



A HOME  
OUTGROWN



THE CAPITAL AND ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN FOR OUR HOUSE

## OUR REALITY

**You won't see them under bridges**, holding "Work for Food" signs or on street corners, but they are there. **You pass them every day and may not know it.** They are the invisible faces of homelessness. On any given day there are more than 1,200 women and children in Atlanta with nowhere to go. They move often, between friends, family, in hotels or cars. Faced with the choice between affordable, quality childcare and maintaining a steady job, many parents choose the latter. Unfortunately, recent headlines have depicted tragic results when homeless parents attempt to balance both: children are left alone with abusive caretakers or in overheated cars while parents try to earn a living.

Recent research demonstrates that the lack of affordable, quality childcare is a significant contributing factor to chronic homelessness and cycles of poverty. Children in unstable conditions in their early years of life often continue to face academic, behavioral and social challenges. For almost two decades, Our House has been a place of hope for homeless parents and their children. **Since its founding, Our House has helped thousands of families turn their lives around by providing both affordable, quality childcare and supportive services for parents re-entering the workforce, pursuing education and seeking permanent housing.** While their children are receiving quality care, parents are able to work on key life skills including budgeting, job readiness and placement.

As Our House approaches its 20th anniversary, there exists a significant need for funding for expansion. While current programs remain strong and nationally recognized, they are severely limited due to cramped conditions, inadequate administrative space and insufficient materials. Daily there are, on average, 25 children on the waiting list for Our House. With further support from community leaders, Our House will continue to grow to ensure that homeless families have a place to turn.

## OUR BEGINNING

*In the 1980's, Our House was founded with one simple purpose in mind: to give homeless families a place to bring their children where they could be warm and well-cared for during the day. Who could have dreamed that such a tiny mustard seed of hope would become what Our House is today – a place of great compassion, possibility, and empowerment to all who enter its doors. Our House is indispensable to our community and to the lives of the little ones entrusted to its care.*

- Reverend Joanna Adams, Founder, Our House & Pastor, Morningside Presbyterian Church

## OUR HOUSE



Our House was founded in 1988 by a group of concerned local citizens who made the simple connection between lack of affordable childcare and the inability of families to break the cycles of poverty and homelessness. Our House is a response to shelter rules that require families to leave early mornings and return in the evenings, often with no place to go during the day. Between sunrise and sunset a homeless parent (most often a single mother), because of children in their care, is unable to look for work, maintain a job or take care of myriad tasks and responsibilities necessary to sustain a family.

The founders of Our House envisioned more than free childcare for these families. They laid the foundation for a place where parents would feel comfortable leaving their children while looking for employment, housing or other care. In addition to childcare, parents gain valuable skills and access to resources to help them reach financial independence and find permanent housing. The visionary founders of Our House knew what the rest of the nation is just now beginning to understand: quality, affordable childcare is critical to the ability of families to overcome homelessness, welfare dependency and poverty.

Since its founding, Our House has grown into a nationally-recognized model for affordable, quality childcare for homeless families. In 1995, Our House was the first homeless-specific childcare center in Metropolitan Atlanta to receive accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and has received numerous other awards from DeKalb County and the City of Decatur.

Following several years of operational and financial hardship, Our House has recovered from uncertain times and budget shortfalls. Under the leadership of Tyese L. Lawyer, Executive Director of Our House since 2004, the organization has had a balanced budget for the past three years. After successful financial stabilization, the Board of Directors of Our House completed a strategic plan in early 2006 and agreed to improve and expand the facility to meet the continued need of homeless families. Since that time, Our House, with full Board support, has laid the groundwork for a capital campaign with careful planning and increased fundraising capacity.

*The mission of Our House is to break the chains of homelessness by providing quality early childhood education and comprehensive support services for families who are homeless.*

## OUR APPROACH

“Three years ago I was in a shelter after leaving my abusive relationship. I had a 15-month-old daughter, no job, no car and no family here because I just moved to this country from Ethiopia. Because of Our House I was able to get childcare for my daughter and work. I now work at Our House as a Lead Teacher. I have a place to live and I just bought a car. I don’t know how I would have done this without Our House. My life has completely changed.”

-- T.G. Abdullah, Our House Lead Teacher and Former Our House Parent  
Winner of the 2007 Sue Wieland Embracing Possibility Award

Our House has three award-winning core services for children and families who are working towards rebuilding their lives: Early Childhood Education, Family Advocacy and the Parent Interns. These programs are continuously evaluated and enhanced based on the changing needs of the community and carefully monitored research indicating evolving service methodology for

OUR HOUSE



homelessness, parenting and early childhood education and care.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

For nearly two decades, Our House has provided quality, early childhood education for families in pursuit of the American dream. Services are offered year-round, five days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m and are designed to address the child’s physical, cognitive, language and socio-emotional development. Children are first screened to identify any specific challenges that often result from being chronically homeless. Many children have significant developmental delays, such as not walking or talking by the age-appropriate time. Children in the program (infants to 5 year olds) participate in developmentally-appropriate activities using a holistic approach. Because developmental challenges are often present in homeless children, Our House provides a nationally-recognized low child to staff ratio for children and infants in the program. Staff incorporates the use of Creative Curriculum including outdoor play, field trips and reading programs to help enhance existing activities. In addition, all children in the program receive a healthy breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack provided by Head Start and prepared in compliance with USDA standards. Early Childhood Education services are supervised by a Program Coordinator who works to ensure activities are structured to help children build skills, confidence, a solid foundation for school and lifelong achievement.

### EARLY EDUCATION IN ACTION: BRIAN’S STORY

Brian entered the Pre-K program at Our House during the time that his mom was in a shelter fleeing an abusive relationship. He had difficulty expressing himself, had frequent temper tantrums and tried often to hit his teachers. Our House staff screened him for developmental delays and realized that, although Brian was developmentally on target, the stress of his living situation and subsequent shelter stay was negatively impacting his behavior. Our House worked with specialists in the City Schools of Decatur to develop a behavioral program that allowed Our House staff to target Brian’s strengths and help him gain control over impulsive behavior. After six months of intensive work, constant reinforcement, positive guidance and a predictable classroom structure, Brian showed marked improvement. One year later, Brian is prepared to enter Kindergarten. Brian follows directions, participates in class, and addresses difficulties and challenges with calm, verbal problem-solving. His teachers say he is a class leader and a top student. Without Our House, Brian would lack the social and academic skills necessary to succeed in elementary school, beginning a cycle of poor outcomes, both behavioral and educational, in a system with limited resources to address the unique needs of homeless children.

### FAMILY ADVOCACY

Supportive services at Our House help families transition from chronically homeless or unstable living conditions to permanency and stability. Family Advocates guide clients in setting goals to achieve sustainable living to ensure they are engaged in the process and understand that they are key players in their own positive outcomes. Research indicates that self-motivation is often a key factor for future success. After devising a plan, a Family Advocate connects parents with the most appropriate community resources based on their skills and needs and provides resources for employment, job training, physical and mental health services, financial management, housing support and other services related to self-sufficiency. Monthly meetings provide an important forum for the parents, many of whom began parenting in their early teens, to address the challenges of raising children. Meeting topics are developed based on feedback from parents in the program and include a wide array of topics such as budgeting, parenting, and building healthy relationships.

### FAMILY ADVOCACY IN ACTION: EVE’S STORY

Four pairs of pants, two shirts and one small child are all Eve had when she arrived at the doorstep of Our House. Desperate to escape an abusive relationship, the last straw was when her ex-husband threatened to take her only child. “I would’ve died without my son,” says Eve. “When I first came I was hesitant to leave him here alone during the day, but I started to see that there was love here.” Eve was also hesitant to reach out for the help she needed. “It doesn’t matter how little you have,” she says. “You’re always embarrassed to ask for help.”

Four years later, and with lots of care and support, Eve is in permanent housing has now started a career as an independent childcare worker. Eve works at various centers around the metro area but chose to spend time as a long-term substitute teacher at Our House. With the help of Our House Family Advocates, Eve now regularly works at other accredited childcare facilities where she can’t help but make comparisons. “The love and attention children receive here is not like at other places. From what I’ve seen, Our House has the best care for children.”



## OUR APPROACH [CONT]

In addition to early childhood learning and supportive services, Our House offers a six-month internship to several parents each year. Since its inception, this internship has trained more than 60 parents and enabled them to 1) gain valuable hands-on learning and experience in early childhood education, 2) build their resume and 3) earn income. Upon completion of the program, Our House interns receive assistance in obtaining further education in this field and/or finding employment. In 2006, Our House began offering a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) for parents in the internship program. This nationally-recognized certificate is key in building a career in early childhood education and counts as three required Early Childhood classes in most technical colleges. While most students take up to a year to complete the CDA certification, interns in the Our House program are able to complete their certification in less than six months. This compressed schedule allows them to continue on their road to financial independence. In partnership with other accredited early childhood learning centers, Our House has opened this program to other homeless parents and is working to facilitate the program's growth.

### PARENT INTERN PROGRAM IN ACTION: LATRICE'S STORY

For three years, Latrice and her four children moved between the homes of friends and family to shelters. With each move, Latrice knew she needed to find a more stable life for her family but did not know where to begin. At one of the shelters, she found a flyer for Our House. She knew that quality child care was the first step to building a better life. Placed on the waiting list, Latrice did not give up - she kept calling until there was room for her family. She didn't have to look far for work: Our House was hiring kitchen staff. "I wanted a job so I applied for it," she says. "I remember it like it was yesterday. I went to my interview and, boy, was I nervous. I dressed up nice and I did very well. I waited a month and thought it was taking a long time. Then I got a letter saying I was hired. I was so happy that day."

With the support of Our House, Latrice completed her high school education and Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. She plans to continue her education and eventually open her own day care. In addition, Latrice and her family are in a transitional housing program. Latrice's tenacity coupled with the support that she received at Our House has ensured stability for her family. Her pride is evident as she states: "I can now say I am on my way to accomplishing my goals."

*"There are numerous important causes in the Atlanta area, but Our House stands out as a unique organization that fills a specific void in our community. The impact of Our House may not be as visible as it could be or as recognized as it should be. However, there are hundreds of families who are now living in stable homes with good jobs and with children in quality care who know the impact for them, is incredibly real. As a donor, I do not know of a better investment that anyone can make than in the life of a child."*

- Audrey Morgan, Honorary Our House Campaign Chair & Longtime Our House Supporter

## OUR HOUSE STAFF

### QUALIFIED STAFF AT OUR HOUSE INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

- 8 Lead Teachers and Assistants
- 2 Family Advocates
- Early Childhood Coordinator
- Bi-Lingual Educator
- Executive Director
- Development Director
- Van Driver

### STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

- 50% of teachers have Associate Degrees or higher
- Most staff have advanced degrees, Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or relevant training
- Staff participate in regular training and continuing education

*"The quality programming at Our House not only provides education and shelter for children, but serves as a bridge for family self-sufficiency. The most rewarding part of it all is that each person whose life we touch, becomes part of our extended family, and we rejoice in their success."*

- Tyese L. Lawyer, Executive Director, Our House



## OUR NEEDS

*You only need to walk through the front door of Our House to see it has been used in all ways possible to provide quality services. The reality is the space is old and doesn't meet the needs of the families it serves. It is critical to address this issue now. Although this is the first capital campaign for the organization, the board has stepped forward to pledge over \$100,000 representing 100% of Board giving. Today, Our House is a strong organization, led by a capable Board and senior staff. The only thing that is weak is the building itself.*

– Gayle Gellerstedt, Campaign Chair, Board Member

Since 1988, Our House has been in the same 3,200 square foot space generously donated by Columbia Presbyterian Church. In this space, Our House serves 90 children and 65 families annually and, on any given day, 44 children and 10 staff are in the building, which includes a shared space for lottery-funded Pre-K and 3-year-olds. Staff works in cramped offices that double as office supply, copy and parent resource rooms. Funding for expansion will enable Our House to serve more children and families and provide support for on-site services so that parents, many with limited access to transportation, are able to receive needed services in one place.

### THE OVERDUE NEED FOR RENOVATION

Built in 1950, the building Our House occupies is in great need of renovation. Owned by Columbia Presbyterian Church, the building has been leased to Our House free of charge for the past 19 years, with a recent lease extension to the year 2040. Now that Our House is stable and healthy, it is time to address the pressing renovation needs that have been mounting for years.

Years of delayed maintenance have resulted in an array of physical plant problems that can no longer be ignored. The toilets and sinks are of inadequate size and height, and are worn out and in frequent need of repair. The light fixtures need replacing and some classes are separated only by coat racks. The staff works with worn-out office equipment and furniture.

There are approximately 25 children on Our House's waiting list at any given time. The majority of these children are under age 3. These families must endure homelessness longer because they have no childcare relief and therefore cannot access employment training and jobs. Long-term, these children may endure situations of neglect, family members may be split up or child protective services may become involved. Two additional classrooms at Our House could accommodate these children and free their parents to work on overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency. The expansion of the center will allow service to 100 additional homeless children and parents annually.

Sacrificing work space to give the children as much room as possible, the staff must function in difficult, overcrowded conditions. One staffer has her office in a well-traveled hallway. There is no break room for the teachers and limited storage space for supplies and donations. In addition, there is no reception area for parents as they enter the facility. Guests are greeted by the sounds of laughing children but, unfortunately, also a measure of chaos and disarray due to limited space.

### A BUILDING WORTHY OF ITS CHILDREN

While the children and families served by Our House have often lived in sub-standard conditions, the Board and Staff at Our House feel strongly that the children, especially, deserve to have a second home in which they do not have to accept second best or worse. The building envisioned by Our House leadership will bring conditions up to standard and take the organization into the next decade with confidence.

The current 3,200 square foot space will be renovated to contain the Pre-K class room, a parent/teacher resource area, restrooms and staff offices. The 3,894 square foot addition will accommodate four more classrooms for infants to 3-year-olds, meeting all NAEYC and state guidelines for space per student and restrooms for children. In addition, it will increase storage space and add a flex-space that could be used for school gatherings or a future classroom. The addition will be constructed in order to minimize the impact on current classrooms and emphasize safety.

The addition will benefit children, parents and staff. The addition of classrooms will allow teachers to separate non-mobile and walking infants to better meet the developmental needs of those children. With added office space, Our House will hire a clinical social worker to address families' mental health needs that are not currently being met through referrals. Families will also benefit from a new parent/teacher resource room which will allow the organization to provide expanded services to parents, including more parent-intern trainings, a computer lab and space for programs. Finally, the expansion will give more space to staff working with families in crisis, both increasing the level of responsiveness to these families and supporting staff as they enhance and expand services to the community.

“I will admit I was skeptical at first. This campaign is a huge undertaking; it's more than a paint job on a Pinto. But I have been astounded by the commitment the Board has made and my faith in humankind has been reaffirmed. The time is right for this campaign because we have the right people in leadership. To me, this is key.”

– Dean Calloway, Board Member

## OUR ENVISIONED FUTURE



*“The vision of Our House is to “break the chains of homelessness.” While this may sound far-reaching in light of the thousands of homeless in our community, for those children and families served by Our House, breaking the chains of homelessness is indeed a reality. Children are provided a safe place to learn and grow. Their parents are empowered to find housing, employment and other essentials for their lives. Here, families find a new hope that they will no longer be enslaved by their unfortunate circumstances. Our House is a small but deeply effective organization that is making a major difference for homeless children and their families. Each child that we teach, each family that we assist, means that our community is that much stronger for everyone.”*

*-- Lee Carroll, Board Chair, Our House*

For years, and through numerous successes and occasional setbacks, Our House has served metro Atlanta families with programs and services to help them achieve a better life. Now is the time to build on the vision of current leadership and take Our House to greater heights. The Board and Executive Director have outlined strategic priorities with an expansion and renovation campaign setting the momentum.

In addition to building its home for the next 20 years, Our House will establish a \$200,000 Endowment Fund. Through solid fiscal management in the last few years, Our House has set aside almost \$200,000 in an operating reserve and over \$50,000 in a long-term reserve. However, for long-term stability, the leadership recognizes that building an endowment is the only way to insure that Our House will continue to serve homeless children and their families. The Executive Director has set aside a \$100,000 capital reserve composed of capital gifts and budget revenues to go toward the expansion and renovation. In addition, as Our House has begun planning for the building project, numerous contractors and building professionals in the community have agreed to donate over \$133,000 in materials and services toward the building project. In addition, more building donations are expected to come through.

Without compassionate intervention, families face chronic homelessness, government dependency and continuous cycles of poverty and despair. Our House believes that every child deserves a quality early education and every parent has talents and skills to contribute to the community. Together, with community support and compassion, Our House is poised to increase its capacity to ensure no one is left without a place to call home.

*“I remember it like it was yesterday. I went to my first interview and, boy, was I nervous. I dressed up nice and I did very well. I waited a month and thought it was taking a long time. Then I got a letter saying I was hired. I was so happy that day.”*

*- Our House Parent*

## OUR HOUSE CAPITAL AND ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN

### Campaign Budget

Renovation and Addition	\$983,000
Site Work	84,000
Exterior/Structure	203,000
Interior Finishes	196,000
Systems	160,500
Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment	50,000
Permit Fee	14,000
Contractor Insurance	20,000
Contingency/Unforeseen	44,500
Project Management	120,000
Professional Fees	91,000
Endowment Fund	\$200,000
Campaign Fees & Expenses	\$52,000
Campaign Total	\$1,235,000

# OUR IMPACT

Innovative and visionary from its founding day, Our House uses the latest research to guide the application and development of its programs. Our House measures outcomes by the progress of children and parents as they move towards early learning milestones, financial independence and permanent housing. Significant FY 2007 organizational outcomes include:

## FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Of the 40 unemployed parents who received care at Our House for 30 days or more, 40% were employed within 3 months and another 20% were employed within 6 months. The remaining 40% entered employment training or education programs within 6 months.
- Of the 22 employed parents entering the program, 29% increased their income (found a better job, got a raise, were able to work more hours due to quality childcare)
- 56% of all parents maintained a positive change in their employment status, training or income during the most recent fiscal year.
- In the Parent Intern/CDA program, Our House trained 23 parents in the field of early childhood education and 65% successfully completed all coursework.
- 100% of those taking the CDA Assessment passed. 100% of participants who completed the program and assessment are employed, in either full-time or part-time positions.

## HOUSING STABILITY

- 63% of homeless families served in FY 2007 moved to transitional or permanent housing.
- 37% of families are currently utilizing Our House programs and services to develop housing and program goals.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD IMPACT

- Children enrolled in the program are prepared to enter school ready to learn. Our House served a total of 88 children in the early childhood program.
- 87% of the children served achieved developmentally appropriate milestones.
- 13% of the children served were identified with special needs or developmental delays and were connected with services and resources to ensure they receive intervention for their area of need.
- 100% of children received appropriate immunizations and health exams.

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*"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong – because someday you will have been all of these.*

~ George Washington Carver