

# Pushing Higher

News from the

# Carole Robertson Center for Learning

Dear Friends,

We would like to share an unprecedented opportunity for the Carole Robertson Center for Learning with you.

We have beautiful buildings. They serve 750 children and youth a day. The addition on 19th Street and our site on Ogden Avenue were built by us through Empowerment Zone projects with many public, philanthropic, and individual partners, including many of you. We would like to own these buildings entirely, without any outstanding capital debt, to return solely to our highest purpose and mission: developing and running quality programs for children, youth, and families.

We have an extraordinary opportunity to significantly accelerate the retirement of our building debt. The Louis R. Lurie Foundation recognized the need for the Center to be free of this debt and issued a remarkable challenge. The Lurie Capital Challenge campaign has been launched to retire 25% of our capital debt in 2009, in order to enable us to accelerate final loan payoffs by more than seven years. That is seven years of greatly increased operating funds.

We are already comprehensive, deep, and busy. But, there is a lot more that we want to do. There is a lot more that needs to be done. Expanded music education, strengthened dual language and family literacy initiatives, a fully developed school age summer cultural exploration curriculum, and increased evaluation and quality assurance activities are some of the things waiting for resources. When this campaign is complete, we can return all of our resources to support our quality programs.

Please consider becoming a part of this unique opportunity. Review the details of the Lurie Capital Challenge that follow to learn more about how we got where we are today as owners of these amazing buildings and what you can do to help us own them in full. This is an opportunity that cannot be missed. As always, thank you for your continued support of the Carole Robertson Center.

Yours,



Mary Monroe  
President, Board of Directors



Gail Nelson  
Executive Director

2020 W. Roosevelt Road  
Chicago, IL 60608  
(312) 243-7300

2929 W. 19th Street  
Chicago, IL 60623  
(773) 521-1600

3701 W. Ogden Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60623  
(773) 522-8400

The Carole Robertson Center for Learning is dedicated to nurturing, supporting, and strengthening family life through quality child, youth, and family development programs.

# An Opportunity That Cannot Be Missed

To meet the **Lurie Capital Challenge** and receive a \$200,000 matching grant from **The Louis R. Lurie Foundation** in support of capital debt reduction, the Carole Robertson Center must raise \$200,000. While the campaign is underway, there is a lot more money to be raised to secure matching funds.

## How We Got Here:

Between 1998 and 2001, the Carole Robertson Center underwent a massive expansion, tripling in size and opening two new family resource centers. The growth was in response to critical community need and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in two **Empowerment Zone** development projects. The Carole Robertson Center became the owner of both new facilities through a series of unforeseen events. If the Center had not become owner, the projects would not have happened, and the community would have lost needed family resource centers with significant public and private investment. The ownership of two facilities has strained the Center's finances and limits additional resources for children and families. The burden of multiple mortgages and facility management is a difficult one for a non-profit that did not originally plan to own buildings and that must constantly navigate private philanthropy and public contracts.

## Why We Need Your Support:

The Carole Robertson Center

has spent the last few years absorbing our rapid growth. Two of our three program sites have received national accreditation, with our final site awaiting a validation visit this month. The Center was named one of 25 exemplary programs nationwide by the **Center for the Study of Social Policy** and the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** in 2001. The **United Way of Metropolitan Chicago** has honored the Center for the last three years for our **Outstanding Leadership in Continuous Quality Improvement**. Because of consistent and strong agency leadership, the Center has continued to add new initiatives to meet community need. These include an intensive home visiting program for children under the age of three and their parents, as well as comprehensive training for community child care providers.

There is more work to be done, however. By reducing the length of capital debt payments, the Carole Robertson Center can expand program enhancements in our long-standing tradition of diverse and strong program options that help families reach self-sufficiency.

## What You Can Do:

You can make a donation directly to the **Lurie Capital Challenge** and make sure to take advantage of your employer's matching gift program. You can also help link the Carole Robertson Center to your company's corporate giving program or a private grant-making foundation.

## To Learn More:

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The Carole Robertson Center for Learning has two beautiful buildings located at 3701 W. Ogden Avenue (top) and 2929 W. 19th Street (bottom) in Chicago, which provide safe places for children and families. These buildings provide quality services and programs to meet community needs each day.

# 2929 West 19th Street



From front to back, the Center's 2929 West 19th Street location is an architectural success, having won a Driehaus Award for its design. This building is home to more than 300 children daily, providing child and youth development, and family and community services.

# Children at 2929 West 19th Street



A typical day at 2929 West 19th Street involves many smiles on the faces of children, staff, and volunteers.

Children learn through many different activities each day, from taking walks in the sun (above, left) to drawing after school (above, right) to singing and making music together with Old Town School of Folk Music musician Anne-Marie Akin, to getting school supplies ready for a new year of school (below).



# Children at 3701 West Ogden Avenue



Children and volunteers read stories together during a literacy rotation (above, left).

Toddler classrooms engage young children in learning activities, such as exploring bubbles and water (above, right).

A view of the courtyard, which unites the 3701 building (center).

Teachers and children have fun in the warm sun (bottom, right)!



# 3701 West Ogden Avenue



A prominent structure, the beautiful architecture of 3701 West Ogden Avenue captivates the viewer's gaze from near and afar. This building's innovative design playfully blends beauty and functionality together, enabling quality child development services to operate, serving more than 200 children and families each day.

# Singing of Freedom

This September marked the 45th anniversary of the 16th Street church bombing in Birmingham and the tragic death of four girls. Children, parents, staff, board members, and other community members came together for *Singing of Freedom, a Rededication of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning* to the memory of *Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, Addie Mae Collins, and Denise McNair*. In the process, we renewed the agency's commitment to a safe, just world for all children and reaffirmed the agency's mission to strengthening children, youth, and families through community-based programming.

The night included performances by the *Rededication choir* and the John Slater III *Brass and Percussion Ensemble*, as well as noteworthy guest speakers. Everyone participated in the *Litany of Rededication*, written by Carole Robertson's mother, the late *Alpha A. Robertson*. To close

the evening, the Carole Robertson Center's staff crowded onstage with the choir to join in the singing of *Richard Farina's Birmingham Sunday*, a tradition of every Rededication Ceremony.

The Carole Robertson Center compiled a collection of drawings, poems, photos, and letters from children and parents expressing their thoughts and feelings about the Center, Carole Robertson, and freedom. This book, distributed to all who attended, represented every classroom at the agency, more than 750 children and youth in total. As the Carole Robertson Center's continues to grow, it becomes even more important to remember the

past. Remembering this pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement and honoring the lives of those who came before us allows the Carole Robertson Center to strengthen its commitment to today's children, families, and communities. Thanks to everyone who helped with the event and to all who came!



Jamellah Braddock Ellis, Carole Robertson's niece and a member of the Board of Directors, shared her reflections.

Dr. Antoine Jones, Carole Robertson Center School Age program alum, emceed the evening.

Clayton Harris III, Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff, delivered an inspiring address.

Members of the Western Cook County Chapter of Jack & Jill of America, Inc. led a memorial ceremony in Carole Robertson's memory.

# Making a List...

Every year, someone with a white beard and a red suit makes a list and checks it twice. This year, because of the overwhelming generosity of so many, the Carole Robertson Center for Learning had to check our list twice. We did not want to forget one thank you for the many individuals, volunteers, companies, and community organizations whose

gifts made this year's holidays so bright for everyone at the Carole Robertson Center! This year, a tough economy and a rough winter that started early made the needs even greater than usual. Participants of the **Holiday Gift Giving Project** ensured that every child and youth at the Center had a wish fulfilled with a gift. Family sponsors provided food,

household items, and toys for more than 50 families in dire need. Donations of coats, sweaters, shoes, and winter clothing made sure that everyone stays safe and warm this winter. Our list of friends is long, and we are so grateful to each and every one for all they did for our families this year.



From many hearts, many thanks to the following sponsors for your new and continued support!

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Chicago Chapter of the National Black MBA Association _____                                 | toy drive  |
| Curriculum and Staff Development Department - _____<br>Carole Robertson Center for Learning | family sponsorship   |
| DBS Microsystems _____  | toy donation   |
| Dearborn Tower Residents _____  | coat and winter clothing drive   |
| Deloitte _____  | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| Delta Airlines _____  | coat drive   |
| DePauw University Chicago Alumni Council _____  | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| Disney Vacation Club _____  | family sponsorship   |
| El Milagro _____  | Thanksgiving and Christmas<br>food baskets   |
| Federal Bureau of Investigation _____   | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| The Field Museum _____  | sweater drive  |
| Harris Bank _____   | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| Jack & Jill of America, Chicago Chapter _____   | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| Jack & Jill of America, Western Cook County Chapter _____                                   | Holiday Gift Giving Project  |
| Robin and Mark Johnson _____  | family sponsorship   |
| Margaret Kibaya and Marion Miller _____   | family sponsorship   |
| McGuire Woods, LLP _____  | coat drive   |
| Nike, Inc. _____  | Holiday Gift Giving Project and<br>new shoe donation   |
| Curtis Peace and Family _____   | Thanksgiving dinners donation  |
| The Stohr Family _____  | Thanksgiving dinner donation   |
| St. Columbanus Church _____   | family sponsorship   |
| United Way of Metropolitan Chicago _____  | coordination of Holiday Gift<br>Giving Project sponsor and<br>corporate donors for coat and<br>sweater drive |

If you would like to commit early as a sponsor of next year's Holiday Gift Giving Project, please contact Jane Baker at 312-243-7300 ext. 248 or bakerj@crcl.net.

# Keeping the Beat

This year, the Carole Robertson Center has been fortunate to continue our partnership with **River North Chicago Dance Company**. Through the Company's Community Dance Education project **The Beat Goes On**, school age children at the Center are participating in eight weeks of professional jazz dance instruction, led by professional dancer **Richard Smith**. Children attended a company rehearsal this fall, meeting other dancers and Artistic Director **Frank Chavez**. They really got a taste of what it is like to be a professional dancer. Children and families also attended **The Body Electric**, performed at the **Harris Theater for Music and Dance**. The experience teaches concrete basics of dance, as well as a deeper understanding of what it means to be a part of something creative, and the cooperation and commitment needed to work towards long-term goals as a group. We are grateful to River North Chicago Dance Company for their commitment to community arts education.

Last month, the **Old Town School of Folk Music** held their **Annual Family Concert** at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning. With support from the **Steans Family Foundation**, more than 100 children and parents enjoyed a wonderful night. Families sang, danced, listened to stories, and played instruments together. An interactive performance by **Shana Harvey** allowed children to share with their families some of the songs that they sing with Old Town School instructors every week. Storyteller and musician duo **Gwen Hilary and Enoch Williamson** also inspired all with their fun and engaging performance. The evening ended with a good meal and books for all to take home. The Carole Robertson Center is fortunate to have this supportive and long-term partnership with the Old Town School to bring opportunities and experiences like this one to our families.



The River North Chicago Dance Company teaches the Center's children basic and creative dance.



Musicians Shana Harvey, Linda Robertson, and Anne-Marie Akin (above, left) from the Old Town School of Folk Music performed for children and families at the Carole Robertson Center. Children also had the chance to learn and play instruments with musician James Warner (above, right).

# Learning Begins At Home

Early development is a crucial time in children's lives, and early learning opportunities and healthy interactions between parents and children are necessary for future success. Whether at home every day by choice or necessity, parents raising very young children at home are often the most isolated and at risk population in our communities. These families often cannot access existing resources because they do not have the transportation, support, or ability to do so. Many times, it is just that families do not know that these resources exist or are available to them.

The Carole Robertson Center's **Parent-Child Home Program** is designed to reach families with toddlers who are not currently connected to other programs. It is a replication of a 40-year old research-based and research-validated model that

began in New York. The program has many short- and long-term benefits. The Center's program currently serves 55 children. The same home visitor visits with a family in their home twice a week for a two-year period. Visitors are friendly, supportive, and instructive, using the language that the family speaks at home. Visitors creatively bring the classroom into families' homes to educate, engage, and inspire parents to actively take on their job of first and most important teacher. Books and developmentally-appropriate toys are given to families weekly to build a library of learning materials at home.

The program curriculum supports language and pre-literacy development, parental involvement, and frequent, quality interactions between parents and children. These have shown to counter many of

the educational challenges faced by isolated children. The benefits of the program range from school readiness to the development of parents as advocates. But perhaps the most immediate data to demonstrate the positive effect of the Parent-Child Home Program in the community is the incredible participation and retention of families. Nearly 700 home visits were made this fall alone. Attendance at center-based activities has increased nearly 300% since the program began just last year. Parents are more engaged with their children, exhibit more appropriate expectations of and patience with their toddlers, and enjoy playing and reading with their children more. Families who complete the Parent-Child Home Program can transition into the Center's Early Childhood Education Program when children reach the age of three.



Home visitors meet with children and families in the Carole Robertson Center for Learning's Parent-Child Home Program. This program currently serves 55 children ages 1.5 to 3 years old, supporting language, pre-literacy development, and parental involvement.

# Break a Pipe?

Theater actors tell each other to break a leg before a performance for good luck. Maybe artists should tell each other to break a pipe? This fall, a flood from a broken pipe left a school age classroom at the Carole Robertson Center empty and unusable for the day. The empty spaces and bare walls became inspiration for **Carlotta Stanford Gill**, one of the Center's School Age Teachers and an up-and-coming artist. Carlotta has brought the world of art and inspiration to children since she came to the Center in 2001. She challenges them to learn about their world and express themselves through the creative process.

Carlotta used the bare walls to explore the techniques of shadow art with her class. She worked with children to form

shadow images that reveal the commonalities of the childhood experience. Children discussed different emotions and activities, and expressed them by making various shadows with their bodies. Carlotta then photographed these images. Children were amazed to see feelings conveyed without the details of facial features or colors. They stepped into a new realm of photography. For the Center's children, art is a process that builds confidence, inspires, and instills new vision.

A series of these photographs was selected for exhibition at **Effe Leven Gallery** in Chicago's River North neighborhood for the month of December. All proceeds from sales through this exhibit benefited the Carole Robertson Center.

If you would like information about purchasing a piece or an art book commemorating this project, please contact Jennifer Leigh at 312-243-7300 ext. 228 or [leighj@crcl.net](mailto:leighj@crcl.net).

Below: Pieces from Carlotta Stanford Gill's series of innovative photographs featuring children and their shadows.

These images and others were on display at Effe Leven Gallery in Chicago's River North neighborhood.

All proceeds from the gallery exhibition benefited children and families at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning.



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# Wish List

The following new items are needed to support our quality programs and services. If you are able to donate any of the following, please contact Jennifer Leigh at 312-243-7300 ext. 228 or [leighj@crcl.net](mailto:leighj@crcl.net). Thank you for your support.

diapers and pull-ups in all sizes  
baby wipes  
new infant and toddler car seats  
new children's books in Spanish  
glue sticks  
yarn  
pipe cleaners  
construction paper  
new video cameras for classroom documentation  
new digital cameras for classroom documentation  
pocket dictionaries  
pocket thesauruses  
basketballs  
CTA fare cards for youth  
M-Audio ProFire 610 Package for youth recording studio  
TASCAM 24-Track Digital Recording Workstation for youth recording studio  
gift cards for raffle prizes at parent workshops  
bottled water for parent meetings and trainings

Todos las publicaciones del Centro para el Aprendizaje Carole Robertson están disponibles en Español. Si a usted quisiera recibir una copia de este boletín en Español, por favor lláme (312) 243-7300 ext. 236.

All publications of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning are available in Spanish. If you would like to receive a copy of this newsletter in Spanish please call (312) 243-7300 ext. 236.

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