

# The Power of Two



Issue 14

May 2010

## Learning from the Youngest of Mothers



*Parent Program Director Silvana Casalegno (seated left) with teen parents from Learning Works! Charter School.*

This year Mothers' Club partnered with Learning Works! Charter School in Pasadena. Their mission is to help teens overcome obstacles in order to graduate from high school and prepare for employment.

Of the almost 300 teens enrolled in Learning Works!, nearly 25% are pregnant or have a child. The school provides academic independent study and group support for the teens, their boyfriends and partners. But, it is not enough for them to learn about math

and science; they also need to learn about being a parent. And so a partnership with Mothers' Club seemed very natural.

Like other teens, this group is loud, always hungry, knows-it-all, and is looking for ways to handle it all. But unlike other teens, these girls and boys are parents. They understand that they can no longer "party," that life is different for them, and that a little person is depending on them.

See **Teens**, Page 6

## Jennifer DeVoll and Disney Store Honored at Annual Fundraiser "Read 2 Succeed"

On April 18 Mothers' Club honored **Jennifer DeVoll**, Executive Director of the **Pasadena Community Foundation**, and **The Disney Store Worldwide Headquarters** at our annual benefit celebration, "Read 2 Succeed." Actress **Joely Fisher**, best known for her role as "Paige" in ABC's "Ellen," was the event's emcee at Pasadena's Castle Green.

For our first honoree, Mothers' Club selected **Jennifer DeVoll** (right) who has served as the Executive Director of The Pasadena Community Foundation. See **Read 2 Succeed**, Page 4



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## Mothers' Club

### Family Learning Center

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## From the President: Holding to Our Mission

After moving into our new facility two years ago, the Board of Directors took time to re-visit our mission and develop a Strategic Plan to guide the organization in the coming years. One of the main goals of the resulting plan was to expand our programs to serve more families beyond those in our established morning program.

While the facility accommodated such an expansion, the Board was committed to proceeding with fiscal responsibility to ensure that we did not jeopardize our existing services.

We began slowly with a pilot program, *First Connections*, which attracted a number of new mothers and their babies. After two years, the program has evolved greatly and is attended by 24 children and their mothers.

Thus we were well positioned to take advantage of an opportunity that arose as a result of the federal government's economic stimulus plan.

**Early Head Start** is a federally funded, community-based program for low-income families with infants and

toddlers (birth to 36 months) that promotes the healthy development of children and their families.

In Pasadena and surrounding areas, the **Center for Community and Family Services (CCFS)** is the agency that contracts with the government to provide Head Start and Early Head Start services.

In March, CCFS received a grant to expand Early Head Start programs. Mothers' Club proved to be a natural partner for this expansion with our licensed facility, highly qualified teachers, and, thanks to *First Connections*, a pool of eligible families who wanted a more intensive program. It was also significant that our mission is aligned with the philosophy of both CCFS and of Early Head Start.

Staff from both organizations began to discuss the feasibility of collaborating. There was only one critical element that needed to be addressed. While Early Head Start provides resources for parents in the form of case management, health screenings, and access to resources, there are no requirements that parents engage in their own educational programs.

Most center-based Early Head Start programs provide full-day care for children while parents go to school or work. In home-based programs, parents receive weekly home visits and bi-monthly group get togethers.

So, the questions arose: Could a new model of Early Head Start programming be established that aligns with our commitment to

two-generation learning and fits within the constructs of a half-day program? And, is there a need in the community for this program?

The two agencies agreed on the answers: Yes, Mothers' Club has proven success and documented outcomes that support the case for a half-day, center-based program in which parents participate in their own educational programming. And yes, Mothers' Club has maintained full enrollment in a half-day program for years and continues to have a waiting list of eligible families.

So, on April 26, families in First Connections began attending Mothers' Club on a daily basis, instead of just 3 days per week. The children are thriving with the increased intensity of services, and parents are receiving an array of support services through CCFS and its many resource specialists.



Additionally, parents are attending classes in adult basic education, parent education, health education, group counseling, and leadership training.

This is at the core of what it is to be a part of Mothers' Club; holistic, in-depth services for parents are what make us unique. We are, after all, Mothers' Club.

- John Carlton, Board President




### Our Mission

Mothers' Club Family Learning Center prepares families living in isolation and poverty to succeed in school and in life through two generation learning programs.

## From the Executive Director: Partnering with Others To Benefit Children and Families

The big news at Mothers' Club is our expanded afternoon program. Through a new collaboration with the **Center for Community and Family Services (CCFS)**, *First Connections* is now being offered five days a week, for 24 infants and toddlers and their parents. Our nine full-time early childhood teachers and five part-time teachers are now serving up to 90 children each day.

While the afternoon program is distinct, it replicates many of the best practices and components of our long-standing morning program. As a staff, we quickly went from conception, to planning, to implementation in little more than three months. It has been a busy and exciting time.

As the staff considered entering into a partnership with the Center for Community and Families services we kept three of our core values in mind: 

### Quality

### Serving Families in Need

### Two-Generation Learning



**QUALITY:** Our new partnership has enabled us to increase the intensity and quality of our afternoon program by ensuring small classroom enrollment (8 children/classroom) and a low ratio of teachers to children (1 to 4).

At the same time we have expanded the number of hours the children are in the classroom from 6 per week to 17.5 per week. This means that children are able to form strong bonds with their teachers who have ample time to assess the children's development and respond to their needs.

Now our teachers have more time to plan activities that will support children's growth and development in both the morning and afternoon programs.

### SERVING FAMILIES IN NEED:

Over the years we have learned that parents of very young children are often highly stressed. Add a lack of income, lack of friends or family, and a

lack of basic skills, and inexperienced, isolated mothers can become overwhelmed.

They don't know what to expect from their children, what behavior is typical, or what is cause for concern. They don't know how to manage their stress, or their own needs.

Parents in our afternoon program are very similar to those who have long been attending our morning program—they need parenting support, friendship, skills, confidence and hope.

However, unlike the majority of parents in our morning program who do not speak English, parents in our afternoon program can speak English, but have other educational needs and aspirations.

### TWO-GENERATION

**LEARNING:** This core value of educating parents and children side by side is embraced by the staff and the Board alike. During our recent strategic planning process, we reaffirmed that Mothers' Club is for mothers as well as their children. We are not a day care center where parents drop off their children and return at the end of the day. Parents remain on site and actively engage in their own learning.

The primary difference between our morning and afternoon programs is that the curriculum in the afternoon is targeted for parents with English language skills. Whereas parents in the morning study English as a Second Language, mothers in the afternoon take adult basic ed to improve their math, reading and writing skills.

"This partnership to bring Early Head Start services to more children in collaboration with Mothers' Club is a dream come true for us. Mothers' Club has always provided quality services in this community and partnering to serve the youngest children of the most vulnerable families in Pasadena is truly an honor."

*Wassy Tesfa, Director of Head Start & Early Head Start*

In both programs, parents benefit from parenting classes, mental health services, and specialized workshops in health and nutrition, family literacy, financial literacy, and career and education planning.

Our focus on two-generation learning requires us to commit resources for programming for both parents and children. But more significantly, it requires a commitment from the parent who decides to participate in Mothers' Club.

Each mother knows that much will be asked of her; she needs to be present each day, to be open to learning and new ideas, she needs to be willing to help in the children's classrooms, and willing to take on leadership tasks for the benefit of other mothers. It is a journey that she is embarking on and we are there to support her along the way.

*- Susan Kujawa, Executive Director*



## Andrea Armenta - 2010 Inspiration Award Recipient



Andrea Armenta was born in Sonora Mexico and is the youngest of six children. Her family struggled with poverty which led them to make many difficult decisions and sacrifices. At the age of 16, Andrea was forced to drop out of school in order to work to support her family. When she was 20, she got married and moved to the United States with her husband so he could look for work.

Andrea has been married for 15 years and has three children, Briana (10), Julian (7) and Rachele (2). During the 6 years she has spent at Mothers' Club, Andrea has emerged as a natural leader.

See [Andrea](#), Page 6

### *Read to Succeed, cont. from Page 1*

Foundation for seven years. Under her leadership, PCF has set up over 200 new charitable funds. PCF, Pasadena's hometown foundation for over 55 years, manages charitable funds for families and organizations. PCF has been a supporter of Mothers' Club since 1974, awarding over \$230,000 in grants to the agency.

Jennifer DeVoll is an active voice for those in need in the greater Pasadena area. She is well respected for her ability to bridge the world of the donor with the world of the community being served. She is actively engaged in conversations at all levels, within the school district, non-profit agencies, and with our local officials. Jennifer works diligently to ensure that the Foundation is making the greatest possible impact on those most in need.

Mothers' Club is only one of the many worthy agencies partnering with Jennifer and the Pasadena Community Foundation to impact children and families. We are truly grateful for her leadership and were thrilled to honor her this year.

Our second honoree, **Disney Store Headquarters**, was selected because of their partnership with Mothers' Club. See [Read 2 Succeed](#), Page 6

In lieu of silent and live auctions that produce little net revenue for our services, Board President **John Carlton** and Past President **Tom Coston** invited guests to simply pledge their support for the myriad of literacy-based services we provide that help families "Read 2 Succeed."

Donned in a Dr. Seuss hat, John talked about our early literacy intervention for children, financial literacy, adult basic education, family literacy and much, much more. With John and Tom's urging, **guests pledged \$25,000 for Mothers' Club's direct services.**

## Thank You to Our Sponsors & Patrons



### **Benefactors**

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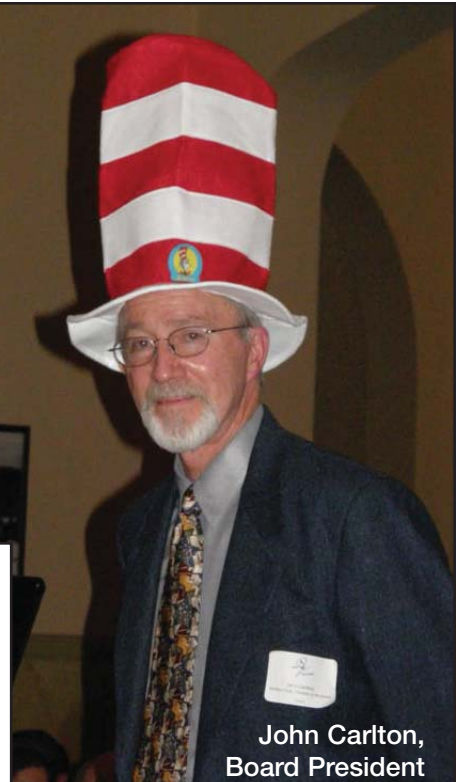
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Emcee Joely Fisher with Disney Store Headquarters Employees



John Carlton,  
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Honoree  
Jennifer DeVoll



Guests pledge  
support for services.



Briana Armenta reads Shel  
Silverstien's poem "Sick" to  
guests and her little sister.



Sue Kujawa,  
Executive Director  
with honoree  
Andrea Armenta

## WANTED: Volunteers for New Saturday Morning Literacy Program

Earlier this year, Mothers' Club launched a volunteer-based literacy program called **The Early Readers' Book Club**. In keeping with our two-generation learning model, the program promotes literacy for both mother and child.

One Saturday a month, mothers and even some dads bring their preschoolers to Mothers' Club for story time and a literacy-based activity. Before the families arrive, volunteers learn how to engage children as they read. But the children aren't the only ones who participate.

Participating families receive a copy of the book, a CD of the story, and reading tips. If mothers aren't ready to read aloud, they can listen to the CD along with their children. The ultimate goal is to prepare mothers to help their future kindergartners with reading assignments and to get kids excited to read aloud themselves.

To learn how to volunteer, contact Jason Wurtz at [jason@mothersclub.org](mailto:jason@mothersclub.org).



*Volunteers from Disney Store, National Charity League, Junior League and others read with families in our Early Readers Book Club.*

"As I read the book, I pointed to the words as I read them, and the mom was silently mouthing the words along with me. The mom was really trying!"

*- Robin, a volunteer from the National Charity League.*

### *Andrea cont. from Page 4*

Quietly, but very competently, she takes on many leadership roles, serving as chair for events and as President of the Parent Advisory Council. Her leadership skills have transferred to the elementary school where her older children attend. She volunteers regularly and is deeply involved in their education.

The early childhood teachers frequently request Andrea to be the Parent Assistant in their classrooms. She is highly regarded among the parents and staff for her dedication and ability to follow through on her commitments. The staff is honored to have her receive this year's Inspiration Award.

*-Sarah E. Orth  
Development Director*

### *Read to Succeed, cont. from Page 4*

Club. Over the last year, more than 40 employees have contributed over 150 hours of volunteer service to the families of Mothers' Club.

Employees have shared their creativity and playfulness with our preschoolers; they have helped the children make Valentines' Day and Mothers' Day cards for their mothers; and have instilled a love of reading in parents and children alike through our Early Reader's Book Club. Disney Store Headquarters and its terrific employees are helping make Mothers' Club the happiest place on Earth for our community's at-risk families.

Disney Store's Headquarters are based in Pasadena with more than 200 employees. The company is proud to

### *Teens, cont. from Page 1*

And everyone is telling them how they should live, but no one is teaching them. These teens are caught in a bind. They are told to be responsible - "you made your bed, now lie in it" - but they are not given the tools or support they need to become responsible.

Well, at Mothers' Club we listen, we talk, and we teach. We listen to their stories about alcoholic parents, abusive relatives, gangs that became their family when no else cared, and how disrespectful words became the norm in their world.

We talk about respecting yourself, about dreams they have for a better life, and about the education that will help them move ahead. We also talk about the stress they feel as court dates approach.

And we teach them what their babies need from them: non-violent discipline, nutrition, and ways to respectfully speak to their children. We teach ways to balance their frustrations and their child's needs. And we praise each other for following through and completing assignments.

Sixteen girls and boys have been enrolled for weekly classes this year. Young men and women who are responsible for almost 22 little lives. It can be scary to think of their future, but I continue to be impressed by their ability to persevere. This group has found something they need at Mothers' Club - people who will listen, teach, and give big hugs - because teens are kids, too.

*- Silvana Casalegno, Program Director*

not only work in Pasadena, but support some key community organizations, including Mothers' Club through volunteerism and charitable donations.

Finally, we presented our 7th annual Inspiration Award to **Andrea Armenta**, whose daughter Briana closed the event by reciting two Shel Silverstien poems to more than 240 guests.

Under the leadership of event chair **Kathy Magistrale**, \$60,000 was raised for our 2009/2010 budget. In a time when so many are struggling, we continue to be truly grateful to the hundreds of individuals who share in our vision for brighter futures for families in need. Thank you for your generosity - we can't do it without!

*-Sarah E. Orth  
Development Director*

## Join us for an Open House

Tour our facility and observe our programs in action.

Thursday, June 10 - 11:30 am  
Tuesday, July 13 - 9:00 am

To provide a courtesy RSVP or for more information call (626) 792-2687 ext. 122

## Welcome New Guardians

Thank you to following individuals for joining the Mothers' Club *Guardians*; a group of individuals who provide cornerstone support for our programs by donating \$1,000 or more to our annual fund.

Richard Davis  
Talin & Armen Dikranian  
Ann Erdman  
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## Our Continued Thanks to All of Our Guardians

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*Thank you to the following funders for their recent grants:*

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*Mothers' Club now proudly partners with the following agencies:*

Center for Community and Family Services, Early Head Start  
U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program

## Have You Considered a Legacy Gift to Mothers' Club?

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 can 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 us at (626) 792-2687, ext. 122. Thank you for partnering with us to meet the needs of future children and parents.



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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. In all programs, mothers and children learn side by side, gaining the knowledge and skills they will need to break out of poverty. National research and our own evaluation results confirm that educating a parent and child together 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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### **The Power of Two**

May 2010

*Editor:* Sarah Orth

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