growing need in the Tampa Bay area for a residential program for minor victims of sex trafficking. We are working on The Genesis Project. I would like to invite readers to visit our website at [www.hopeyouthranch.org](http://www.hopeyouthranch.org) and learn more about how they can help in any of these areas.

*How do you enjoy or draw information from the magazine?*

Wow, what a resource for Tampa Bay's parents. My first experience with the magazine was during a visit to my child's pediatrician many years ago. The parenting advice, information on family friendly activities and ideas were so very beneficial to me.

*What is your favorite thing to do with your kids in Tampa Bay?*

Fishing and watching the sunset.

*Who is your biggest inspiration or role model?*

I had the opportunity to meet Mother Theresa as a teen and I was struck by her humility and sense of focus on her life's calling despite the obstacles she faced. I love what she said when asked how she felt about the fact that Calcutta, India, after so many years of hard work on her part did not appear to be any different. She responded, "God did not call me to be successful, He called me to be obedient." She did not measure her success through the eyes of men but through the eyes of her Creator.