Established in loving memory of
William G. Kerwick
2002

THE
HEALTHY MOTHERS
HEALTHY CHILDREN
Project

A residential & service program
for pregnant and post partum
women and their children
challenged by
the crisis of homelessness

Bethany House
changing children’s lives!

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**Bethany House** is a warm, loving shelter for women and children who are homeless. Established in 1978 by the Dominican Sisters of Amityville, Bethany House now comprises five high-quality residences for homeless families with special needs. Bethany’s facilities offer emergency housing and services to more than ninety persons each night as well as transitional housing and services to numerous families who have moved out of the homeless crisis toward stability.

Bethany House is a not-for-profit, not religiously affiliated corporation that provides housing and services for disenfranchised families in Nassau County. Bethany was the first emergency shelter to open on Long Island, and has long been distinguished as a **model program** because it provides safe, comfortable emergency housing that is combined with a strong component of supportive services and resources to best assist the most marginalized of our society.

The special needs of **homeless women who are pregnant or have recently given birth** have long concerned us, especially those whose health and well-being are compromised by the pervasive nature of the homelessness crisis. Bethany House is often home to young women experiencing high-risk pregnancies; more often still, we are called upon to assist new mothers and their infants as they leave the hospital without even a shelter of their own. The pressing unmet needs of these families have led us to develop **The HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project.**

Since the number of cases of high-risk pregnancies and post partum women and infants has dramatically increased among homeless families and since these women are required to remain inside the house all day, Bethany has developed a project to answer the many unmet needs of this population during the period of their confinement and beyond.

The **HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project** represents a well thought-out design for bridging the service gap from the streets to permanent housing for pregnant and post partum women and their children who are experiencing the situational crisis of homelessness. This project is the culmination of many years work for and with homeless women and children, many of whom are psychiatrically disabled, bear the scars of domestic violence, or struggle to overcome an addiction, often at the young age of seventeen or eighteen.

**The HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project** provides:

- clean, safe, adequate and comfortable emergency housing and nutritious meals.
- extensive parenting and child rearing group training combined with one-on-one education.
- comprehensive, appropriate resources and referrals to insure the provision of the many additional services needed by this population.
- competent, consistent case management for each resident based upon a case plan created and developed by and with the resident.

A variety of service methods are utilized to enhance the **HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project:**

**Case management** - each participant works directly with her case manager to develop an appropriate case plan and functions as an active participant in the case planning and implementation throughout the process. It **is most important that this project is client-driven**, as client commitment is an integral part of the case plan’s effectiveness. A calendar of scheduled activities and case management sessions is kept by each participant. Progress is reviewed and difficulties are discussed on a weekly basis, adapting the case plan as new needs and challenges arise.

**Workshops and Training Sessions** - a series of workshops and training sessions is provided to best respond to the needs of the participants. The topics of these workshops include: self esteem, character building, relationships, the joys and the struggles of the single-parent, and the unique challenges of children raised in the single parent family. Training is further provided on specific parenting skills, the preparation of nutritiously balanced meals, the importance of healthy diet and exercise for both parent and child, and the “how to” for planning inexpensive and fun-filled activities for children of different ages and interests.

**Group Dynamics** - participants become active members in their own peer group as it meets weekly in the evening. Child care is provided so that the mothers can enjoy this time with other adults. The group develops its own agenda and chooses appropriate discussion topics with the guidance of the group leader. Once the group develops its own level of proficiency, the leader’s role diminishes so that the group soon functions as a team, working together toward common goals.

**Interactive Learning and Hands-on Skill Development** - all of the participants have many opportunities during their “stay at home day hours” to learn both from staff and from one another. The new parent can experience exactly how and when to bathe a baby in a safe, gentle way. Correctly preparing formula and sterilizing bottles offers additional opportunity for hands-on learning from those with experience. Quieting a crying baby and knowing when to hold back and when to encourage a child to explore are lessons best learned from those who have “been there.”

**Resource Development and Referrals** - the participants and case managers together choose the most appropriate and useful referrals for each participant and her young child. Each participant is then encouraged to contact the referrals directly
Opportunities for Adult Socialization - a number of activities are planned by a small sub-committee consisting of staff, volunteers, and participants to provide opportunities for the young mothers to relax with one another [child care is provided], as well as activities wherein the mothers can enjoy their children. Some of these activities are held on-site; others may take place outside Bethany House.

Ongoing Success of The HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project:

Since its inception in August 2002, this Project has met with an unanticipated level of success and had grown dramatically within its first two years. During its first year of operation alone, it was projected that The HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY CHILDREN Project would serve approximately 108 families - it served a total of 298. It was also projected that between 80 and 90 young mothers would be assisted in developing effective parenting skills - 136 young mothers were assisted.

The total number of families served is over 1500, and the number grows each day.

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