

# The Power of Two



Issue 10

October 2008

## Families are Glad to be Back in School

Families find relief from increased stress at home.

For many families the traditional excitement surrounding "back to school" this year was overshadowed by the economic crisis our country is facing. Parents have been distracted, fearful, and experiencing increased stress and anxiety. This is magnified for the families we serve - their low paying service-sector jobs are being negatively impacted as people cut back on restaurants, car washes, gardening, etc. And they have been hit by higher prices for gas and food. These factors lead to higher stress levels in parents which inevitably trickles down to their children.

But, children are completely unaware of the volatile world around them. All they know is that mommy and daddy seem angrier, tired and more frustrated. A critical part of our job as parents is to maintain a sense of See **Back to School**, page 4

## Successful Parent Education Programs "Create Pathways for Action and Change"

Mothers' Club participates in an inquiry process to research best practices and approaches in parent education.

There is a saying, "it takes a village to raise a child," which Mothers' Club certainly knows to be true. And a question we ask ourselves time and time again is, "what does it take to raise a parent?" What type of support, guidance and services do parents need to raise their children in today's world? In January 2008, Mothers' Club joined a group of leaders in our field to research this very question and identify best practices and approaches in parent education that are proven to produce positive outcomes for families.

The Inquiry Team is comprised of lead staff from three family literacy programs in First 5 LA's Family Literacy Initiative (Mothers' Club, Hawthorne See **Parent Ed**, page 4

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## Mothers' Club Family Learning Center

980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91103  
626.792.2687 Office  
626.793.1832 Fax

Visit our website at  
[www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org)



Children in our Pre-Kindergarten Class learning exploring the world of bugs!

## From the President...

Dear friends,

Last week, I participated in a panel discussion for *First 5 Los Angeles* about the benefits of family literacy programs. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on key steps to our success.

(Background note: First 5 Los Angeles is part of **First 5 California**, the California Children and Families Commission, which grants funds from **1998's Proposition 10** - a 50 cent tax on every pack of cigarettes.)



*President Judy Smith seen here with Erich Nakano from Little Tokyo Service Center and Armando Argandona, the panel's facilitator.*

Mothers' Club became part of First 5 LA's Family Literacy Initiative in 2002 with a three-year grant. Then in 2005, we received another five-year grant when First 5 LA expanded the initiative. This was a watershed event for Mothers' Club as an organization, and it wasn't just the long-term funding that had such a tremendous impact on our agency.

The grants came with technical assistance to help us develop strategies to measure our outcomes and results in a rigorous, academic way. Until then, we had relied on anecdotes to tell the impact of our two-generation learning program. Anecdotes only tell part of the story, since influencing a family's prospect for success in school and in life is a multi-faceted goal. Through the **Family Literacy Support Network** we learned to objectively document the results we produced, and in doing so, compare them to other family literacy programs nationwide.

We found that our family retention rate (the length of time a family consistently comes to Mothers' Club) is much higher in comparison with other programs. This buttressed a fact we knew, but could not quantify: that we [See \*\*President\*\*, page 3](#)

## Save the Date! Our Annual *Guardian* Recognition Event

January 28, 2009

6:30 PM

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center  
980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue, Pasadena

*Guest Speaker:* Richard Atlas, The Atlas Family Foundation

**Rich Atlas** is co-founder and trustee of The Atlas Family Foundation, Los Angeles, CA; retired general partner, Goldman Sachs & Co., and a Board Member of ZERO TO THREE since 2001. Mr. Atlas and his wife, Lezlie, are philanthropists who are dedicated to supporting parents and early childhood professionals to impact healthy development of the first years of life. The Atlas Family Foundation works in partnership with its grantees to help lay solid foundations on which to build social, emotional, and cognitive development that can enhance learning in school and throughout life. Rich has a particular interest in increasing the sensitivity of business leaders about the impact of company attitudes and policies on family priorities.

For reservations and/or more information, please call our Development Office at (626) 792-2687 ext. 122.

## Thank you to Our *Guardians*

The Mothers' Club *Guardians* provide cornerstone support for our programs by donating \$1,000 or more to our annual fund. Consider joining today!

Judy Smith Asbury & Greg Asbury, Gwen & Guilford Babcock, Carole & Mike Babcock, Ann & Olin Barrett, Renu Bhat-Hansen & Alex Hansen, Claire & Bill Bogaard, Jeannine Bogaard, Barbara Campbell, Marie Campbell, Nancy & John Carlton, Kevin Clifford, Mrs. James Alexander Cobey, Mary Anne Cunningham, Leslie Dennis, Dorlys Devereux, Bonnie & John DeWitt, Sonia & John DiCiaccio, Anne Esbenshade & Michael Miele, Helen Minton Farley, Christine & Ira Felman, Jean & Louis Fleming, Susan Futterman & Arnold Siegel, Jennifer & Mark Giles, Stephanie & J. Dale Harvey, Deborah Heitz & Shaw Wagner, Tracy & Richard Hirrel, Adelaide Hixon, Ellen



& Harvey Knell, Annette Kunzman & Douglas Soloman, Valerie & George Leiva, Rosemary Lonergan, Linda Lopez & Harold Perera, Maria Low Way, Kathy & Tony Magistrale, Judy & Stephen McDonald, Patricia McLaughlin, Margaret & David Mgrublian, Maria & John Minervini, Norah Morley, Janice & Richard Morris, Wendy Munger & Leonard Gumport, Jennifer & E. David Murphy, Nanette & Henry Nevins, Mary Lois Nevins, Celia Gomez Newman, Judy & John O'Neill, Beth & Christopher Orndorff, Kathleen & Donald Orth, Claudia & Ramon Pack, Teresa Payton, Sylvia & Benjamin Paz, Manny Perera, Peggy Phelps, Gay & Ron Redcay, Marsha V. Rood, Aty & Howard Rotter, Pam & Tony Schwarz, Carol & Carl Selkin, Jil & Joel Sheldon, Joyce & Richard Summerwill, Victoria & John Tongish, Maxine Tongish, Heather & Michael VanMeter, Julie & Stephen Webber, Judith & John Whiting, Cindy & George Wiley, Judy & Randy Wilson

## New Focus on MC's Volunteer Program

Hello! My name is Jason Wurtz and I am the new Volunteer Manager at Mothers' Club. I was hired to recruit young professionals and their families to volunteer at our beautiful Learning Center. While I have volunteered for over three years now, this is my first job with a non-profit. After graduating with a business degree in 2003, I worked for a few financial institutions and a large food company. However, my experience tutoring homeless kids ignited a passion for volunteerism, which is why I am at Mothers' Club today.

In the summer of 2005, I began tutoring my first student, a nine-year old named Keyshawn. While he was a grade or two behind in almost every academic subject, he had a keen perception of the world around him. I remember once telling Keyshawn it was time to go "home" and he immediately corrected me by saying, "the shelter is not my home". I tutored Keyshawn for nine months until one day he and his family disappeared. Such is the reality of working with homeless kids. Families tend to move a lot, sometimes without notice. One day they are just gone.

I received news eight months later that Keyshawn was at a new shelter on the west side. His mother asked me to tutor him again. Very excited, I agreed and trekked to one of my favorite spots, Venice Beach. I arrived at the shelter and was greeted by a large man with an even larger smile. The Pastor walked me down some stairs into a

large dining room with five rows of long tables. Keyshawn bounded out of a small adjoining room and practically leapt into my arms.

I always had doubts about my impact on Keyshawn. He seemed to enjoy my company, but we sometimes struggled to make progress and I often got frustrated. So I had a little bit of anxiety about our second time around. After catching up on the last eight months, I asked him what he wanted to work on. He jumped out of his seat, marched to the chalk board, and asked me for a multiplication problem. I told him five times three. He drew three buckets and five apples inside each. "The answer is fifteen," he exclaimed confidently.

This floored me. Keyshawn used the very same technique I had taught him over a year ago to solve simple multiplication problems. In fact, he remembered a lot of the things I taught him. Apparently, I *DID* make a tremendous impact on Keyshawn. This moment helped me better understand the important role volunteers can play in the lives of kids like Keyshawn.

It's been two years since my reunion with Keyshawn and my belief in the power of volunteerism is stronger than ever. I very much look forward to recruiting bright, compassionate volunteers to work with the families at Mothers' Club. I know first hand the difference they can make.

- Jason Wurtz  
Volunteer Manager



Jason Wurtz, Mothers' Club's new Volunteer Manager, spends a few minutes reading "The Nightmare Before Christmas" to a preschool boy.

## A Wish List from our Children's Program

- ♦ Digital cameras, used in working condition
- ♦ CD players, used in working condition
- ♦ Halloween Costumes for Children 0-5
- ♦ Magazine Subscriptions

1. **Wild Animal Baby** - <http://www.nwf.org/kidsmagazines>: \$19.95 one year subscription

2. **Your Big Back Yard** - <http://www.nwf.org/kidsmagazines>: \$19.95 one year subscription

3. **Ladybug** - <http://www.cricketmag.com> (click on tab "3-6 yrs"): \$33.95 one year subscription

4. **Babybug** - <http://www.cricketmag.com> (click on tab "6 months - 3yrs."): \$33.95 one year subscription

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### President, cont. from page 2

had developed a program that answered the needs of families in a profound way - and they in turn would move heaven and earth to stay involved.

We found that in all areas, our data revealed we were above standard, and in many cases, way above standard. Again, objective numbers showed that our grassroots program was really making a difference in the lives of families.

And as we collected the data, we learned how to use it to improve our programs. We talk objectively about our programs, what the data reveals, and then consider ways to improve upon that. This, in turn, increases outcomes and continues to inform our progress.

Finally, this data provided the solid evidence that our donors needed to know that their dollars were getting the job done. We were not just a "little Pasadena project," but a significant model that was succeeding over and above expectations. That set the stage for our successful capital campaign and our new building.

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center is charting the course for our next phase of growth right now. Thanks to many visionary philanthropic agencies, including First 5 LA, we are realizing a very bright future.

Warm Regards,  
Judy Smith Asbury, President

**Back to School, cont. from page 1**

calm and order. School helps us do just that by providing parents and children with the stability and structure they need amidst the uncertainties they face each day.

So here at Mothers' Club, we are not surprised to find our programs bursting at the seams, with 72 parents and their 85 children enrolled. On September 8, returning children ran down the hall to hug their teachers and see their classrooms, mothers greeted old friends and met new ones; and everyone sighed in relief as they escaped the pressures of the outside world.

The parents started off the year by electing new leadership to the Parent Advisory Board Council, including Nelly Nuno as President, Mayra Flores as Vice-President, Marisol Aquino as Secretary, and Christina Cisneros as Treasurer. The council began a new committee of classroom representatives to support the teachers, and to help parents learn leadership skills that will benefit their children in elementary school. And of course, they are planning for a fun-filled Halloween.



Families count on Mothers' Club to provide a peaceful and nurturing environment in which parents and children can learn critical skills that will support their future, and become part of a community that shares both their concerns and fears, and their hopes and dreams. It is our job to make sure that we are always here for these families. Our vast experience in designing quality programs with proven outcomes, and our



*Celebrations provide needed social opportunities for mothers in our programs.*

**Parent Ed, cont. from page 1**

and Rowland Heights), and the Family Literacy Support Network.

Our inquiry process thus far has entailed delving into the plethora of research on parent education; polling family literacy directors and parent educators from all programs in First 5 LA's initiative; and most importantly, asking parents in the programs what they feel they need to succeed.

The consensus among staff and parents on key factors contributing to successful parenting include developing critical life skills, along with increased capacity to face a variety of potentially volatile situations they may encounter as their children grow up, moving from preschool all the way through high school. Both groups believe parents are best equipped for the future if they develop their personal skills, increase their own education, and are part of social networks that can support them when times are tough.

Parents who were surveyed believe that characteristics such as confidence, resiliency, independence, self-esteem, and persistence are keys to being a good parent. Staff identified the importance of building a parent's self-efficacy along with an "I can do it" attitude. To parents this means they feel capable of handling common prob-

lem, such as asking for help in an emergency, handling conflicts with their children, understanding how to navigate the school system, and how to find resources in a crisis. Another critical factor is learning how to effectively interact with people outside the home - landlords, doctors, social workers, and teachers. Successful parents weave these acquired skills and contacts into a valuable network of "social capital" that supports their family life.

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Research on families living in poverty confirms the notion that "families suffer most when they live in situations that make them socially isolated." Indeed, experts agree that children of parents who have not developed social capital are at risk for school failure, delinquency, higher drop out rates, substance abuse, etc.

Programs that focus on strengthening parent/child relationships and developing parents' capacity to raise healthy, happy, and resilient children, need to "adopt an empowerment model and take action to break down patterns of social isolation." Successful family support programs, like Mothers' Club, invest in families, and communities, by building social capital.

- Julie Espinoza  
Family Literacy Coordinator

long track record of fiscal accountability and solid leadership will help ensure our role as a "constant" for families in need in our community.

- Sarah Orth  
Development Director  
and Silvana Casalegno  
Parent Program Director

Article Resources: (1) *Two-Generation Programs: Design, Cost, and Short-Term Effectiveness*, Robert G. St.Pierre, The Future of Children, Winter 1995. (2) *Rethinking the Evaluation of Family Strengthening Strategies: Beyond Traditional Program Evaluation Models*, Harvard Family Research Project the Evaluation Exchange, 2004

## From the Executive Director...



*A mother and son arrive for the first day of our new program, First Connections.*

Our Mothers' Club family is growing! One of the goals we set when building our new home was to increase the number of families we serve. We know from our waiting list and phone calls we receive that there are many anxious and isolated mothers who want to be part of Mothers' Club. But our space and hours of operation were so limited that we had to turn many away. Now that we are settled into our spacious, welcoming facility, we are able to open our doors to more mothers and children. We now serve 60 children and their parents each morning in our core two-generation family literacy program, a 30% increase from previous years.

Because there remains a limit to the number of families we can serve at any one time, we are now looking for new ways to serve families throughout the day. Our first outreach effort is an afternoon program for mothers and their very young children. We call it **First Connections** and its purpose is to provide a safe, nurturing place for children to interact, and to provide mothers with a place to get their basic questions answered, meet other mothers, and, importantly, get a small break from their child.

A pilot version of *First Connections* began last spring and we quickly discovered that, yes, we were right - there is a need and desire for this type of program. Now, thanks to grants from the **Confidence Foundation** and **The**

**Atlas Family Foundation** we have fully embraced this new Mothers' Club component. With the guidance of our new **Afternoon Program Coordinator, Dana Lee**, 12 mothers with 14 children between the ages of 4-30 months are learning that they are not alone in their motherhood journey.

For three afternoons each week, our energetic early childhood teachers engage the young children in water play, songs, and outdoor activities. At the same time, their mothers gather with Dana and other teachers to share their stories - stories that combine re-visiting often painful memories of

## Recent Grant Awards

Thank you to the following funders for their recent support of our programs for children and their parents in Northwest Pasadena:

AT&T Foundation  
The Green Foundation  
Nrothrop Grumman Corporation  
Target  
United Way of Greater Los Angeles  
Whitecap Foundation

the past with hopeful visions of a brighter future. The first week of class included a program orientation, a presentation about the dangers of lead poisoning in children, and the beginning of a process of self discovery that will help them transform their lives and those of their children.

In these times of heightened uncertainty, I find great comfort in reconnecting with the simple acts of being a mother: watching a boy with his fat little tummy solemnly pour water from one container to another; seeing a little girl's anguished cries for her mommy fade away as she feeds a carrot to a guinea pig; and most of all, witnessing the attentive face of a mother eager to learn how to be the best mommy she can. I am so grateful to be a member of the Mothers' Club family - and so grateful to know that all of you are as well.

- Sue Kujawa  
*Executive Director*



*Teacher Monica Montenegro engages children in play during First Connections.*

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**The Power of Two**

October 2008

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Photos, Mothers' Club staff,

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**About Mothers' Club**

Founded in 1961, Mothers' Club prepares families living in isolation and poverty to succeed in school and in life. We promote strong parent/child relationships and encourage friendship and mutual support among mothers through our educational programs and social services, thereby creating a stronger community for all families. Since our inception, we have evolved in direct response to the needs of families in our community. Today we are a model family support and education center.

Learn more at [www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org)

**Community  
Open Houses**

Please join us for a tour & conversations  
with staff and Board members.

9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

November 18

December 9

January 13, 2009

February 10, 2009

To provide a courtesy RSVP,  
or for more information, please call us  
at (626) 792-2687 ext. 122

**Helping Mothers' Club On-Line and in Stores**

Here are two great ways you can support Mothers' Club when you shop and surf the internet:

**P**ennies add up at **GoodSearch & GoodShop!** Search the web with Yahoo-powered GoodSearch.com and they'll donate a penny to Mothers' Club each time you search! Shop at more than 600 GoodShop.com merchants including Amazon, Best Buy, Toys R Us, and others, and a percentage of each purchase will go to Mothers' Club! So make GoodSearch.com your home page today and start surfing!

**Ralphs Club is now Ralphs Rewards!!!** Sign up your Ralphs Rewards Card to earn money for Mothers' Club at [www.ralphs.com/ccprogram](http://www.ralphs.com/ccprogram). BUT FIRST - you need to replace your Club card with a Rewards card. Rewards cards are available at all Ralphs supermarkets. Mothers' Club Member Number is 90748.



Mothers' Club Family Learning Center  
980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91103

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