



SPRING 2010

News from the heart of

OUR HOUSE

A Child Care and Support Center for Homeless Families



HELP US GO PAPERLESS!

Please send your e-mail address to: ourhouse@ourhousega.org. We'll send our quarterly newsletters and other Our House updates via e-mail.

Become a fan of Our House, Inc. on Facebook! Please visit our Facebook page often for updates on what's happening in our classrooms, upcoming events, etc. And feel free to share your experiences visiting Our House or attending one of our events on our site as well.



DOING SOME SPRING CLEANING?

Our House accepts gently used, in season clothing for children ages 3 mos. – 5 years and particularly needs boys' pants and underwear (2T-4T.) And of course we always need diapers, pull-ups and wipes at the Center. Thank you!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning Laura volunteers with the children in our Mixed Age Classroom. She came to us in January eager to help out in one of



our classrooms after moving to Atlanta from a small town near Santa Fe, NM. In the morning as the teachers clean up breakfast, Laura grabs a book and reads a story on the carpet while the children crowd around her and point at the pictures. Some start to narrate the story from their point of view based on the pictures and Laura always encourages them to use their imagination. As usual, within minutes of getting into the story students run off to grab blocks and play with a stroller. Laura is always right there with them supporting their choices.

Since Laura has volunteered with us, we have known her to be flexible and very giving. A few weeks ago she offered to pay for her own ticket in order to help the teachers with the children on their trip to the circus. Ms. Deqa, our Mixed Age Lead Teacher, feels that having Laura in the classroom, "gives her an opportunity to lesson plan and get paperwork done without worry. We know that Laura is giving 100% helping Ms. DeBorah with the children." When asked what she loves best about volunteering here, Laura immediately replied, "That's easy! It's the children. I love the kids. I miss them when I leave in the afternoon."

Laura has been such a delight to have here at Our House these past two months. We are thankful to have her on our team. She brings a peaceful calm to a classroom filled with 2 to 4 year old children. Laura is everything that we look for in a volunteer: cheerful, giving, patient and flexible. We hope that her Tuesday and Thursday mornings remain open so that she will be able to volunteer with us for many years to come.

To all of our volunteers, thank you for rocking babies, organizing our storage area, hosting birthday parties, bringing diversity into our classrooms and for all that you do for the children. Our House would be a different place without you.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Webmaster: Our House seeks creative, motivated webmaster to manage the agency's website. The Webmaster will ensure that the web site is easy to navigate, stays current and that it addresses the needs of the organization and its stakeholders. The Webmaster will perform a variety of technical tasks to make sure that a website works properly and can be accessed quickly by as many people as possible. We anticipate this will involve a commitment of 5 to 10 hours per month. If interested, please call Tyese Lawyer at 404-373-4508, or email ourhouse@ourhousega.org.

From the Desk of the Executive Director

In mid-December, I broke my ankle, an injury that resulted in surgery and weeks on crutches, followed by a walking boot, which I am still wearing today. Of course sustaining this type of injury the week before Christmas was not ideal, nor was the time spent away from the office at one of the busiest times of year for Our House. Once I was back at work, first on crutches and then in a walking boot, one of our young homeless students asked me, “did your man hurt your foot?” This incident made me keenly aware of the trauma that some of our children face as they witness first-hand their mothers and/or other family members victimized by abusive partners. It also reinforced for me the important work our Teachers and Family Advocates engage in each day with the homeless families we serve.

According to a Winter 2010 research brief from the Institute for Children and Poverty, experiencing homelessness and poverty increases young children’s exposure to a physical fight between their parents by 75%. The brief also cites Joy Osofsky’s *Social Policy Report IX* (1995), stating “It is estimated that over three million children are at risk of exposure to intimate partner violence each year, with such risk greatest for children under the age of six. Witnessing this violence adversely shapes a child’s social-emotional development, with evidence of increased externalizing and internalizing behavior problems compared to those who do not witness family violence. In addition, children who are exposed to intimate partner violence are less likely to succeed in school than children who are not exposed.”



Each day at Our House, we strive to provide our children and their parents with holistic programming designed to help overcome any barriers to successfully moving forward with their goals. For our children, this means helping them meet developmental milestones and preparing them to succeed in school when they matriculate to Kindergarten. It also means being attune to any issues they may be facing due to their homeless situation as well as any additional negative factors their family might be experiencing (be it domestic violence, mental illness in the family, etc.) and ensuring they receive appropriate services to address these issues as soon as possible. For our parents, this means connecting them with needed resources and providing counseling that enables them to envision, strive for, and achieve a

better life for themselves and their children. Sometimes our parents are so defeated by their circumstances that they can’t even imagine a better life. We help them to address the root causes of their homeless situation, and to gain the confidence and skills so that these cycles will not be repeated. For those cases that involve domestic violence, it is even more important that we get our parents the help that they need to first remove the family from danger and get to a safe place, and then to begin addressing all issues associated with the abuse that are negatively impacting each family member. As our children acclimate to their new school, they begin to feel safe in the consistency and routine that comes with participating in the curriculum at Our House. As we build that trust with each child, we are able to help them grow and to thrive, and to keep on track with their housed peers. The same is true for our parents. As they learn to trust their Family Advocate and to honestly share their stories, so they begin to heal and to move forward toward the ultimate goal of self sufficiency and a new reality for themselves and their families.

So, while the question “did your man hurt your foot?” saddened me, it was also very reaffirming. It was a moment that reminded me why I put that boot on every day and hobble down the sidewalk through the doors of Our House – to make a difference in the lives of the homeless children and parents we serve, and to help each one toward that place where they are safe, they are loved, and they are moving forward with hope for a better future.

Sincerely,

Tyese Lawyer

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH....

When a family leaves Our House, circumstances can make it difficult to stay in touch. We follow up when we can, and get the occasional phone call about a success, or even a continued struggle. (We have reminders of children past from pictures in our hallway, and we have images in our minds of parents overcoming barriers so that they may realize their dreams.) So it's always nice to receive an update. We were excited in January when we heard from The Mobley's and thought we'd share it with you in this quarter's newsletter.

Dear Our House,

You may not remember me or my children David and Jasmine Mobley but we remember you and your organization. My children were there in 2005. After a nasty break up with my now ex-husband, I came to GA in hopes of getting my life in order. Having Our House look after my children so I could find suitable employment was a great relief for me. So now let me update you on their progress.

Daniel is six and has special needs and is doing very well in First Grade. He no longer has long hair and still gets mad, but keeps it under control. Jasmine is also doing well in Kindergarten as well. She has gotten over her scarlet fever and has to still take meds for it, but is a very active 5 year old.

I'm doing the best out of everyone. We live in Indianapolis, Indiana and are doing great. I work as a Personal Assistant in a law firm. We live in a 3 bedroom apartment and I drive now. My divorce was very messy, and if it wasn't for your staff helping me to cope I wouldn't be where I am today, so thank you. Also, I have a great man in my life with a baby on the way. So again we the Mobley's thank you and Our House for all that you have done for us from the food, to the clothes, to the childcare, and more.

Sincerely,

The Mobley Family

Week of the Young Child

April 11-17, 2010

WOYC

Our House is celebrating "Week of the Young Child". The Week of the Young Child brings attention to the needs of young children and their families, while highlighting the early childhood education programs and services available to meet those needs. We would like to celebrate Week of the Young Child by inviting members of our community to see what a quality early childhood program looks like in action. *Please come tour our early learning facility on Thursday April 15, 2010. Tours will take place 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.*

We know and want every member of our community to know that early childhood education is vital to our community. All children, especially homeless children, need a strong early learning foundation to succeed in school, and to succeed in life.

Here are some ways you can make a difference in our community:

- Support early literacy programs. Early reading skills are crucial for young children to be ready for school.
- Reach out and thank parents, teachers and all adults who help young children get a great start.
- Support policies at the local, state, and federal levels that provide high-quality early learning opportunities for all young children.

For other ways to get involved, please contact Amber Buck at 404-378-0938.





*A child care and support center
for homeless families*

**P.O. Box 1304
Decatur, GA 30031**

**(404) 378-0938
www.ourhousega.org**

UPCOMING FUNDRAISERS

New Partnership with OnX for 2nd Annual Golf Tournament

Our House is thrilled to partner with OnX Enterprise Solutions this year for their 2nd annual golf tournament. In September 2009, OnX held their inaugural event with a tournament at Stone Mountain's Lakemont Course, and selected three lucky local non-profits to split the event proceeds. This year, Our House is pleased to have been chosen as one of the three beneficiaries of the 2010 event planned for August 5, 2010 again at Stone Mountain's Lakemont Course. OnX is currently finalizing plans for this year's tournament, and we look forward to sharing more details with you in the near future. Thank you to Board member Julie Onstott for connecting us with OnX, and to OnX VP Julius Head for recommending Our House this year!

17th Annual 5K for Hope Race planned for August 2010

Our House is grateful to have the opportunity to partner with the South DeKalb Striders once again this year on their 17th Annual 5K for Hope Race, planned for August 28, 2010. This annual Race is held at the Decatur campus of Georgia Perimeter College, with all race proceeds benefitting Our House. Last year's event was a great success, with a large turn-out and more dollars than ever raised for Our House. We are grateful to Striders member Deanine Halliman for her work to organize the Race, as well as Robert Truesdale, a Striders member and our current Board Chair. If you are interested in registering for the event, or serving as an event sponsor, please visit www.southdekalbstriders.org. We hope you will plan to come out and join us on Race Day this year and enjoy some physical activity while supporting Our House!

2010 Fall Fantasy Planning is Underway

We are in the beginning stages of planning our 2010 Fall Fantasy event. Following a very successful "Night in Tuscany" at Callanwolde in October 2009, we are excited to get the ball rolling for this year's annual fundraiser. Stay tuned for more information as plans are confirmed. If you are interested in getting involved on the Fall Fantasy Committee, please contact Amy Green at 404-378-0938, Ext. 28 or agreen@ourhousega.org.