

The Power of Two



Issue 28

September 2015

A Family's First Year at Mothers' Club

From Jesús and Erika's twiddling fingers and nervous smiles, it was clear that what they were about to share with me during our interview carried extreme emotional weight. "We came to overcome. We came to... a better life," Jesús said. However, for their first 6 years in the US, language barriers and social isolation stifled the hope within their family. Almost a year ago Jesús and Erika came to Mothers' Club with their two boys, Cristian, 2, and Leonardo, 5. That day, August 25, 2014, a date they eagerly remembered, marked a permanent transformation within their family.

Jesús and Erika heard about Mothers' Club from a neighbor. They got in touch with the Program Director, Silvana, and scheduled a tour. They saw the vibrant classrooms where their boys would take classes, the expansive playground, and the pristine kitchen. Jesús and Erika were drawn to the



Jesús and Cristian engaged in an activity in the Toddler Classroom

sense of community felt inside the building, its families, and the staff. "We didn't know anything about the community. It helped me; it helped us," Jesús explained. They immediately enrolled.

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Fall Food & Wine Festival

**Saturday, October 17th
6-10 pm**



Tickets: \$100 each
www.mothersclub.org

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Learn more about our work with families!

More information on page 6

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Welcome Back to School

A new school year has begun! After a brief two-week summer hiatus, a refreshed group of families walked into our center on August 24th. With all five of our Early Childhood Education classrooms up and running during both our morning and afternoon sessions, we have 91 families with more than 115 children here each and every day. While many are familiar faces, we welcome 28 new families to our center this September.



PreK student Jueun makes a pink cake

Though the parents and children are nervous on the first day, they are eager for new opportunities and experiences. Parents quickly warm up after our Program Director, Silvana Casalegno, greets them with open arms and a friendly, "Hola, mi bella!" Children cling to their moms at first but are slowly enticed by the fascinating and exciting projects the teachers have planned.

The new program year has brought other changes to our organization as well. We have made some very exciting changes to our staff. Mara Leong-Nichols has been promoted to Development Director and looks forward to taking on a leadership role at our organization. The second member of

our Development Team, Lara Nassar, will be taking on more responsibility with her promotion to Development Coordinator. Andrea Huicochea will be using her extensive early childhood education experience to oversee our afternoon session as the Program Coordinator. We have also made changes to our program staff. Daisy Pedraza Badillo is very happy to take on the challenge of working with older children as she transitions from our Toddler Room to our Preschool Classroom. We have also welcomed two new teachers: Cindy Alvarado and Natalie Gochez, who will make great additions to the team.

The first order of business for our 2015-2016 Board of Directors was to approve our new Strategic Plan. After devoting several months to evaluating and assessing our current opportunities and challenges, we emerged with a shared vision for the future. Our 2015 Strategic Plan focuses on the following overarching goals: ensure sustainability of our organization both financially and programmatically; strengthen our two-generation learning programs; maximize the number of families served; and raise the public profile of our organization and two-generation learning both locally and nationally. We feel that a well-formulated Strategic Plan inspires people to give, join, and serve. It is a critical tool for main-



PreK boys Michael, Jonathan, and Jacob hard at work on a puzzle



Vanessa with her son Martín

taining stability and strategic direction and will ensure that all Mothers' Club stakeholders are in alignment. We look forward to where our future will take us!

You can view our full 2015 Strategic Plan at www.mothersclub.org/purpose.html.

Hector LaFarga, Jr.
Executive Director

Join Us for a Tour

The best way to learn about what happens at Mothers' Club is to visit our Center and take a guided tour with staff.

Upcoming Tours:

Thursday, Sept. 17 - 11:30am
Tuesday, Oct. 6 - 9am
Thursday, Oct. 15 - 11:30am
Tuesday, Nov. 3 - 9am
Thursday, Nov. 19 - 11:30am
Tuesday, Dec. 1 - 9am
Thursday, Dec. 17 - 11:30am

To RSVP or for more information call
(626) 792-2687 ext. 122 or
email mara@mothersclub.org

Letter from Our Board President

In the mid-1990s, when I joined the Mothers' Club Board for my first term, I had three school-age children so I completely identified with, and loved, the family-centered work we did there—I was getting my own hands-on experience with motherhood and its challenges. Twenty years later, and now that I've become the lucky Grammy to Jackson, Zoey and Evangeline, I believe even more strongly in the Power of Two and am honored to have been elected President of the Board of Directors.

While a lot has changed in 20 years at Mothers' Club, its heartbeat remains constant. Whether working out of improvised space in the Quaker Meeting House or our own state-of-the-art Nevins building, that heartbeat knows that it's hard to raise strong, healthy children in today's world under the best of circumstances. But many members of our community live under significantly less than the best of circumstances and still fight to do the best they can. That's why Mothers' Club has continued to occupy an important space in our community since 1961—reaching vulnerable parents and children at the most critical time in their development and making a difference in



It's a family affair! Judy Brown (third from left) with her husband David Brown, her three children, and their spouses at the Mothers' Club Power of Two dinner.

the future of those families.

As we wrapped up the last fiscal year, we said goodbye to five wonderful long-term Board members: Norah Morley, Julie Ward, Sylvia Paz, Stephanie Rasines, and Kelly McCord. Having worked with each individual for several years, I can say that we are eternally grateful for their contributions and the lasting impact they have made on Mothers' Club and our families.

My first order of business as President of the Board of Directors was to welcome four new leaders to the Board: Ronald Johnson,

Michael Leb, Abel Ramirez, and Sara Shapiro. Each brings valuable skills and expertise that will enhance our leadership capacity. I am also happy to introduce my fellow 2015-2016 officers: Amy Duncan, *Vice President*; Gretchen Reed, *Treasurer*; and Jennifer Quintanilla, *Secretary*.

Together with our talented and devoted staff of teachers and a lean administration, we are all excited to begin the new school year and get this year's 0-5 year olds and their parents off to a great start. Please plan to come by for a visit to see how we're thriving and how you can help.

Again, after 20 years, I am honored and grateful for the opportunity to lead Mothers' Club Family Learning Center. As my family said, "It's about time!" Thank you to our friends and our wonderful community of support!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judy Brown".

Judith Brown
Board President

Meet Our New Board Members!

Ronald Johnson is the Vice President of Ecommerce for Disney Stores in Pasadena, one of Mothers' Club's most dedicated corporate partners. He has more than 20 years' experience in retail operations, technology, ecommerce, and supply chain.

Michael Leb is the CEO and owner of Choctál LLC, a Pasadena-based company specializing in single-origin ice cream of the highest quality. He has almost 30 years of broad-based business and legal expertise.

Abel Ramirez is the CEO of Ramirez-Bianchi Corp, which includes El Portal Restaurant, Yahaira's Café, and Vanessa's Coffee House. He has been pleasing the tastebuds of Pasadena residents at his restaurants for 20 years, and was in the food service industry for years prior in Pasadena.

Sara Shapiro has over 40 years of experience in education. She is currently the Assistant Principal for the El Monte Rosemead Adult School, with a focus on English as a Second Language. Sara's career in education includes teaching, school counseling, career development, and coordination of resources.

Teen Volunteers Happy to Be of Service

It's Back to School season, and for dozens of local 8th Graders, they'll soon be grappling with some sophisticated concepts when they visit Mothers' Club: Universal preschool. Social isolation. Literacy gap. Federally defined poverty line. The young teens come to our center as part of our Service Learning Program, and those terms start to make more sense during their guided and hands-on volunteering within our Early Childhood Education Program.

Several independent middle schools in Pasadena – including Westridge, Poly, and Chandler – incorporate forms of Service Learning into 8th grade curriculum and visit Mothers' Club and other local service agencies several times in a semester. During students' initial Orientation with our Volunteer Program Coordinator, they learn about the history of Mothers' Club, its mission, and the center's day-to-day routine. But discussion also includes an in-depth look at how early experiences – particularly from birth to age five – play a major role in shaping a child's brain and development. Sarah encourages the students to consider how they can play a role in fostering positive developmental impacts during their visits by using rich language to bridge the well-documented "word gap" among at-risk children, showing children imaginative new ways of playing, and listening with intent so



Poly volunteer William Hammond playing at the park with PreK student Raúl

children feel like they've made a new friend.

For our teachers, the 8th Graders' help is invaluable: They can supervise additional activity stations, read aloud to small groups, and help our children learn not to fear new faces in the classrooms. Perhaps most important – for our moms and children alike – the teens serve as powerful role models, demonstrating the importance of learning and staying in school and of being involved in one's community.

The Mothers' Club volunteer experience also gives back to the teens in several ways, providing them with a nuanced understanding of important issues in our community and a sense of how non-profit organizations operate. Students take the first steps in learning what poverty really looks like at a local level and the ways in which it can dramatically impact a child's success in school. They learn how preschool is a critical component to kindergarten readiness and to lifelong educational and

professional success. Our young volunteers also feel a sense of empowerment when their ideas and creativity are recognized and implemented in the classrooms by our teachers, and they feel honored when our little ones turn to them for friendship and hugs. Finally, their direct work with our clients helps break down "us-vs-them" barriers and disrupts persistent stereotypes. Jill Bergeron, Chandler School's Liaison for Service Learning, agrees: "Our students gain empathy for families that are in challenging circumstances, but they can also see how kids are kids. Mothers' Club kids love to read, to play and to sing, just as the volunteers did at that age. I think the balance between building empathy and observing commonalities is something Mothers' Club does so well with its young volunteers."

This year, Mothers' Club will be reaching out to additional schools for new Service Learning partnerships, including several of our local public schools. For now, we are eager for September to be underway because the month always brings us bright and energetic teens happy to be of service!

*- Sarah Hilbert
Volunteer Program Coordinator*



Westridge 8th grader Summer helps Camila in the Toddler Room



Chandler 8th grader Kyle cruising the bike path with Andrés



Jesús, Leonardo, Cristian, & Erika at Early Readers' Book Club

It did not take long for them to realize that Mothers' Club's classes on parenting, English as a Second Language (ESL), family literacy, and health and wellness were their way out of isolation and poverty. Today, the young family of four is well on its way to overcoming its previous struggles.

Jesús praised the ways Mothers' Club has transformed his family's life: "They helped us learn English. They taught us how to treat the kids. They have helped us learn how to be better people." Both Jesús and Erika are enrolled in the ESL classes offered by Pasadena City College at Mothers' Club. After just one year, Jesús has already secured a higher position at the restaurant where he works. He is now a host, interacting with customers on a regular basis and practicing his improved English. Erika's daily life has also changed dramatically. She no longer spends her time alone in the house, but socializes with her many new friends gained since coming to Mothers' Club.

Some of the most endearing changes in the lives of Jesús and Erika have been through their boys. At 2 years old, Cristian already knows how to clear and clean his dishes after he has finished eating. Leonardo has made progress in sharing with

his classmates and his brother. These qualities of maturity not only warm the hearts of their parents, but also take a burden of stress off of Jesús and Erika. "I believe a lot has changed. There are people that come and explain to us what to do with the kids. How to talk

with them. What to do if a kid is sad. I didn't know any of this before," Jesús explained. Jesús feels that by closely engaging with the material on parenting, he has developed stronger, more positive relationships with his children. He also has learned the importance of patience, communication, and responsibility in his role as a father.

Jesús and Erika's optimistic outlook for their family's future is remarkable given where they were just a year ago, and where they came from. Jesús described his life in Mexico as a life without a future to look forward to. Mothers' Club is concerned with resolving immediate issues in the lives of families and preparing

them for the future once they leave the program. Jesús and Erika have gained a revitalized hope for their future. Jesús' goal is to one day become the general manager of his restaurant. He thinks about the futures of Cristian and Leonardo, saying he wants them "to be something in this life, like a professor or an architect." Mothers' Club has made a lasting impression on this deserving family. "I believe that we'll never forget this. That we were here and what we have learned."

Written by Isaac Dalsheimer, a student at Occidental College. He spent a semester visiting Mothers' Club as part of the English Writing Department's "Writing with the Community" course.

Edited by Lara Nassar, Development Coordinator



Erika, Leonardo, Cristian, & Jesús working on a craft activity

Mothers' Club programs are funded in part by the following agencies:

Pacific Clinics, Early Head Start

Los Angeles Universal Preschool

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program

City of Pasadena, Community Development Block Grant

Pasadena City College Community Education Center

5th Annual Fall Food & Wine Festival

In 2011, Mothers' Club Family Learning Center celebrated 50 years of service to at-risk families in the Pasadena community. In honor of the momentous milestone, we hosted a series of events and activities intended to pay tribute to our history and celebrate our future. One of our most successful endeavors was a festive tasting party planned for October that we called the "50th Anniversary Celebration." The one-time-only event was such a hit with Mothers' Club supporters new and old that we have continued to host the party annually ever since!

The 5th Annual Fall Food & Wine Festival will be held this year on Saturday, October 17th. The event will be bigger and better than ever with our center on North Fair Oaks filled with 250 guests, two live bands, 18 restaurant and business participants, and more than 70 silent auction packages. The fun and raucous evening will celebrate another year of service to the Pasadena community while offering a genuine good time to all who participate.

The growth and success of



Left to Right: Jennifer Dyer, Anna Meadows, Carolyn Cota, Sahar Farmanesh, Peggy Smith, Kristin Bacon, Candice Reinhardt, Tori Welch, Anne Marie Pieczarka, Ginger Mort
Not Pictured: Jill Bergeron, Kelly Crowe, Amy Duncan, Nurit Kotick, Simonetta May, Rosiris Paniagua, Jennifer Quintanilla, and Tanya Reader

our Fall Food & Wine Festival is due to the dedicated and hardworking group of volunteers who make up our Event Steering Committee. The committee has nearly tripled in size since our first party five years ago and now consists of 18 creative, spunky, and passionate individuals who choose to donate their time and talents to Mothers' Club Family Learning Center. While fresh faces have added new perspectives and ideas to our committee every year, several dedicated members have participated year after year. There is no way that this event – and the funds it raises for our two-generation

learning programs – would be possible without the commitment of these truly wonderful volunteers.

What was once intended to be a nice party to celebrate our anniversary has turned into an attraction across the Pasadena community that introduces a wide audience of individuals to Mothers' Club and raises significant funds to support our programs. The 5th Annual Fall Food & Wine Festival will not disappoint. We hope you will join us to celebrate our accomplishments and have one great night out!

- Mara Leong-Nichols
 Development Director



Fall Food & Wine Festival

Tickets: \$100 each

Purchase at www.mothersclub.org or mail payment to Mothers' Club. For questions, call: 626.792.2687 x112.

Thank You To Our Sponsors:



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Saturday, October 17, 6-10 pm
 at Mothers' Club Family Learning Center
 980 N. Fair Oaks Ave., Pasadena 91103

Participants Include:



Thank You to the Mothers' Club Guardians

The *Guardians* provide sustaining support for our programs and operations by donating \$1,000 or more to our annual fund.



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All gifts to Mothers' Club provide you with the personal satisfaction of providing critical services to our community's most vulnerable children and families. Planned gifts can give you even more in return.

By including Mothers' Club in your will or living trust, you can ensure that Mothers' Club will remain a valuable resource for generations of families to come. We can refer you to professionals who will help you design a charitable gift plan that benefits Mothers' Club and enables you and your family to fulfill your personal financial goals.

If you would like to learn more, please contact our Development Office at (626)792-2687, ext. 122.

Thank you for partnering with us to meet the needs of future children and parents.

Thank you to our foundation partners for their recent grant awards

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to support our Mental Health Program

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for our Family Literacy Program

Los Angeles Times Family Fund, A McCormick Foundation Fund
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The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
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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 through two-generation learning programs. 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 Online & Learn More at www.mothersclub.org

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The Power of Two - September 2015

Editors: Mara Leong-Nichols & Lara Nassar

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center is a
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Get Your Tickets Now!

Fall Food & Wine Festival

Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015

More info at www.mothersclub.org