



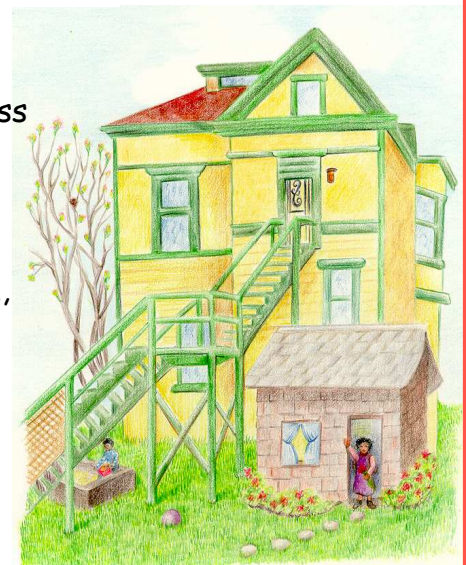
Nourishing and protecting the light within each child

Serving children and families
at risk for reoccurring homelessness
through

Early childhood education,
Infant and Toddler care,
Before and After School program,
Respite care,
Arts programs,
Child development classes,
Family support
and Festival Celebrations



Myrtle House



Sophia House

Dear Friends,

Spring 2006

We have been running two houses since August 15. Twenty-two children are in the daily programs and a total of sixty-five children per month in the combined programs. Two houses means more of everything: more meals, interns, meetings, clothes, homework, joy, crises, struggle, growth, possibility and more rhythms (read eight individual schedules for babies and toddlers). Each child has his or her own story and needs, and an important strength of our program is that we are able to meet these individual circumstances.

In past letters we have shared with you pictures of the healing education and the beautiful and harmonious environment we provide for the children. In this letter we hope to give you a glimpse of our work with the mothers.

An Extended Family Community—Family Support Services

In The Beginning

When a family comes to us (usually a single mother with children) they are in a state of chaos and crisis. The young mother is fearful and overwhelmed by the obstacles she faces. This time of transition from crises to stability is extremely stressful; the mother cannot meet the needs of her young children. Sophia Project's core work is to ensure that the needs of her young children are met while providing the mother with the time, guidance and support to acquire new abilities which she must have in order to meet her children's needs herself. Our intensive programs nourish and protect the light and capacities within each child, assuring a strong foundation upon which to build their lives.



Inside Sophia Project

Our work with the children allows the mother to breathe a bit, knowing that the children are safe. In the first weeks within Sophia Project's warm family atmosphere, she will participate in activities with her children that are healing for both of them. Each mother is guided in parenting and homemaking skills of all kinds depending upon her specific needs. These new abilities could range from appropriate discipline, a better understanding of child development, sharing stories and bedtime rhythms to cooking, sewing, nutritional information and food shopping. These healthy and nourishing skills are modeled and practiced within Sophia Project and each mother is assisted in taking them into her own home.

The road to stability is a rocky one for our mothers. Typically they have few job skills, low self esteem and a low level of education. They struggle with poverty, recovery from abusive situations and the myriad effects of homelessness. But they are courageous and determined. Thanks to your support, being a part of Sophia Project gives them hope.

Outside Sophia Project

The Sophia Project live-in community, Carol and David as well as staff and interns, serves as an extended family for the children and mothers. We are the aunts and uncles and grandparents. For the mothers this means we are available any time we are needed. When a mother starts a new job, the hours are often difficult. She does not have sick days or benefits. This often means being on call every and any day, for six months to a year. For a mother with small children this is an impossible situation. Our mothers know they can count on Sophia Project to care for her children at any time during the sometimes long process of 'paying her dues' until finally obtaining work with sustainable hours. Without this support no mother on her own can make it through this time successfully.



Family support takes many forms. Depending on the need, it has included help with forms and other filing and paperwork, tutoring, occasional help with rent, gas and electric bills or bus passes, taking a child to the emergency room, advocating for appropriate medical care, providing for food shortfalls, accompanying parents to teacher conferences at their child's school, Christmas and birthday presents, baking cupcakes for a child to take to school and being available for many and varied conversations and requests for advice and referrals of all kinds. During this time we serve by supporting and helping, while the mother is building inner resources and self confidence. We share the joy and appreciation of life with their young children. We share meals and celebrations. Dignity is restored.

One Mother's Story

Isabelle* arrives home at 5am from the night shift. She wakes her children ages 1, 3, 8 and 12. The father is no longer with the family—a friend stays with the children at night. The two room apartment is cold; the heat doesn't work well and in any case it is very expensive. When her children are dressed they catch a 5:40 a.m. bus arriving at Sophia Project at 6:10 a.m. The children will begin their day here with a warm breakfast, finishing homework and whatever other early morning needs there may be.

Isabelle returns home, sleeps until noon, works her second part-time job from 1-4pm and then comes to pick up her children.

This month she will move into good quality housing. She is near the top of the list for full-time day work at the hospital. She participates in parent-teacher conferences and budgets her money. As demanding as her life is, she has found a rhythm that works. Very soon she will not need our intensive services. She has become a responsible member of society and a caring mother. It was not always so.

We have spent many hours together developing parenting skills and an understanding of her children's development. We have been an integral part of her life. During her time at Sophia Project when Isabelle needed surgery for mouth cancer, the children stayed with us. After surgery, the dental bridge replacing her front teeth did not fit and was painful. When MediCal would not pay for another, a Sophia Project Board member found a dentist to do it pro bono.



* The following account is actual but the name has been changed

When the IRS erroneously sent her a letter saying she owed back taxes, we helped her with the bewildering paperwork and she received the much needed refund she was due. When her youngest child was born, Isabelle was prepared to take the bus to the hospital, not wanting to spend the money on a taxi. We picked up her (then) 2-year-old and drove Isabelle to the hospital, which was fortunate because the baby was born within the hour. On another occasion when one of her children had an accident in the middle of the night and the ambulance was reluctant to pick up the child, we were able to sort it out. We have helped with food when food stamps were cut after taking her second job, and we helped her file for state health insurance for the children.

In short, when Isabelle didn't know where to turn, she knew-and knows-she can turn to us. Thanks to all of you, we can be there for all of the Sophia families as they find their feet- their balance and develop necessary capacities.

Isabelle's children are doing well. The teachers of the older ones comment on the children's ability to bring harmony and helpfulness to others. Isabelle is bringing her new- found life skills to her church group. The little ones have grown healthy and happy, ready for their next step.

For the mothers, being a part of the Sophia Project community means that we can hold the pieces of their lives together as they work with a few pieces at a time until they can manage them all. For the children it means security, healthy development, love, beauty and healing education.

Every child and mother will pass on to others what they have received at Sophia Project—all of this is possible because of your support. We are very grateful. Thank you.

A word about photographs: in consultation with the families at Sophia House the board has decided not to use photographs of the children or families in our literature. Instead we will use artistic renderings. As one mother put it "When we were homeless it was not so important but now we are almost getting normal and we will just be a part of the neighborhood... so if you don't have to.." In order to ensure that the children and families will continue to feel this is a safe place to heal and grow without risk of shame or exposure to the larger community, now or years from now, we are happy to honor this wish.

Pictures by
Ellie Wood, Sharry Wright and Rachel Rosen

Wishing you many peaceful and joy filled days
Carol Cole, David Barlow
and The Board of Sophia Project

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