

Caroline House

An Educational Center for Women & Their Children

574 Stillman Street
Bridgeport, CT 06608

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ORGANIZATION
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Caroline House Mission Statement

To enable women and
their children to reach the
fullness of their potential
through education in
English language and life
skills



Caroline House

Founded and sponsored
by the School Sisters
of Notre Dame

Serves the women of
the Bridgeport area
by teaching classes in
English, basic computer,
and life skills

Offers programs for
preschool children
while their mothers are
in class

574 Stillman Street
Bridgeport, CT 06608

Telephone: 203-334-0640
Fax 203-334-0248

Email: thecarolinehouse@snet.net

Caroline House website:
www.thecarolinehouse.org

Students Spend Full Days Learning at Caroline House

Each weekday morning, approximately 45 women, some with one or two children and some alone, walk or ride to 574 Stillman Street. Waiting on the top step of Caroline House is Carlie, the cat that arrived several years ago and, like the women, found a home here.

These women are the reason for the existence of Caroline House, which fulfills its mission by

- welcoming women and their children
- encouraging them to take advantage of the educational opportunities being offered to them
- creating an environment that facilitates the development of the whole person
- teaching skills necessary for further educational endeavors or employment

The women's days are full and start early. At 9 a.m. all the women go to their respective classrooms on the 2nd and 3rd floors; school is now officially in session. They begin with their basic class, offered on four levels, in which they speak, write, read, and listen to English. In addition, at some point in each day, the women spend 45 minutes practicing either the Rosetta Stone English program or a keyboarding program on the computer. They also attend one of three daily lunch periods.

On Tuesdays at 12:30 those women with a child in the Early Childhood Program meet their children for "Mommy and Me," during which they sing, play, and read books together in English. On Fridays both Caroline House women and women from the neighborhood are invited to attend a life skills program on, for example, parenting, health, and nutrition. On the first Wednesday of every month, there is a special presentation on such topics as finance, education, domestic violence, and safety.

Especially enjoyable to the women are the holiday and bi-monthly birthday celebrations. Many of the students have never before had a celebration for their birthday. However, whatever the day, when the women leave at 1:30, they do so with big smiles and a cheerful "See you tomorrow." They look forward to returning, and they know that the Caroline House staff, as well as Carlie, will be eagerly awaiting them.

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Yadira & Vilma view a budget explained by finance educator, Rose Mary Williams.

from the desk of the Executive Director...

Dear Friends of Caroline House,

As I begin my third year here, I continue to view with awe both our staff and the women we serve. If only you could hear the obstacles our students overcome to be here on time to learn their daily dose of that "difficult language," English, you too would be filled with admiration for them.

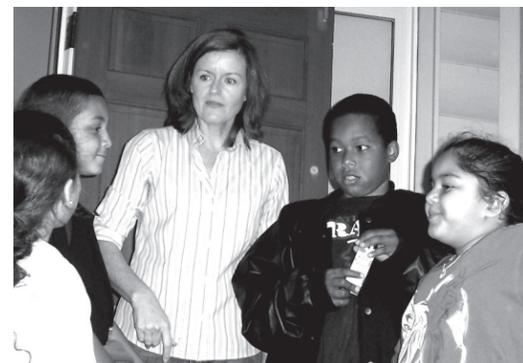
The house was very busy this summer as we inaugurated a 3-week Summer School for students from Grades 4, 5, and 6, whom the Bridgeport public schools could not afford to include in their summer program. Twenty tutors showed up on different days to help these young people with math, grammar, and reading. What a fabulous "faculty" they were! One fifth-grade boy who came to us unable to read was reading three-letter words by the end of the third week, and his self-esteem had increased 100%.

In October we again started tutoring for students in grades three to six on Mondays and Thursdays from 3p.m. – 4 p.m. If anyone reading this letter would like to help with this program, please call me.

I hope that you will plan to visit us soon to see for yourselves how your donations are being used. In addition, I have just started a Book of Remembrance, which will be kept in the front parlor, for those on behalf of whom you may wish to make a donation. Whether you are remembering a birthday, an anniversary, or a death day, the name of the person you are honoring will go into this special book.

I welcome your ideas and would love to hear from you.

--S. Ann Moles, SSND



Diane Johnson (tutor) greets her after-school students Melanie, Brandon, Sirwarren, and Rebekah

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In-House People in the News

During the summer, Sister Connie traveled to Hungary, where she taught English to the SSNDs in Budapest. For her, it was “a very rewarding educational and cultural experience.”

Meanwhile, back at Caroline House, high school students from **Greens Farms Academy** (Westport) and from **Fairfield Prep** volunteered to spend a day of their summer vacation to clean and organize Caroline House. It was amazing how quickly all that young energy put our home in tip-top shape. In addition, two amazing donations came to us through our youngest volunteers. In lieu of birthday gifts, Claire Carroll raised \$850 for us. A Confirmation class from **St. Stephen's** in Trumbull raised \$340. Thank you!

Also, to those who donated books the summer school children could take home, to the **St. Thomas More Society** lawyers who donated juice boxes and snacks, and to the **Connecticut Post** for the excellent coverage in its July 3 issue of our first summer program: Thank you!



S. Mariano and Mary Ellen Gavin look over the weekly schedule.

In September, our staff welcomed two new members. Our newest teacher, Sister Mariano Pardo, brings to her work with Level 3 students a B.A. in English, an M.A. in Secondary Education, and experience teaching in Puerto Rico, Florida, and the tri-state area as well as to the Sisters in the Missions in Tanzania. Sister Mariano tells us, “I am delighted to be part of the Caroline House ministry. I hope that my contribution here can make a positive difference in the lives of the women we teach.”

Mary Ellen Gavin, who holds an MPA degree in nonprofit administration, is the new Development Director of Caroline House. In addition to many years experience as a community fundraiser throughout Fairfield County, she recently worked with nonprofits in implementing two successful capital campaigns and several annual appeals. Mary Ellen, who lives in Fairfield with her husband and two daughters, talked about the goal of her new work: “I am

looking forward to guiding the development team toward a healthy financial future. I feel very lucky to have become involved with Caroline House.”

In Our Mailbox

Dear Readers,

When my husband Dave and I retired, we agreed that it was time to give back for the blessings life has given us. Although he immediately became a Habitat for Humanity volunteer, I searched for something that would not only be a contribution from me but also a passion for me. I have found that passion as a tutor at Caroline House.

The women at Caroline House are amazing, both the students and the teachers. The students are like sponges, eager to soak up as much education as they can. They bring enthusiasm to every lesson. It is so rewarding to watch them learn as much as they can about language and culture.

As a tutor, I have come to love and respect these women. Even as the daughter of immigrants, I never fully understood the difficulties facing families coming to this country. Watching the women of Caroline House overcome obstacles, struggle with fears, and sacrifice for their families has been both humbling and inspiring.

The teachers bring love and dedication to their work. Their interactions with the students are supportive, gentle, and kind. What started out as a contribution from me has become a gift to me, a gift that brings me fulfillment and the happiness of knowing that I am part of the special group of women at Caroline House.

Dolores Conway, Seymour, CT



Dolores Conway, Volunteer



From The Children's Corner



Indoors, outdoors, in their main room or their small tutoring room, Caroline House children, ages 2 – 4, are busy each day from arrival to departure. After entering the building, they walk directly to the coat hook under their picture and move their names from the felt under “At Home” to “At School.” Walking to the Children’s Room, mothers and children immediately wash their hands and then interact with one another by reading or assembling puzzles. Just before 9 a.m. the mothers leave and report to class upstairs.

The next hour is devoted to supervised free play, outdoors if weather permits. Both before and after lunch, volunteers work with small groups on pre-literacy and pre-math skills. They also use one of their three computer programs—Science, Math, and English. Approximately 12 volunteers—work-study students, interns, and community volunteers from Sacred Heart University (SHU)—come on different days of the week for this small-group and one-on-one tutoring.

Lunch is a happy time that is enjoyed over nutritionally sound meals that always include fruit and milk or juice. Visitors occasionally join the children for lunch as SHU Psychology Professor William Mayer did recently. The children are responsible for cleanup after the meal. They then go back outdoors, sometimes playing as a group, at other times choosing to play with cars, chalk, ball, or Legos or deciding to experiment at the Science Table. At other times they just run around, enjoying being children together until their school day ends at 1:30 p.m.

Looking Ahead

Very soon the children will participate in their annual Halloween parade to all the classrooms upstairs. A month later they will have completed making special table decorations for the big turkey dinner that Jean Fredricks, their Program Director, will prepare for them to share with their mothers. Also in celebration of Thanksgiving, St. Joseph’s High School in Trumbull sends groceries for each Caroline House family.

During the Christmas season, the generosity of people from the local area is especially evident. Each family is adopted by a member of St. Luke’s parish in Westport. That parishioner becomes “Santa” for his or her family. St. Mary’s in Ridgefield sends a special toy for every child, and gifts for mothers and children arrive from Notre Dame, Easton; Fairfield University; and St. Catherine’s in Trumbull.

The Caroline House children quickly learn that on an ordinary weekday as well as on a big feast, they are indeed—each one—very special.



Leslee looks at her mom as Rosa helps her son Lael color.

Safety: A Priority for Caroline House Kids



Giovanni, Fatima & Monica delight in moving new car seats.

We at Caroline House realize in a special way the importance of using car seats. Three years ago a precious little boy, one of our own students, was killed in his neighborhood when a car hit the one he was in. His only safety was in his older sister’s arms, but they weren’t strong enough to save him.

Fortunately for our students and their parents, Robert Cordes of Fairfield County’s Safe Kids contacted us. He explained that Safe Kids provides car seat safety checks and also gives free car seats to families in need. At his request, we agreed to work with this organization to sponsor a Car Seat Safety Day in Bridgeport. St. Charles Church gave us parking lot space for the safety check and installation. The Bridgeport Police installed a car seat for each family that needed one.

Now our children are proud and happy to be known as “Safe Kids.”