

Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame

Archive Project

Inception to Induction

“Where Hope Lives”

“Real Choice for Life”

MOMMAS House

Year of Founding: 1986

Issue(s) Addressed: Young mothers aged 17 to 23 and their babies

Induction Category & Year: Family Support, 2006

Founders: John Connell, Patricia Shea

Personal Quote: “Mothers need to know there are choices out there and places to help.”

History: A group of volunteers from Birthright of Nassau/Suffolk, led by John Connell and Patricia Shea, had long been working on the planning of this program, when it finally came to fruition in 1986. The first MOMMAS House was opened in Wantagh due to the generosity of Joe Haley, who felt a real need to help.

The founder, Patricia Shea, was working as a social worker when she met a girl named Judy. Judy was pregnant and had no place to live, so Patricia decided to let Judy come and live with her while they both searched for a place for Judy to go. Judy told Patricia that she had found a place in Freeport and was renting a room. Judy had given birth to a gorgeous baby boy so Patricia decided she was going to see her and the baby at their new place. When Patricia went to this house, to her surprise, Judy was living with nine men. These men were older men who came from prison, who were on parole, who were mentally ill, and men who were placed there from a drug and alcohol program. The house was filthy and no place for a woman and her child so right then Patricia decided that Judy would come back to live with her. While living with Patricia, Judy asked her to watch her son for a little while and that was the last day that Patricia ever saw Judy. She just left her baby and never came back. This was a major reason for Patricia and her brother John to try and get MOMMAS House started. It gave them the determination to never let a situation like this happen again.

Since 1989, they have opened three group mother-child residences (Glen Cove, Jericho, and Hempstead) and one transitional apartment residence (E. Massapequa). They were given these

homes by the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Malverne who offered them an abandoned building on their property. St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Brookville offered the use of a building that was formerly a convent. Another house was opened in the former Rectory of St. Rocco's Church in Glen Cove. With funding from a HUD matching grant, a purchase of a two-family home was completed to serve as their transitional apartment residence. Their Brookville home was moved to a new site in Jericho, a historical house of the original Quaker settlement. The last house is located in Hempstead, NY, with a grant from Nassau County.

Population Served: There are about 500 women that MOMMAS House has helped. MOMMAS House serves woman from ages 17 to 23 and their babies. Under 17 they are not legally allowed to house anyone without parental approval. They do not discriminate on the basis of race and are willing to take you in no matter where you have lived. They do not accept women who are mentally ill because they do not have staff who are certified to help them. Also, they will not take mothers who have an addiction to drugs and alcohol if they are not willing to receive help.

Agency Mission: MOMMAS is a home for young mother ages 17 to 23 years and their babies. For approximately two years, the young mothers at MOMMAS House continue education or vocational experience interrupted by pregnancy. With guidance and direction, the young mothers can learn to support themselves and their children independently.

Agency Vision: MOMMAS House is dedicated to ensuring that any pregnant young woman on Long Island can have a realistic opportunity to parent her child even in the most difficult circumstances. MOMMAS House can make a difference for teenage mothers abandoned by their families, having no place to take their babies other than a seedy rooming house and no prospects other than being chained to welfare. Young mothers, whose choice of life for their child is at odds with a society which too often promotes death, now have a place to take their baby home. Patricia Shea would love to be able to get more houses and expand this program except they do not have enough money to continue. With the lack of money, they cannot expand. The houses are only allowed 5 women and 5 children. Mrs. Shea is willing to help and discuss with other people around the world, how to open a MOMMAS House in their area without the money coming from her. Also the organization is looking to try and get another home for their transitional apartment program. MOMMAS House also tries to build family relationships with the women who still have family members who are willing to stay in their life. They feel this is very important to the women and their families. Some girls even leave and go back to their families with a better understanding and more knowledge of the help that is out there so not all the burden falls on the family members.

Agency Goals: MOMMAS House wants to provide these young mothers with the skills and education to succeed in life. MOMMAS HOUSE has five basic goals:

1. Provide young mothers age 17 to 23 years of age with a sheltered atmosphere

where responsibility is stressed, yet support is available.

2. Prevent child abuse by alleviating the isolation of the young mothers.
3. Avoid child neglect by teaching parenting and child care.
4. Offer a stable environment where young mothers can be nurtured and encouraged to obtain training and schooling.
5. Assist the young mothers in establishing a secure job in order to become financially stable and not be dependent on a welfare allotment.

Why Agency Is Needed: Over the past twenty years, the profile of the typical mother has changed. Patricia Shea sees more women who are homeless than just teens needing help. Long Island has a high incidence of teenage pregnancy. Birthright of Nassau/Suffolk, (in counseling crisis pregnancies for nearly twenty years,) noted an alarming fact. Young pregnant women, unwilling to part with their children through adoption placement, had no place to which they could bring their babies. Some of the young mothers were homeless—living in cars, and surviving in temporary situations. A few had been homeless for a long time, while others had been thrown out of their home when their parents learned they were pregnant. Many other young mothers lived with parents who would not let them return with a baby, or the young mothers were part of dysfunctional home considered dangerous for an infant. The infants of all these young mothers in crisis often became victims of child abuse and neglect. Moreover, the young mothers themselves would become isolated and hopeless, trapped into a life of dependency upon public assistance.

Programs Offered:

Housing- provides a safe and stable living environment for a mother and her child or children. Parenting- Each young mother is encouraged to bond with her infant. During their two years at MOMMAS House, the young mothers are afforded a supportive environment. Parenting Classes instruct the young mothers in proper infant care, thereby helping to minimize neglect often associated with teenaged motherhood. Education and Employment- After the first six weeks, the young mother must proceed with vocational or educational goals which are to be accomplished during her residency. The social work staff works with the resident to select an appropriate educational setting. This may be high school, GED preparation classes, community college, business school, or a more specific vocational training program. Tutoring and other classes are offered as needs become apparent. When educational goals have been reached the young mother must begin to acquire full-time employment in order to prepare for independent living. The social work staff works with the resident and various employments assistance programs to help the resident through this process. **Day Care-** currently provides onsite daycare in each of the MOMMAS's residences. As the mother begins to work, she is encouraged to begin

the process of selecting an outside daycare setting so she can have child care in place before she moves out on her own. **Mental Health Services-** All residents are provided with or referred out to Mental Health Counseling, and additional psychiatric or substance abuse treatment as needed. **Early Intervention-** All children are referred for Early Intervention Evaluations to try and catch developmental delays and learning disabilities as early as possible, particularly if the mother received inadequate prenatal care. If early intervention services are granted, the services may take place at MOMMAS House. **Driving to Thrive Program-** The program addresses the need for the young mothers of MOMMAS House to be capable of transporting themselves and their children. This program assists the mothers in obtaining their learner's permit and then enrolls the mothers in driving school. This prepares them to take a road test, with the ultimate goal of enabling them to earn their driver's license. As they learn the practical skills needed to be a working parent, they must save money in preparation for the day they leave MOMMAS House.

Agency Support: MOMMAS House receives grants and donations from the following organizations, foundations and corporations. These are their primary sources of funding, but they are blessed by hundreds of other groups and individuals who contribute to MOMMAS House throughout the year, helping them stay afloat. The agencies are The Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, Nassau County Bar Association, Americana Manhasset Shopping Center, North Shore Community Church, Hagedorn Foundation, Howard E. Stark Charitable Foundation, The Barker Welfare Foundation, Bank of America, St. John's of Lattingtown Episcopal Church, Diocese of Rockville Centre, O'Sullivan Children Foundations, Inc., Raymond J. & Mary C. Reisert Foundation, Inc., McCormick Tribune Foundation, M.B. & Edna Zale Foundation, Rosyln Savings Foundation, The Laura B. Vogler Foundation, and NBTY Helping Hands Charity. They also have a special list of organizations, foundations, and corporations on their online journal that are recognized by their gold, silver, and bronze page, depending on what they do for MOMMAS House and also on how much is donated.

Scope of Activities: MOMMAS House does as many events as they can through the year. Every year some of these events will change. There are some events that they will try to do every year if they see the outcome is really great. One of the contests that they are doing now is Mother of the Year. People nominate their own mothers, mothers nominate/are nominated by their daughters and so on. It's so uplifting because the role of mother has been so diminished and there's no value placed on it like there should be. The most important person in the family is the mother and without her, the family suffers greatly, so these mothers should be honored and supported in every way. Instead of acknowledging all the bad mothers out there and hearing about mothers who have done wrong, it's time to start acknowledging the mothers who do good and can really be a role model for younger mothers who are struggling. This is one event they hope to continue each year.

Other fundraisers they do are Capital Fund Campaign, which is organized to try and raise enough money so that MOMMAS House can purchase another house, as their waiting list is very long.

It's hard for them to tell a homeless mother and her child that they do not have a place for them. MOMMAS House Cook Book, which contains the best recipes from staff, volunteers, and supporters of Mommas House, is another project. MOMMAS House Christmas ornaments, is another event of creating different beautiful ornaments anyone can purchase. In Memory and Living Tribute Cards makes Memorial and Living Tribute gift/donation cards available. When you make a donation in memory of a deceased loved one, an *In Memory* card will be sent to the surviving family member(s) of your choice. When you make a donation in tribute to a living person, a *Living Tribute* card will be sent to the honored individual(s). MOMMAS House 25th Anniversary and also the Dinner Dance are some other events being held this year/

Volunteer Involvement: They have about 260 volunteers, 10 paid full-timers and 3-part-time staff members. They have 40-50 people who just work on events. The organization has groups of volunteers who come and work on their newsletter. They also have volunteer groups who come in and do workshops and activities at each house. There have been volunteers who have been with MOMMAS House for 20 years and some have been there for 20 minutes. Some will come once a year, and other who help year-round. There are volunteers who help drive the residents to and from their doctor's or other appointments. Some volunteers help with the day care of the children while mothers are in school or at work. Other volunteer opportunities include tutoring/teaching projects such as crafts, cooking, budgeting, personal care and mentoring. They have a workshop class which volunteers come in and share their own personal skills or expertise with the young mothers. Some volunteers come in to help with clerical work, handyman for small repairs such as paint, plumbing and yard work. They have volunteers for donation pick-up and /or sorting (food, furniture, clothes), and also on campus for paper drive and food collections.

**Submitted by:
Valerie Humberger
Spring 2011**

Contact Information:

MOMMAS House
1857 Wantagh Avenue, Wantagh, NY 11793
516-781-8637
www.MommasHouse.org

Disclaimer: The Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame has created the Archive Project to record the histories of Long Island not-for-profit organizations. The entries are for informational purposes only with no intention of endorsement of any service or organization. We are not responsible for inaccuracies or omissions. The user assumes all risk related to any misinformation.