

ONWARD

Update

Fall/Winter 2010

It Just Keeps Getting Better: **Program Enhancements Mark Ambitious Start to New Program Year**

Board of Directors

Prentice H. Marshall Jr.
President

Mark Stenftenagel
Vice-President

Tamar B. Kelber
Secretary

Travis J. Krueger
Treasurer

Jon Clopton

Carrie L. Distler

Daniel Greiwe

Bradley A. Nunemaker

Howard Romanek

Joel Scoble

Ann Shuman

Andrea Van Gelder

David Villalobos

Rian Wren

Mario F. García
Executive Director

The new program year for the Onward House Early Childhood Education and School Age programs began on September 1st, and Onward House has hit the ground running.

Onward House was recently selected as one of six agencies to participate in the **"Go, Slow, Whoa" Grant** that is provided through a partnership with the City of Chicago and the Illinois Department of Health. The funds will allow Onward House to address the childhood obesity and family wellness issues through nutritional, weight and exercise initiatives.

"The grant will let us do a number of things," says Program Director Donna Webb. We will be able to assess a child's health through Body Mass Index tests, institute an agency-wide exercise program with the assistance of a physical education specialist, educate parents on healthy meal choices for their families and institute healthy menu planning for the meals provided through Onward House."

Another opportunity for program growth is through the **RELAY Project, a two year grant provided through a partnership with the McCormick Foundation, Columbia College Chicago the Department of Family Services and the City of Chicago.** The RELAY Project aims to elevate program quality through strategic planning, developing a system of professional development and creating a system of reflective practices.

"We are improving classroom environments the 'Onward Way' and are developing a method of education that in the end will equip our children with skills to be successful," says Education Coordinator Melisa Larson.

In a time when community-based agencies are feeling the repercussions of a difficult economy, Onward House has positioned itself to incorporate a series of improvements that will reinforce its status as a flagship agency that provides a continuum of high-quality programs to underserved residents of Chicago's west and northwest communities.

Onward House is on the fast track to doing just that.



Onward Spotlight



Naphateri Neal started with Onward House seven years ago as a Family Support Worker. For the past five years, Ms. Neal has been responsible for overseeing the Partnership Program.

The Onward Neighborhood House Head Start Partnership Program serves 134 children between the ages of 3 to 5 years old in five privately owned and licensed child care centers on Chicago's Westside. The Partnership Program allows Onward Neighborhood House to provide comprehensive full-day services to families beyond the West Town and Belmont Cragin communities so that parents can have access to affordable early childhood education, social support and additional resources.

As Partnership Program Coordinator, Ms. Neal ensures that all Partnership Agencies have the proper classroom and professional resources, which includes professional consultants, development opportunities for teachers, and educational workshops for parents and community members. Ms. Neal also ensures that the Partnership sites implement Head Start and Creative Curriculum guidelines so as to maximize the cognitive, linguistic, social, and physical development of the children. Ms. Neal's leadership has helped bring about a number of improvements in the Partnership classrooms and among teachers and parents.

"When I first started as Coordinator, there were agencies that lacked resources," she explains. "Now, all classrooms have the proper supplies, class materials and playground equipment." As a result, "The children are leaving for Kindergarten in a much better position than when they came in."

While working with so many agencies can prove challenging, Ms. Neal's reason for working with the Partnership sites is simple and sincere:

"I love to do it because serving others is my life's purpose."

News from the Executive Director

Forging Ahead

As I write this, Onward House is already a quarter of the way through our 2011 fiscal year. By the time you receive this newsletter, we will be approaching the halfway point.

It is easy to lose sight of the big picture when we go about our business in our everyday tasks; days move quickly into weeks which fly into months.



Onward House has experienced some incredibly positive changes over the past six months. We have recently hired three new key personnel: Donna Webb as Program Director, Melisa Larson as Education Coordinator, and Jenny Seacat as Head Start Coordinator. Combined, these three individuals bring 50-plus years of knowledge and experience in education and social service.

We are also working on initiatives that improve the quality of our programs through teacher training and development. In addition to the improvements discussed in this issue's cover story, we recently received grant funding from **Peoples Gas** to help 25 teachers at both the West Town and Belmont Cragin sites receive professional development training for our Early Childhood Education curriculum. The training session will give our teaching staff opportunities to explore, discover, discuss, and reflect on educational concepts and best practices.

And last but certainly not least, our Executive and Auxiliary Boards continue to provide the energy and advocacy that has come to define the leadership of our agency. In light of the recession, the third annual Golf Outing hosted by **Transparent Container** and **Neutral Tandem** raised over \$63,000 for the Belmont Cragin facility—our most successful to date. Meanwhile, the Auxiliary Board continues to bring in new young professionals eager to make a change. Planning for the 5th Annual "Night of Bright Futures" Gala is already well under way.

In spite of the dour economy and challenges affecting virtually all non profit organizations, Onward House continues its rich history of providing resources to build better families and better communities. The wind may not be at our backs, but we have the energy, will and momentum to forge ahead.

Sincerely,

Mario F. García



The Early Childhood Education Program: Laying the Groundwork for a Lifetime of Success!

The three year old Busy Bees classroom was bursting with energy on a recent October morning. Breakfast was over, they had just finished brushing their teeth and the class of 19 students was eager to have fun. One little girl was showing off a masterful crayon rendering, while at another table, a group of boys were building an architectural masterpiece out of blocks. Meanwhile, in the dramatic play area, two boys and a girl were immersing themselves in their imagined world.

"I want to finger paint," one little girl declared.

Almost instantly, five other children retrieved their art aprons, put them on and sat at a table. While waiting for the teacher to bring the paper and paint, one preschooler decided to begin reciting her ABCs. The rest of the table soon joined in.

The Onward House Early Childhood Education Program for children ages 2 to 5 is designed to meet the needs of parents who aim to better their

children's lives. Intended for working-class families who often have limited affordable daycare options, the year-round, full-day preschool services allows parents to work full time while actively involving themselves in their child's safety and educational development.

"The Early Childhood Program has been beneficial to parents," says Kerrie Lay, a teacher for the three and four year old classroom. "Our one-on-one time with parents allows them to ask questions and get advice on how to create the best learning environment at home."

The Onward House Early Childhood Education Program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in recognition of its programming excellence—a prestigious endorsement earned by less than 10% of all day-care providers nationwide. One of the ways Onward House maintains such a high level of early childhood education is through the implementation of the Creative Curriculum, which promotes

the cognitive, linguistic, social, and physical development of young children.

"I've had several students who had come in [at the beginning of the year] not talking at all," says Kristin Vignaroli, a teacher for the two year old classroom at the Belmont Cragin site. "By the time they left my classroom, they were speaking in sentences with four and five words."

While a preschool child's true success lies years ahead in the future, the teachers see plenty of small signs that their efforts are setting up the children for success.

"One of the best things for us is when children come in who have never been in a classroom before and we get to watch the socialization process unfold," says Ms. Lay.

"I love seeing the children smile every day when I arrive in the morning," adds Ms. Vignaroli, "[because] I know we're making a difference in their growth and development."



600 North Leavitt Street
Chicago, IL 60612

3rd Annual Onward House Golf Outing Another Success!



The stormy weather held off for another fun-filled golf outing on September 16th at Ruffled Feathers Golf Club in Lemont, Illinois. This year's event helped raise over \$63,000 for the Belmont Cragin facility. Since its inception, the Golf Outing has raised \$174,000 for our Belmont Cragin facility. Onward House would like to give special thanks to Board Members **Dan Greiwe, Jon Clopton and Rian Wren;** Golf Outing planners **Irene Rodriguez, Eric Clamp, Jim Durham** and everyone involved at **Transparent Container; Neutral Tandem;** our sponsors; and everyone who came in support of Onward House's cause. To see more photos of the event, please **visit our website, www.onwardhouse.org.**

Shop Online and Help Onward House this Holiday Season

Do you plan to shop online for gifts this holiday season? If so, do it through **OneCause**. OneCause channels your online purchases from over 800 online merchants and service providers and contributes a percentage of what you buy to Onward House. Participation is easy: just go to **onecause.com**, search for Onward House as a cause and register an account (make sure to tell your friends, too).

Mark your Calendar

The Onward House Auxiliary Board invites you to join us for the
**5th Annual
"Night of Bright Futures" Gala.**
The event will be held **Saturday,
February 26, 2011 at the River East
Arts Center in Chicago.**
Stay tuned for more details.

Donate Online

Tired of those long walks to the mailbox? It's now easier than ever to donate to Onward House! Simply click on the donate link at our website, **www.onwardhouse.org**, and make an online contribution. All donations are securely made through PayPal, and all major credit cards are accepted. Thank you for your support!

About Onward Neighborhood House

Onward Neighborhood House, founded in 1893, has served Chicago's West Town Community for more than 100 years. Its mission is to empower immigrant and other low-income families, individuals and children to achieve their full potential through quality education, recreation, and social service programs in a community-based setting. Today, this mission is put into action through an Early Childhood Education Program; School-Age Program; Family Support Services; Senior Services; and a Community Computer Resource Center. Onward Neighborhood House provides child care to 452 children and serves over 900 families and 5,500 individuals annually.