



HOMEWORK
House

HOMEWORK HOUSE NEWSLETTER

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Mission Statement

Homework House provides free tutoring and mentoring for children who are at-risk for academic failure and dropping out of school. We give children a loving and caring environment. We help them improve their literacy skills so they can become productive members of our community. We work towards rekindling their interest in learning and self-improvement - one page at a time. Services are provided to school-age children without regard to race, religion, ethnicity or gender.

Beginnings

Since we Sisters of Saint Joseph of Springfield started our Homework House program in Holyoke on the first day of February in 2006, we haven't known what will happen when we open our door. There's an unexpected hug, a moment of real clarity, accelerated interest in a subject area that has presented difficulty or met with downright resistance. What we do know is both simple and remarkable.

For two hours a day, four days a week, nearly a hundred students from Holyoke schools spend time on their homework. They come either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday, with their gifts and their struggles, for free individualized tutoring. They do their homework; they read; they do arithmetic; they have a snack; they play word or math games.

How did Homework House arrive here? A 2004 newspaper insert, "Los Olvidados" (The Forgotten Ones), alerted and sensitized us to some of the city's educational needs. About the same time we heard of a place called Homework House in California. It seemed the right fit for a real need. Two years later we paid a visit.

Last Summer

During the summer we received an e-mail saying that Barbara Abouchar, creator and founder of the original Homework House in Orange, CA, her daughter and three grandchildren planned to travel cross-country and would love to visit the Holyoke Homework House. We welcomed them one July morning. How quickly the few years had passed since we had met Barbara, and how her vision had transformed our lives!

We were proud to introduce them to our two sites. They were newly painted and cleaned, thanks to Elms College's Dorothy Day Program and the United

Way Day of Caring. She was overwhelmed to see the newly furnished learning centers, our reward closet filled thanks to Girl Scouts from St. Michael's Parish in East Longmeadow and our shelves stocked with school supplies thanks to Sisters, schools, and our many benefactors.

We shared wonderful stories of the children we now know in the Flats and Churchill. As we toured these neighborhoods and told stories about the children and the dedicated 90 + tutor volunteers, she exclaimed, "This is exactly how I imagined Homework House should be." She admitted that she had felt a little discouraged at times that other sites in CA were not entirely reaching the poor children she had envisioned more than 15 years ago. Before leaving, she told us, "This visit to your Homework Houses is the best part of our trip. It is so fulfilling for me."

One month later we were saddened to receive a call from California with the news that, after an unexpected and brief hospitalization, Barbara had died. Daily this year we think of her and feel her blessing on our Homework Houses in Holyoke.



Children and tutors study at Homework House Site 2.

This Fall

Since September, Andrew Melendez of the Elms College and Karina Vasquez of Smith oversee the tutors from their own colleges, Holyoke Community, Mount Holyoke, Amherst, and UMass, as well as Holyoke, St. Mary and Holyoke Catholic High Schools, and our adult volunteers as they work with close to 100 students.

- Srs Maureen Broughan and Jane Morrissey, ssj, continue their work as co-founders and co-directors.
- We have refurbished our learning centers at Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe parishes.
- We opened a new learning center at Guadalupe for 5th and 6th graders so that we can continue to work with them.
- The Community Foundation has underwritten the costs of instituting a pilot evaluation program so that we have real data on student progress.
- MIT has outfitted our learning centers with computers.
- Youth who have studied at our Homework House come back and offer to help as tutors. Others return with their little brothers and sisters. Parents join our Board.

Future Plans

On June 12, 2008, we received a \$45,000 challenge grant from the Peabody Foundation toward our daily operations and to help provide a new roof for our Homework House site building in Our Lady of Guadalupe Center. To meet this challenge and to provide additional funds for the new roof, our Homework House Board is setting up a fundraiser/raffle. All proceeds will go to matching our grant.

On December 12, we will have the drawing for the raffle and a social for our Homework House family and friends. The first prize for our raffle is 3 \$280 tickets to the Dec. 21 Boston Celtic Game, a dinner in a North End restaurant, and a limousine to take our winners to and from Boston. Value of the prize is \$1500. Our second prize: 2 tickets to the Dec. 21 Patriot Game, valued at \$225. Our third prize, 4 tickets to February 10th Bruins game; our fourth prize, 4 tickets to the January 28th Celtic game. Cost of raffle ticket is \$10 or 3 for \$25. If you would like to buy tickets, please call us at 413-265-1017 or e-mail hpdroholyoke@aol.com Mark your calendar for the grand drawing at Our Lady of Guadalupe Center on 340 Chestnut Street Holyoke, the afternoon of December 12th.

Homework House Thanks You for Your Support in 2006-08

We thank all our generous individual contributors and our host sites, as well as the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, Orange and Albany, City of Holyoke, Bickford Foundation, Davis Foundation, Peabody Foundation, Community Foundation of Western MA, Diocese of Springfield, Campaign for Human Development, Conrad Hilton Fund, Project Bread.



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Providing free tutoring and mentoring since 2006