

Letty Owings Center

The Stork Delivery

December 2008

Laura's Place Becomes Reality for Graduates

When Brad Mersereau's sister Laura died in 1999 as a result of alcoholism at the age of 46, he grieved deeply and then began seeking ways to honor her memory. He donated her house to a non-profit organization and began telling her story - to friends, to media, to anyone who would listen.

Soon, Brad was making donations to Portland programs that helped people get clean and sober. In 2002, he included Central City Concern in his charitable giving and asked the agency to make a powerful difference in the lives of women in recovery.



Central City Concern is pleased to honor Brad's wishes by announcing *Laura's Place* (shown in the above photo), transitional housing for women who have recently "graduated" from LOC.



A LOC client and daughter check out the kitchen in one of the finished units.

Letty Owings Center wants to move clients through residential treatment more rapidly in order to make room for other pregnant or parenting women in urgent need of residential drug/alcohol treatment. Some women, however, need more time to acclimate back into mainstream life. Enter *Laura's Place*, a fourplex for women and children in recovery. Letty Owings Center staff will provide daily supportive services to clients until they are ready for permanent housing. CCC expects that 40 to 60 people will call *Laura's Place* home each year with stays of three to four months.

"This building is a sorely-needed interim step for some of our clients," said Nancy Anderson, Program Manager of LOC. "We have been dreaming of having such a place for a long time." In late September, Nancy and Central City Concern architect/project manager Ben Gates toured the fourplex with four clients and their children.



Ben Gates discusses possible kitchen placement options with LOC client.

All of the clients talked excitedly about trying to time their LOC exit with the building's completion - currently projected for January. Each unit has a small kitchen and full bathroom.

LOC staff will be frequent visitors to Laura's Place. Case managers will visit clients multiple times a day, working closely with residents to help them comply with requirements established by LOC and the State of Oregon. Clients will receive continuing assistance with life skills training such as budgeting and meal preparation, transportation challenges, day care scheduling, parenting, adherence to outpatient treatment, court appearances, domestic violence support groups and a commitment to starting a work plan toward self-sufficiency, whether it is pursuing a GED or engaging in other work-oriented training.

Staff will also be available to secure permanent housing that is alcohol and drug-free for those ready to



Laura's Place - down to the studs in preparation for electrical work and new drywall.

leave the fourplex and will prepare incoming LOC graduates to live at the transitional housing facility.

The building is currently undergoing substantial upgrades including a new roof, electrical and plumbing systems. Energy and water efficiency is being

“It’s a thrill for us to walk through the units and start to see the possibilities. This will be an important home for so many women who are striving to rebuild their lives and create positive futures for their children.”

- Nancy Anderson, LOC Program Manager

improved as well through the addition of insulation, dual flush toilets and energy efficient fixtures. Carpets were removed, revealing old-growth fir floors

which will be refinished. In addition, each unit will be child-friendly with safety improvements such as reconfigured porch guardrails.

Purchase of Laura's Place and the cost of renovations are partly covered by Brad Mersereau and several other major donors. A funding gap remains on the project and LOC is proactively working to generate grant support from foundations and corporations. In addition, LOC has earmarked proceeds from the next major fundraising event to Laura's Place. 🍅



Reflections from Clients as They Leave LOC

Q How would you describe yourself and your situation when you arrived at LOC?

A Hopeless, helpless, scared, lonely, sad, angry, exhausted, a mother without her children.

Desperate.

I was unable to take charge of my life.

I was self-medicating with alcohol, meth and morphine pills.

I was a very scared woman, lost inside myself from my addiction. I had no faith in myself, or anyone else. I so wanted to live a healthy life.... I knew that I could not live like this anymore.

An addicted mom who wanted to change and didn't know how.

Q How would you describe yourself now?

A Today, I am a woman who lives life instead of just surviving. I have integrity, values, goals, confidence and hope.

Now, I am a calmer person. I use my coping skills now. I'm a good mother and my recovery means everything to me.

I'm hopeful, happy, determined, grateful and confident.

I'm a grateful, recovering addict now with people, tools and the places to stay clean.

I am a confident woman in recovery. I've got the skills to know what is right and wrong.

I love who I am, and it's exciting knowing there are no limits to bettering myself.

Marina's Kafe Supports Alumni & Children



A family affair: Marina Argiris (left) usually gets members of her family to help out with the LOC monthly dinner. Here, nephew Yoryos Kondilis and sister-in-law Anatasia Kondilis .

For two years and counting, Marina's Kafe - just a short walk from LOC - provides a place to gather & have dinner every month for LOC's current clients, alumni and children. This monthly tradition gives women a chance to catch up with each other before they attend a monthly alumni speaker meeting at a nearby church.

Owner Marina Argiris has also turned into a bookseller on behalf of LOC. She accepts book donations from customers and friends and sells them in her cozy restaurant. All proceeds go toward Letty Owing Center's Mother Day Lunch for alumni. Marina said she has many repeat donors (and customers!) participating in her mini bookstore! 🍎



Growing with Music: A Weekly Tradition at LOC



On this October day, five mothers straggle into the playroom at Letty Owings Center with five toddlers in tow. Some are enthusiastic, some are grumbling, some are just beginning to wake up. Anne Clark, founder and operator of Growing with Music, wastes no time. Shaker bells with smooth, long red handles are brought out and the children dive for them, marching around and shaking them in every direction. After a few minutes, Anne begins singing “shakers in the bucket, shakers in the bucket,” as she walks from child to child, basket extended for their cooperation. And cooperation comes easily to these children because they know that many more noise-making opportunities will be theirs during this 50-minute session of music, games, reading and snuggling with mom.

“Music and movement do a lot toward brain development,” Anne says enthusiastically, “and there’s much social value for these children too. This marching around with their arms swinging starts to get them aware of their physical space and how to respect the space others need as well.”

Anne coaches the mothers through every activity, gently reinforcing the positive parenting they exhibit. Getting a child back on task isn’t always easy but the quick pace of the activities and group dynamic are helpful. Toward the end of the toddler session, Anne asks the moms to hold their children close and just breathe slowly and deeply. Amazingly, every child slows down and willingly sinks into the relaxed laps of their mothers. “This is as much for the moms as it is for the children,” says Anne. “They need time to just *be* with their children sometimes.”

Nancy Anderson, LOC Program Manager, agrees with the value of this class stating that many of the LOC clients don’t really know how to play with their children. “For most of them, nobody played with them while they were growing up,” she says, “it’s all new territory. But it’s an important skill for them to develop.”

The infant class begins with ten babies and moms sitting in a circle on the floor. Anne leads the moms in how to do gentle baby massage and even the sleepest baby perks up. Soon, the moms are singing to their children, then carrying the babies as they dance a bit, before coming back to the floor for reading time.

Since 2000, Anne has been bringing her music programs to the women and children of Letty Owings Center free of charge. She developed Growing with Music as a non-profit organization with a mission to serve those in need. For more information on the program, or to contribute, contact Anne at 503-282-1839, 3221 NE Schuyler Street, Portland, OR 97212.



Thank You to Our Loyal Donors - You Help Keep Our Programs Vibrant!

(list reflects donations received from April 7, 2008 through November 14, 2008)

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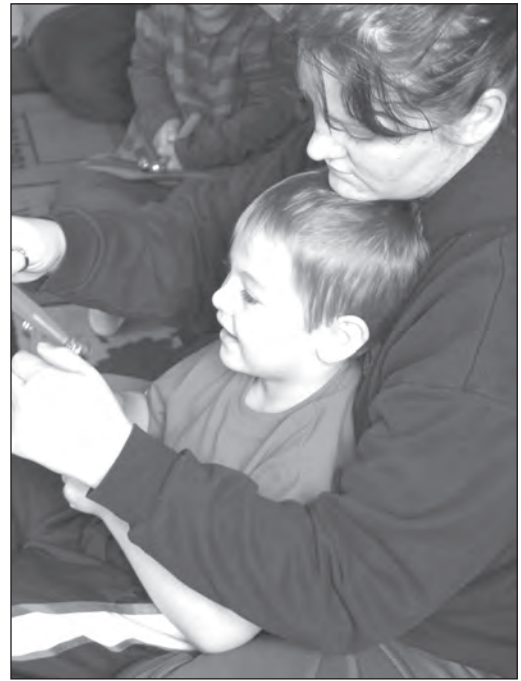
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What we love to receive during the holidays!

- Gift cards, gift cards and more gift cards! Remember how quickly children go through shoes? And how they need a new coat every year? Most coveted gifts cards are Fred Meyer, Wal-Mart and Target.
- Personal care items: shampoo, deodorant, feminine hygiene products, tooth paste, etc.
- New bath towels & sheet sets!
- Stationary supplies, pens, pencils, journals, writing tablets, greeting cards.
- Narcotics Anonymous® basic texts such as “It Works, How and Why” and 12-Step Meditation books
- Clothing for women (all sizes) and clothes for children up to size 6 or 7.
- Gently used strollers, baby bouncers, exercise saucers, high chairs, cribs and dresser drawers.
- Novels, non-fiction and children’s books can be taken to Marina’s Kafe at 814 NE 28th Avenue in Portland. This business sells the books and gives all proceeds to LOC’s Mother Day Luncheon for graduates and their children.

New Federal regulations do not allow us to accept any used car seats.





“There but for the grace of God, go I”

I had hit a bottom of hopelessness and despair. I cannot describe the pain of watching the effects of my bad choices reflected in the eyes of my 5-year-old son. I was a heroin addict living in the back of a used TV store. I needed to stop using drugs, find a job and a home for my son - with no money. I was not eligible for public assistance because I had no home address. The hole I had dug was so deep, I could not figure a way out with my child. One day, the store owner handed me a newspaper article about a recovery program for women and their children. I mustered up the courage to knock on the door of Letty Owings Center (LOC) and became the first client in the program on May 1, 1989. Today, I am celebrating 19 years clean and sober, have a college degree, have been a paralegal for 15 years, and own my own home.

LOC approaches recovery by treating the addict, the woman, the mother and the child. I graduated with solid parenting skills that I practiced during my nine

months with the program. I developed a plan for my life before leaving the program, and attended aftercare meetings to stay in touch with other graduates.

However, one of the best gifts I was given was a warm sense of community support. Members of the community visited, mentored, trained, donated, and cared about me and my son when I did not feel worthy of such kindness. This community support changed my life and the life of my son.

What I learned in those desperate moments was, I cannot do this alone. LOC cannot continue to change lives of women and their children without your support. Let my success assure you that you have made a difference in my life and the life of my family. By supporting LOC, each of us can have a profound impact on the lives of women and children. We all thank you! 🍎

- Susan, LOC's first client

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