

Heart and Sole

A Newsletter from Small Steps Nurturing Center

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A Big Day at Small Steps

By Jessica Brazelton,
Executive Director

As I reflect on what happens in a "typical" day at Small Steps, I find it somewhat ironic that the name of our preschool is *Small Steps*. In many ways, it is the perfect description of the progress we see daily in the at-risk children and families we serve. On the other hand, the experience a child has in just one day at Small Steps can be described as anything *but small*. The enormous needs these children have as a result of living in poverty require a BIG (or comprehensive) program – one that instills and fosters social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

But a comprehensive program is not enough. It must also be exemplary. So what exactly does it mean to be "comprehensive" and "exemplary"? This question is probably best answered by examining just one child's experience during a typical day at Small Steps.

I am a student at Small Steps. I may not be able to count on much in life so far, but I can count on this experience at Small Steps each and every day!

I ride a bright, clean Small Steps van to and from school driven by welcoming, familiar faces of Small Steps teachers and staff. I play "I Spy", finding letters of the alphabet and numbers on street signs and buildings.

I eat a nutritious meal at breakfast, lunch, and snack prepared by Small Steps' very own Grandma and Grandpa in the kitchen (a.k.a. Oscar & Chari).

I play and laugh on the playground with friends, feeling a sense of security and freedom that may not exist at my home.



I engage in all kinds of learning activities in the classroom from listening to books being read, to singing songs during chapel time, to reading the day of the week and month on the calendar, to writing and acting out my very-own, personal story.

I may participate in play therapy at Texas Children's Hospital or in speech therapy with Kid's Developmental Therapy.

I receive one-on-one attention (a very rare commodity) from a special volunteer friend who reads, plays games, and wants to hear my stories.

I experience fine arts four afternoons a week with visual arts by The River, drama by the AD Players, music by the St. Luke's Methodist Children's Choir Director, and dance with Kristie Kiser from Dorrell Martin Dance Fusion.

Comprehensive and exemplary mean Small Steps children who have so little can expect the best, in a BIG way, everyday.

The Sole Purpose

By Kathie Hartzog,
Program Director

What is the saying? Walk a mile in another person's shoes... In the happy, safe environment of Small Steps, it is easy to lose sight of the challenges the children and their families encounter on a daily basis.

Historically, every August the Small Steps' teachers make home visits to meet their students and families, update student information and assess the family needs. These visits give us an opportunity to see how each family "walks" through the day.

This year we tried something new. We added a second home visit to the calendar. What a success! With a five month history to the relationships, the level of communication was much more open. The parents were at ease hosting the teachers; children were excited to see the teachers on their own turf (we call it "celebrity sighting"); and the teachers were available to visit rather than update paperwork.

Some of the home visits uncovered encouraging stories. On two separate visits teachers found moms planning to cut back on work hours in order to spend more time with their children. Other families were thriving and happy with dads in new jobs and moms graduating from English classes or GED programs. And in most homes, parents are

extremely proud of the academic progress being made by their children.

Other home visits uncovered some discouraging stories, reminding us of the difficult situations some students face on a daily basis. One family of five had been without food for several days. The family had been robbed (for the second time this year), moved to a new two-room apartment where they felt safer and dad had just lost his job. The parents seemed to be in shock. We delivered two boxes of food to them and gave them information on a food distribution center.

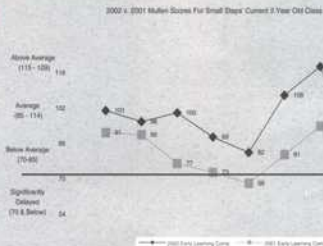
Another mom and her children were in a different house in an effort to escape an abusive relationship. There were a total of five people sharing three rooms and only two twin beds. We gave mom information on a women's shelter in case she needs counseling or a safe place to be.

Unfortunately, these are just a few of the many stories that remind us of the obstacles our children and families face, and the courage they have to overcome these challenges. Home visits are critical in helping us understand the "walk" of our families and children- a walk most of us would not have the courage to take. There has been a unanimous decision to keep the second home visit as a permanent addition to the school calendar.



Small Steps Works!!

As part of Small Steps' collaboration with The Learning Support Center at Texas Children's Hospital, students are evaluated annually to monitor progress. The graph to the right illustrates the progress made by the current three-year-old students after just one year at Small Steps. The average score increased from 78 (Below Average) in 2001 to 94 (Average) in the fall of 2002. This data confirms that Small Steps is making a profound difference in the lives of these children.



By *Retta Bravo*,
Volunteer Coordinator

Everyday is a volunteer day at Small Steps Nurturing Center! The volunteer participation in our program is growing as quickly as our wait list. A volunteer at Small Steps may be an elementary student or a college student, a Grandma/Grandpa or a MOP (Mothers Of Preschoolers). They may volunteer for one hour, one day, or one day a week for the entire school year. Some of our volunteers are even four-legged! Volunteer hours at Small Steps total the equivalent of two fulltime staff positions.

Holidays always bring the pitter-patter of many volunteer feet at Small Steps and Valentine's was no exception!

Valentine's Week began...

Monday Post Oak Middle School volunteers assisted in the learning centers with special valentine projects.

Wednesday volunteers from St. Catherine's Montessori Middle School

help the children make and decorate cards.

Lifeline Chaplaincy delivered handmade tote bags for every student. Perfect mailbags for their Valentines.

Duchesne High School volunteers then sorted and prepared the tote bags for the Valentine's Day parties.

After naptime, *Izzy* our four-legged cupid and *Ms. Susan* delivered conversation hearts and kisses on their monthly visit.

Thursday as our *Memorial Hermann S.W. Grandmas & Grandpas* signed-in for their weekly volunteer time, 24 5th graders from *Westbury Christian School* also arrived with Valentine's cards addressed to each child, cookies and juice. It was a wonderful celebration of love for young and old alike.

Last but not least, the 4 & 5 year old classes shared cupcakes and made Valentine's Day cards with 22 new buddies from the *Chinquapin School*.

Our Knights in Shining Armor

Small Steps was proud to host four Episcopal High School students as part of the school's Senior Outreach Program. Ashley Parker, Jessica Miranda, Andrew Clarkson, and Margaux Knecht spent two weeks at the Center helping in classrooms and working on special projects. The group also submitted a grant proposal and received funding to purchase much needed playground equipment.

Move Over da Vinci!

Small Steps Into the Arts is flowing with greatness... Small Steps is proud to announce a new addition to its fine arts program. The River Performing and Visual Arts Center is now providing visual arts at Small Steps once a week. The children have created several masterpieces including: an "Under the Sea" mural, mosaics with torn paper, and beaded necklaces crafted from clay and watercolors!

One Fish, Two Fish...

To celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday and the NEA's annual Read Across America celebration, 20 members of Houston Young Lawyers Association (HYLA) volunteered to spend a morning at Small Steps reading Dr. Seuss books to all of the Small Steps children. The event was an absolute success... fun for all and educational as well!



I WANT YOU!

Spanish Translators Needed
to help translate Small Steps' written
documents from English into Spanish

Call 713-862-1020
if you are interested in helping





Classroom Spotlight...

Ms. Hermette & Ms. Shirley's Class

*By Lesley Scruggs,
Development Director*

Question: How does a butterfly egg turn into a butterfly?

The answer to this question and many others can be learned in Ms. Hermette and Ms. Shirley's class. I had the pleasure of spending a day with these fabulous teachers and inquisitive 4-year-olds. This is a story about my experience...

After breakfast, we all gathered in the classroom for "Circle Time." The class is learning about insects, so Ms. Hermette read a story about butterflies. The class was absolutely riveted during the story. I was instantly impressed with their knowledge of the metamorphosis of a butterfly. During this lesson, the children learned that a butterfly cocoon is called a chrysalis; it takes 8 weeks for a caterpillar to become a butterfly; and butterflies drink nectar from flowers.

The letter of the week is Y. The class practiced the sound that Y makes, used their arms to "write" the letter in the air and talked about words that start with Y...Yellow, Yes and Yesterday. Since the most meaningful words to children are their names and the names of their friends, Ms. Hermette used the names of the children to reinforce the letter of the week. Today we counted how many names contain the letter Y. Kayla circled the Y in the middle of her name, and Ms. Shirley and I circled the Y at the end of ours. It was very exciting and involved much cheering and celebration!

For lunch, we traveled to a nearby park to dine al fresco and hunt for bugs. While munching on PB&J, the children imagined that their juice boxes were flowers and that they were butterflies using their tongues (straws) to drink the nectar. After the picnic, these inquisitive students used bug-catching tools to unearth an army of ants and a drove of doodlebugs to investigate under the magnifying glass.



The children also enjoyed playing on the playground at the park. Before returning to Small Steps, the girls pretended to be princesses and that the playground equipment was their castle, while the boys played chase and raced each other down the grassy hills.

Following their nap, the children proceeded to the multi-purpose room for drama with The AD Players. On this day, a story about spring was read to the class and then the children took turns acting out the story as they remembered it. All of the children enjoyed

themselves as they contributed new ideas to the story from their experience at the park.

As a final activity for the day, the class took their clipboards and pencils to the playground to conduct a survey. The other Small Steps' students were polled on whether they like bugs or butterflies more. This activity was not only fun, it reinforced math skills such as addition, the concept of less and more, and one-to-one correspondence. At this time, the results of the survey are still being tabulated, but it looks like a victory for the butterflies!

Just The Facts

- ◆ Small Steps Nurturing Center serves a healthy breakfast, lunch and snack daily to ensure that the children are receiving a nutritious diet. Each week the children at Small Steps consume about 10 gallons of milk, 6 dozen eggs, and 6 loaves of bread.
- ◆ Transportation is provided to and from school each day for all children without a reliable means of transportation. The Small Steps' vans are also used to travel to field-trips, the grocery store and to Texas Children's Hospital for play therapy. On average, the 4 Small Steps vans travel a total of 840 miles each week and consume about 70 gallons of gas.

small steps
SPORTING CLAYS
Invitational

The First Annual Small Steps Sporting Clays Invitational was an extraordinary success, raising \$125,000 for Small Steps! Mr. John Gibson of Halliburton was the chairman and emcee of this year's event. Proceeds from this tournament will be used to support operating expenses of Small Steps' second facility. Small Steps wishes to recognize the following generous sponsors for making this event possible and for supporting Houston's at-risk, inner city children.

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Did you know?

82% of funding raised by Small Steps directly benefits the children served by the program.

*Out of the
 Mouths of Babes...*

"Do they play Duck, Duck, Goose in heaven?"
 Aradely, age 5

"Old McDonald had a farm... ee-ii-ee-ii-ochof"
 Ricardo, age 4

"My mommy's going to buy me a new baby
 brother."
 Chris, age 4

Donations In Memory of Lucille Elam

Memorial Hermann 55+ Volunteers

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