



O 'Truly I tell you,
whatever you did for one
of the least of these
brothers and sisters of mine,
you did for me.'

Matthew 25:40

READING TO THE CHILDREN

AT HOPE RESIDENCE OF EVA'S VILLAGE

IN PATERSON, NJ

In 2010 the reading program for the children of the Hope Residence emerged during a conversation that Sandra Shahinian Leitner had with the Development Director of Eva's Village. The idea was to extend the relationship between St. Leon Women's Guild and the women and children seeking temporary shelter at Eva's 'beyond the kitchen.'



For decades, the Women's Guild of St. Leon has been providing a meal to the resident women and children of Eva's on a monthly basis. The Development Director suggested ways that we could get involved in different areas with greater impact. The Women's Guild began our enhanced involvement by furnishing a room in the newly-renovated Hope Residence in 2008. The Hope Residence originated as a dormitory that was utilized in the early 20th century to house single women who worked in the silk mills of Paterson. In an interesting connection, many Armenians immigrated to Paterson in order to work in the silk industry and the first home of St. Leon was in Paterson. Eva's Village refurbished the building to make it suitable for the women and children staying there, incorporating bedrooms, common rooms, and study rooms. The bedrooms were furnished by volunteer organizations, including St. Leon Women's Guild.

For the reading program, Sandra enlisted the participation of Christine Badach who has a distinguished career in education. Christine asked Suzanne Kasabian to help. Suzanne is a long-time teacher in St. Leon Sunday School with a keen interest in children and talent with hands-on projects. On a monthly basis, the three of us, along with volunteers from St. Leon's Women's Guild and ACYOA, read a story to children of the Hope Residence and help them with a craft project related to the story. Suzanne and Christine select the books and Suzanne designs the hands-on project to reinforce the story and give the children something to take back to their rooms and share with their mothers. As the children only live in the residence for a period of up to 4-6 months, the interaction with any individual child is brief, yet the impact is great. The season runs from November through May on a monthly basis.

Book Club for Moms

Creates a Full Circle

By 2012 the Women's Guild extended its ministry to the mothers of the children that attend the reading program. Loren Medina was one of the Women's Guild volunteers. Her many years of working with mothers and children in public schools made her wonder how the mothers spent their time while their children were involved in their activity, and how the mothers could also come to love the joy of reading. Each time she entered Eva's, although she enjoyed the children, she pondered these thoughts. Several conversations and meetings later, the Book Group for Moms took off. While the children are busy with the St. Leon group, the mothers gather in the lounge and over tea and cookies read and discuss the books that are being read to their children. Many interesting thoughts and ideas emerge from these discussions, from how to read to their children to what life is like as a resident of Eva's.

Women's Guild and ACYOA volunteers have deeply felt the rewards from working with the children.

Sandra Leitner, Suzanne Kasabian, Christine Badach and Loren Medina

Coordinators