

The Power of Two Special Edition

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In the beginning....

In the fall of 1961 a local Quaker, **Mara Moser**, embarked on a solo crusade to reach out to the families of men in prison to offer them compassionate and practical support. Mara soon recruited her friends **Betsy Conner, Lisl Auf de Heide and Terry Mackenzie** to join her, and together they made a presentation to fellow members of the **Orange Grove Friends Meeting**. In Decem-

ber, 1961 the Orange Grove Quakers agreed to allow a "Mothers' Club" to use their lovely facility at the corner of Oakland and Orange Grove Boulevard two mornings a week, rent-free. The rest, as they say, is history.

The original concept was deceptively simple, as Lisl auf de Heide described it: "The aim is to let mothers, many of whom are being both mother and father to their children, find some variety in their daily routines, learn new skills, and improve others, and, through discussions with mothers

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in similar circumstances learn that they are not alone with any problem; while in the nursery school the children are exposed to a relaxed, though controlled, group experience, which helps them channel their energies and talents, and prepares them for an easier transition into public school.”

In 1961, four mothers with 21 children among them attended the first Mothers’ Club Christmas party and later formed the core participants in the program.

Mara and her cadre of volunteers began to offer courses in housekeeping, sewing, cooking and “charm”. As **Elinor Freeman** said, “While we have classes in nutrition, money management and budget planning, the mothers can just visit with each other if they want. We call it a club because it is so informal. Our only basic rule is that if a mother brings children she must be here too.”

Taka Nomura was a pre-school teacher at the nearby prestigious Pacific Oaks. In 1962 she responded to a request to leave her job and work, as a volunteer, with a “group of poor children.” Using the progressive early childhood education principles taught at Pacific Oaks, Taka set up a children’s program and taught parent education at Mothers’ Club.

As word spread, mothers began to come from the neighborhood.



Small boy at Mothers’ Club, circa 1965



Mothers’ Club Families, 1974

Whether they were single parents, or had husbands in custody, they also needed support and friendship. Most families were on welfare. Many were frightened to bring their children out of the home because of the neighborhood atmosphere. Most were African-American at a time of growing racial strife in Pasadena.

By early 1963 **Pasadena City College** began supporting the Mothers’ Club programs through the PCC Community Education Department. Mothers learned cooking and sew-

ing and participated in parent education classes, all taught by PCC instructors. PCC also paid stipends to some of the children’s program teachers, including Taka.

During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s Mothers’ Club was becoming better organized and better funded. One hundred people attended the Christmas party in 1965. Hours were expanded to three mornings a week in 1966, when 60 families were enrolled, and five days a week by 1973.

50 years ago, Mara Moser washed the dishes of a neighbor, a young lonely mother, and the seed of Mothers’ Club was planted.

Congratulations for 50 years of transforming lives and bringing forth a community of admirers.

Jean Fleming



Mothers' Club children 1975

Growing up....

Twelve years after Mara Moser first began knocking on neighborhood doors, and assisted by volunteer lawyer **John Favre**, and flush with United Way funding secured by Elinor Freeman, Mothers' Club was incorporated as a nonprofit organi-

zation, with an 11 member board of directors, including mothers from the program.

By 1984, Mothers' Club had grown to a \$64,000 agency and needed a part-time administrator. The Board hired a former mother, **Susan Kujawa**, who by 1988 became the first full-time Executive Director. Board President **Mary Lois**

Nevins led the charge during the 80's to grow community support for Mothers' Club by recruiting Board members, donors and volunteers.

Over the next 10 years, Sue partnered with strong Board Presidents, including **Judy McDonald, Jane Wetzel and Elise Campbell** to grow the budget to \$240,000. Programming ran five days a week and included English as a second language classes, group counseling, and four children's classrooms.

In 1998, California voters approved a tax on tobacco products with the funds allocated to the improvement of the lives of children from prenatal through age 5. Known as Proposition 10, it might more aptly be called the Mothers' Club initiative, so well aligned was it to the Mothers' Club mission.


With three-year funding from First 5 LA (the official name of the Proposition 10 funding agency) Mothers' Club opened a second site in Altadena. Originally housed in a crime-ridden apartment complex, the new Mothers' Club soon outgrew its facility and moved to another church property, **Christ the Shepherd Lutheran Church**, on Altadena Drive.

California Community Foundation

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Mothers' Club Family Learning Center

for 50 years of leadership and service in Los Angeles



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Families came to the Altadena location for the same reason they flocked to the original Orange Grove space – there was a need among mothers to belong to a group of women in similar circumstances, and a longing to share the joys and burdens of parenthood.

Under the dedicated leadership of children’s teacher, **Nydia Rivera**, the Lutheran Church social rooms were transformed each day into a space where children from birth to kindergarten age could play and learn together. Mothers helped care for the children, attended parenting classes, and developed strong, nurturing friendships with teachers and other parents.

In 2002, as the original three-year grant expired, **First 5 LA** began another three-year initiative focused on family literacy. This was another funding opportunity that was tailor made for Mothers’ Club. Family Literacy is formally defined as having four components: parent education, adult education, early childhood education, and parent/child interactive literacy activities. It turns out that Taka Nomura and the other early Mothers’ Club pioneers were ahead of their time in more ways than one. The Mothers’ Club emphasis on parents participating in their children’s classroom activities was actually “parent/child interactive literacy activities.”



Mothers’ Club became one of 15 model family literacy programs in Los Angeles County. The funding from First 5 LA and the participation in the Family Literacy Initiative brought with it the adoption of program evaluation methodologies that were soon incorporated into the culture of Mothers’ Club. Programs and activities that had been implemented based on an instinctual sense of the needs of parents and children, were validated and improved by paying attention to demonstrated outcomes and best practices.

A blue graphic with a white border, featuring the Disney Store logo in the top left. The text reads: "We're proud to be your community partner and look forward to sharing our magic with Mother's Club families for many years to come!" Below the text is a white silhouette of Mickey Mouse in a celebratory pose. The bottom right corner has a small "© Disney" logo.

Disney
STORE

We're proud to be your community partner and look forward to sharing our magic with Mother's Club families for many years to come!

Congratulates
Mothers' Club
Family Learning Center
on 50 years of serving families in Pasadena.

© Disney

In recent years...

Mothers' Club soon achieved a new level of excellence that was deeply rooted in the original vision of Mara Moser and her volunteers but also met the changing needs of a largely immigrant population and increased expectations for children entering kindergarten. The validated outcomes achieved by children and parents at Mothers' Club aligned with the focus of many foundations and donors who saw the need for increased accountability and a more rigorous curriculum. Interestingly, parents responded positively to the higher expectations set by our participation in the Family Literacy Initiative. Attendance soared and our waiting list grew to more than 200 families. Clearly Mothers' Club was

fulfilling a need.

The increased demand for participation in Mothers' Club and the program improvements that were made only heightened the awareness of inadequacy of our physical space. Children's classrooms were over-crowded and lacked many of the components that were taken for granted in other programs: child-sized toilets and hot running water, to mention two glaring omissions. Our toddlers didn't even have a classroom; they had an outdoor play area. When it rained the toddlers came into the adult room, forcing the parents to meet in the kitchen.

To top it off, the Quakers, after hosting Mothers' Club for many, many years, were anxious to respond to new interests of some of their members. Eventually, the Quakers asked Mothers' Club to search for

Thank you for all the wonderful work Mothers' Club has done throughout the years.

Pasadena is lucky to have you!

Margaret & David Mgrublian

a new home, bringing about an end to a very long, mutually beneficial relationship.

While the challenge of finding a new home was daunting to Mothers' Club leadership, the prospect of having our own home fueled the passion and excitement needed to undertake the momentous tasks ahead. Board and staff rallied early in 2005 around a strategic plan that set the goal of conducting a capital campaign to secure a permanent home for Mothers' Club. Leadership learned that **The American Friends Service Committee**, another Quaker institution, would be selling their long-time home at 980 N. Fair Oaks Avenue. With the visionary spirit of Mara Moser watching over us, the Board unanimously approved purchasing the facility in September 2005.

The next two years brought together a multitude of community leaders. After heading up the strategic planning process, **Judy Wilson** became Board President and Chair of the capital campaign. She and her husband Randy facilitated a relationship with **Professional Business Bank** for our mortgage and construction line of credit. Local community activist and real estate developer **Jaylene Moseley** signed on as Project Developer and brought with her **Andy Kaplan and Kaplan Construction Co.** to oversee the "green" renovations. Lead architect **John Dale**, and his team from **Haley Ellis Devereaux**, partnered with landscape architect **Ronnie Siegel** to design a facility that reflected



At our International Carnival in 2004, mothers performed traditional dances for their children.

Happy 50 Year Anniversary
Looking forward to another 50 years!

Norah Morley & Anthony Koerner

Mothers' Club's unique two-generational approach – with designated classrooms and spaces for parents, and a state-of-the-art child development center.

The goal of \$6.5 million was set and pledges from Board members topped \$370,000. With a lead gift secured from long-time Mothers' Club ally, Mary Lois Nevins, support from foundations was generous. Just two years later, in October 2007, Mothers' Club opened the doors of its new home and exceeded its campaign goal, having secured \$6.6 million in pledges and donations for the facility.

Mothers' Club now serves more than 100 children and 120 parents/adult learners every year in three programs: Family Literacy, First Connections and Teen Parenting. Mothers' Club is a model in Southern California, recognized for our best practices in parent engagement and education, for our two-generation learning strategies for at-risk parents and children, and for our high-quality early childhood development environment and curriculum. Our most recent award came in September 2009, when the California Community Foundation and The Eisner Foundation honored Mothers' Club with a top award in education for our innovation, resilience and impact in improving the quality of life for low-income L.A. residents.



Congratulations to
Mother's Club for
Fifty Years of
Two-Generation
Learning!

Fran Norris Scoble

Looking ahead...

As we pause to celebrate the remarkable work Mothers' Club has done in our community over the last 50 years, let us not forget the work ahead of us.

There are still hundreds of vulnerable families in our community that are in need of quality services. And due to the continued economic uncertainty facing so many of us, we must remain focused on how we can secure the revenues needed to fulfill our mission, which is to prepare families living in isolation and poverty to succeed in school and in life.

We have much to plan for as we look for opportunities to expand our impact for another five decades. We have an incredible staff and a wonderful learning center, and have worked diligently to maximize its use over the last 4 years; but there is room for more to be done.

While 85% of a child's core brain structure is developed by the age of four, less than 10% of public investments in education and development are spent on children, ages four and younger. That is why Mother's Club focuses its attention on the youngest of children, providing the foundation for children's future health, academic success, and social and emotional well-being.



Over the coming year, Mothers' Club leadership will lay the ground work for our next phase of expansion as we look for strategies to grow our afternoon program to serve more families. Our recent evaluation report, which documents the significant impact our program has on both children and parents, provides powerful motivation for expanded support that will enable us to reach many more at-risk families.

In addition, we will expand our efforts to become a model for other programs and professionals, in our respective fields, that are looking to strengthen their own efforts and implement two-generation learning strategies.

I have come to Mothers' Club

at an exciting time in its evolution. Thanks to the tremendous dedication of those who spearheaded our capital campaign, Mothers' Club owns its facility free and clear. This is especially reassuring as we face cutbacks in government funding and private support. In order for us to sustain our quality services, we need the help of each member of our community. We need to spread the word to our friends, neighbors and colleagues – that Mothers' Club is a valuable asset and worthy of their investment.

I hope that we can count on you to be a partner in our efforts to expand the number of people who know about and support our important work. It is clear that it has taken the dedication and resources of many to get us here, including many of you. Now, we need to build on our past for a strong and vibrant future.

- Hector LaFarga, Jr.
Executive Director



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50th Anniversary Celebration

October 22, 2011

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Meet Olivia & Julian...

My name is Olivia Medina and I am 19 years-old. I have been attending Mothers' Club for two and half years with my son Julian, who is four. I was first introduced to Mothers' Club through my high school, Learning Works Charter School. The teacher asked me if I wanted to join a parenting class for health credits. Although I did not need the credits, I decided to take the class anyway. I was always looking for ways to learn more about how I could be better with my son. He was two at the time and I did not know how to react to his tantrums. I was frustrated and overwhelmed.

The Teen Parenting Program at Mothers' Club has helped me and my family a lot. I am much more patient with Julian and better able to communicate with him. The class also helped me with my relationship with



Olivia and Julian Medina

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for Continued Success!*



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my husband.

After about six months in the program, I was invited to join First Connections, so that Julian could stay at Mothers' Club while I went to school. I still attended the teen parenting classes, but the staff worked around my schedule so that I could go to my academic classes at Learning Works.

For Julian, the program has been remarkable. The teachers tell me he is very intelligent and that my husband and I are doing a great job with him. He talks so much more now, interacts with his friends, and he is very patient with other children.

Before coming to Mothers' Club, I felt like I would never finish high school. But, having Julian here enabled me to complete a four month internship at Kaiser Permanente in their legal department; and now I can say I am a High School graduate. If it wasn't for Mothers' Club, I would not be where I am today.

I am now applying to colleges and my goal is to become a nurse. I feel so comfortable around everyone at Mothers' Club, and they continue to support me and Julian. In November, I will begin to learn all about how to enroll him in kindergarten and how I can support him in school. I have nothing but great things to say about this place and everyone in it. Thank all of you for making Mothers' Club possible.



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**Congratulations Mothers' Club
on 50 wonderful years!**

**Looking forward to
the next 5 decades!**

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Our Mission & Guiding Principles

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center prepares families living in isolation and poverty to succeed in school and in life. Our programs are built on two guiding principles: in order for significant, long-term change to occur within a family, you must reach both parent and child and educate them together; and, the most critical time to reach a family is when children are proven to be most vulnerable and impressionable, between birth and 5 years-old.

The Power of Two-Generation Learning

We fulfill our mission by providing FREE programs to disadvantaged families with children ages 0-5. Our two-generation learning model helps mothers and children gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they will need to break out of poverty. National research and our own evaluation results confirm that increasing the education levels of both a parent and their child is an irrefutable way to promote long-term, positive change within a family and a community.

[Donate On-Line & Learn More at www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org)

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