

Caroline House Mission Statement

To enable women and children to reach the fullness of their potential through education in English language and life skills



Caroline House

Founded and sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Serves the women of the Bridgeport area by teaching classes in English, basic computer, and life skills

Offers programs for preschool children while their mothers are in class

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Summer 2011

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Miriam's Story

There are so many stories to tell about the women who come to Caroline House. They left their country of origin because they experienced dangerous oppression, lack of work and poor educational opportunities for their children. Their only hope seemed to be a new life in the U. S. Their husbands came first to a job and then later they followed.

Let me tell you one typical story. Miriam came here three years ago to learn English so she could in her words, "Become a better mother." She wanted to become more involved in her children's education, help them with their homework, confer with their teachers, and supervise class trips. Like most of the mothers who attend class here, her goal is to help her children to have a better life than she did. This new language, English, did not come easily to her, but her determination overcame her frustration of not learning as quickly as she wanted. Yet learn she did, as she slowly moved through the four levels of Basic English offered daily at Caroline House.



Miriam and her son.

One day in the middle of the third level she came into class announcing, "I am so happy today! Yesterday I went to the teacher conferences at my children's school and I was able to talk with my two girls' teachers. I did not need a translator. I understood them and they understood me. It was wonderful!" Then she softly added, "My children said they were proud of me."

Not only are her children proud of her, so are her teachers at Caroline House who had watched her come to this moment. They had seen her with her son who was in our children's program. They watched her interact with the other students and staff, always sensitive and amazingly aware of the needs of those around her. Her teachers have seen Miriam, not only as a dedicated student, but also as a good mother, a generous and kind person who gave of herself and of the little she had. Her gentle presence has a calming effect on all around her.

Miriam will stay in level 5 until her new baby arrives in late September, and then she and her husband, Alejandro, will become once again the parents they were called to be.

Summer School Learning is Fun!

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Jabaire

Students from local elementary and high schools, from Grade 2 to Sophomore Year, participated in the three-week Caroline House summer school program. At 8:30 each morning, they were welcome to start their day in the Caroline House kitchen with a breakfast of cereal, juice, milk, and crackers provided by the City of Bridgeport. They then enjoyed three 45-minute classes, improving their math, reading, and journaling/creative communication skills.

Adults, as well as high school and college students from Fairfield, Trumbull, and Westport, offered one-on-one tutoring that greatly facilitated participants' progress. Boys and girls from Haiti, Turkey, and several Latin American countries also developed their social skills during their half-hour recess, relating to one another over snacks and games in this multi-cultural environment.

Tutors and students enthusiastically engaged in the learning process. Alex Bookbinder, who will be a Staples High Junior in September, looked forward every morning to that day's teaching. "What makes it especially enjoyable is knowing that by tutoring these students in reading and seeing their progress, I am doing something really good for them."

As was true in previous years, we are confident that when the program participants return to their schools, their teachers will offer very positive feedback on their achievements. And, as always, we are very grateful to those generous friends of Caroline House and First Book who donated such great reading books to this program: thank you!



Mary Carroll & Alejandro



Jeff & Jerilyn



Berenice, Luis & Nestor

Caroline House offers tuition-free education programs that are made possible through the generosity of grants and donations. Your gifts help us continue our mission to educate and empower women and children in need. Contributions may be made by mail or on-line at www.thecarolinehouse.org.

From the *Children's Corner*

Starting Out

The last semester's lessons were enriched by special activities and events. In February the Caroline House Cabaret, held at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, featured the children, who stole the show when they sang "I Have a Dream." Coming in a close second was Sister Christina with her dummy "Happy," who delighted the little ones.

Continuing

Sacred Heart University graciously hosted our Spring Walkathon. Dawn, coordinator of SHU's volunteers and work-study students, arranged a tented meeting site, and students joined the families on the walk. Next year we will rotate back to Fairfield U. Students from both schools continue to support and be actively involved in our Children's Program.

Volunteer Lindy Toole arrived with her guitar and spirited sing-a-longs every Tuesday. The music and high-energy movements thoroughly engaged the children, while Elmo's song consistently evoked laughter and cheers.

Welcoming Spring/Summer

With the children faithfully keeping watch, our backyard garden flourished. They loved seeing the plants grow and waited eagerly for the peas to pop. Soon the carrots, radishes, peppers, peas, and tomatoes were in full bloom.

In May 57 of us participated in a day trip to the Bronx Zoo, an annual event for the Caroline House children. We met Mia, the poisonous snake that had escaped, was found, and once again was safely behind glass. One of our 3-year-old girls summed up her experience with this classic comment: "I like the zoo, but I don't like the animals."

Innovating

This year we offered a special week at the end of the school year to give extra help to our children who will head off to kindergarten in September. Two children from the prestigious Achievement First Academy joined us for the tutoring in English and Math. Each day ended with an innovative story time, as the artistically talented volunteer student from the University of Richmond drew the story as the children told it.

Thanking and Assessing

A very special thank you to Liza and Jane, who volunteered one day each week. They, along with Jean and Deb, look back on a very successful year: The children are polite, kind, and well-spoken. All of those going to kindergarten will enter English-speaking classes, a wonderful achievement thanks to delightful children, cooperative parents, and generous, dedicated staff and volunteers.



Sr. Christina & "Happy" chat with the children



Nathaly brings her big brother to our Walkathon.



Alejandro, Angel, Alex & Naejli are off to kindergarten.

Caroline House

An Educational Center for Women & Their Children

574 Stillman Street
Bridgeport, CT 06608

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From the Executive Director:



Mayor Bill Finch, S. Peg and some Summer School Students.

Director's Perspective

It's been a year since Sister Ann handed me a binder entitled "Caroline House". I've learned a lot this year ... and to be sure, I still have a long way to go. I've been deeply moved by the courage of our women who have faced great obstacles and yet have hung in there with their studies. I've loved watching the children in the pre-school grow and learn.

Summer Camp has been lots of fun! Marie Paul de Valdivia, Mary Carroll and Diane Johnson gathered an outstanding group of tutors from high schools and colleges and the kids caught the enthusiasm of their one-on-one tutors and made great strides in Reading and Math as well as developing their imaginations and artistic skills in their "Journaling" class with Marie Paul and all her able assistants.

Mayor Bill Finch came to visit and he too encouraged the kids to keep at learning for their future. The Mayor had all the kids make a promise that when they turned 18 that they would register and vote. These young citizens were especially pleased when the Mayor handed each one of them a "B Green" backpack and reminded them of all the things they could do now for the good of the planet by recycling.

It's been a good year! Thank you for making it possible.
S. Peg