

Heart and Sole

A Newsletter from Small Steps Nurturing Center

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The Small Steps' Spirit of Christmas

By Jessica Brazelton,
Executive Director

Magical, giving, joyful, festive, loving, thankful, peaceful, a bright light in darkness. These words often come to mind when describing the spirit of Christmas. Just think of the millions of lives that are touched and changed during Christmas each year as a result of this spirit. *What would the world look and feel like if the spirit of Christmas existed year-round?*

I believe it would feel a lot like walking into the doors of Small Steps Nurturing Center – any day of the year. In a world of poverty, despair, and sadly, hate, Small Steps is a bright light in darkness throughout the year – not only for the children and their families, but also, in many cases, for the staff, volunteers, collaborative partners, and donors.

This year, Small Steps' bright light has shown in many ways... the 18 joyful children who graduated to kindergarten in June; the 17 Small Steps employees who demonstrate seemingly never-ending love, patience and hope; the 354 volunteers who make an invaluable contribution to the program daily; and last but not least, the generous donors who have continued their support despite the challenging economic times.



May the holidays bring joy to you and the children in your life.

Even for Small Steps, the giving and joyful spirit of the entire year will culminate with the Christmas season. From the Houston Police Department's Blue Santa who makes sure every Small Steps child has a gift for Christmas to the many individuals and groups who volunteer to adopt a Small Steps family in need for the holidays, Christmas is truly a magical and joyful time for the children in spite of some of the unimaginable challenges they

face at home. And even though these children have very little, many are most excited to make presents for their families - realizing the Christmas spirit is more about giving than receiving.

So, what would the world look like if the spirit of Christmas existed year-round? Well, we invite you to visit Small Steps, a bright light in darkness where lives are changed daily. Merry Christmas from our heart to yours!

Volunteer View

By Kelly Boots,

Small Steps Nurturing Center Volunteer

My passion for Small Steps began when I heard a good friend talking about her new job as the Executive Director. Her enthusiasm for the program was absolutely contagious. I later visited the school and was immediately hooked!! I started volunteering twice a week and now hardly a day passes that I don't think about the smiling face of Quanna, my 5-year old buddy.

The Center's purpose of offering free preschool education to children, who otherwise would not have the opportunity, was something that made so much sense to me. With two young children of my own, I have watched the impact a quality early childhood program and loving preschool environment has made in their lives. I believe every child deserves this opportunity, especially in a world where over the last year so many awful, senseless events have occurred.



Some days I read to the children after they finish their breakfast. Some days I play games one-on-one with a child who needs extra encouragement. A few days I have organized books in the library.

These children are such blessings - walking in with big smiles on their faces hardly able to contain their own enthusiasm for what lies ahead that day. As a bonus, getting to know some of the teachers and other staff members has been inspirational. They are all there with smiles, hugs, and enthusiasm for the children, as well as for the volunteers!

The opportunity I have had over these last few months to take a small step, one day at a time, with a child who just wants to learn and have fun has truly been a bright spot in my life. Another volunteer said to me "Don't you wish we could just replicate Small Steps for children all over Houston." My answer was "Absolutely!!!"

*Please consider contributing to
Small Steps Nurturing Center this holiday season.*

Small Steps depends exclusively on private donations from individuals, corporations and foundations, receiving no funding from the government or United Way. By contributing even a small amount to Small Steps you can make a huge difference in the life of a child.

- If each household that received this newsletter contributed \$25 to Small Steps, the Center would raise enough money to feed breakfast, lunch and a healthy snack to all the 57 children for a year.
- If each household contributed \$50, Small Steps would raise enough money to provide social-emotional therapy through Texas Children's Hospital to students with developmental delays.
- If each household contributed \$100, Small Steps would raise enough money to provide teaching, supplies, transportation and educational fieldtrips to a classroom of students.

Classroom Spotlight...

Ms. Mary Anne & Ms. Daisy's Class

*By Lesley Scruggs,
Development Director*

The past few months have been an exciting time in the lives of our new two-year olds. For many of the students, Small Steps is the first time to be away from their parents. The transition of starting school can be intimidating for both the children and their parents. To help with this, Small Steps has adapted the first two weeks of school to make the transition easier.

During this transition period, parents are invited to attend school with their two-year old. The class is divided in half, with one group attending school in the morning and the other group attending in the afternoon. A licensed therapist from Texas Children's Hospital participates in the class for these two weeks to assist with the BEIP program.

This year, nine out of the thirteen parents were able to attend school with their child. The teachers



report that participating in this program seemed to increase the parents' confidence in Small Steps. Ms. Mary Anne added, "It is a great way to start the year and to build a relationship based on trust and respect with the parents."

Once settled in, this group of toddlers has been busy learning about the world around them. In October, Ms. Mary Anne and Ms. Daisy's class began learning about nature and the seasons. They took

a nature walk to collect an assortment of leaves, acorns and twigs. After these treasures were sorted and studied, the children put them together to create a class tree.

The class also studied about the ocean, the beach, water and sand. On Beach Day, circle time was spent in the sandbox on beach towels. For the full effect, the whole class took off their shoes, walked in the sand, and made sand castles!

The two-year olds were polled on their favorite things about Small Steps. They enthusiastically report the following:

Book - "Our Class" (A collection of individual photographs with each child's name.)

Bible Story - Noah's Ark

Meal - Baked Chicken and Rice

Time of Day - Playground Time

Center Activity - Dress-up for girls,

Blocks for boys

Toy - Tricycles on playground

Just The Facts...

- The two-year old class is rich with diversity - with 10 girls and 3 boys; 62% of the students are of hispanic origin and 38% are African-American.
- Small Steps proves to make an impact on its families, as 10 out of the 13 two year olds are siblings and 2 are cousins.
- After just a few months at Small Steps, the two-year olds have learned... all of their class mates names; the days of the week; the color orange; and new vocabulary words including pumpkin, leaf, squirrel, and acorn.

The Sole Purpose

By Kathie Hartzog,
Program Director

The Sole Purpose of Small Steps Nurturing Center is to provide hope to the 57 students and their families served here. Living with hope allows a person to look beyond himself or herself and find new ways to contribute to their families, communities and the world. To this end, Small Steps believes in giving students and families the opportunity to participate in outreach projects.

During November, the students and teachers used their creative talents to design centerpieces and prepare entertainment for the 5th Annual Small Steps Thanksgiving Feast. The parking lot was covered with a tent; tables and chairs were moved outdoors; and parents came early to decorate and stayed late to help

clean up. Everyone paid an entrance fee of a canned good to share with a local food bank.

A new outreach project is underway for December. The children and teachers are as busy as elves in preparation of the Christmas party at University Place, an assisted living community at Memorial-Hermann Southwest. The Pre-K classes will bake and decorate Christmas cookies. The two and three year olds are hard at work creating Christmas cards that are worthy of the Hallmark Crown. Teachers will bring a favorite book to read to all who attend.

The holiday season provides great opportunities for everyone at Small Steps to practice looking beyond our doors to make this a better world.

Hot Off The Presses!

A recent study by the *National Center for Children in Poverty* reports that healthy social-emotional development is crucial for children to succeed academically. Small Steps is on the right track, as nine of our children are receiving play therapy at Texas Children's Hospital Learning Support Center once a week to address severe social-emotional delays.

Gobble, Gobble, Gobble

On Tuesday, November 26, Small Steps held the 5th Annual Thanksgiving Feast. This event was a wonderful opportunity for the students, their families, volunteers and other friends of Small Steps to dine together and give thanks for all of our blessings. The Black-eyed Pea Restaurant generously provided turkey, dressing and all the trimmings for the 250 people who attended. The Small Steps students entertained the crowd with several Thanksgiving songs. Once again, this event proved to be a very special way to kickoff the holiday season.

Don't Step on My Barbie Shoes

As anticipated, the Back-to-School Shoe Drive was a huge success. There are few things that children like more than a new pair of shoes... Shoes with blinking lights, fire trucks, flowers & Barbies, every student received a new pair of tennis shoes. Thank you to the residents of University Place, volunteers from Memorial Hermann Southwest and Southern National Bank. The style show began the next morning as all of the excited children arrived modeling their new shoes.

Energy For Inner-City Children

Small Steps wishes to thank the many wonderful sponsors for making the 7th Annual Small Steps Energy Classic another tremendous success. This years tournament raised over \$400,000 for Small Steps Nurturing Center!!

Cans for Cobbler

The Black-Eyed Pea Restaurant is sponsoring a food drive to benefit Small Steps families this Christmas! Bring cans or other non-parishables to any of the 16 Houston area locations between November 29 through December 18 and receive a free cobbler.

