

Staff Profile:
*Advocate for
Quality Childcare*



Meet **Lori Thames** whom we honor for her outstanding service to the community. Lori, Director of Project Hope's Children's Center, pictured here reading to **Donnell**, also serves the early childcare community at the neighborhood and state level.

Naming the Issues

Lori is a natural leader, an activist, an enabler of community. As a leader in the early childhood field Lori knows that **“early childhood teachers are among the poorest people raising America's richest asset – the children.”** The passion behind Lori's activities is her desire to have quality early childhood programming available to all, and to have early childhood teachers compensated at professional levels.

The problem as she chants it is:
**Parents can't afford to pay.
Teachers can't afford to stay.
Directors have to find a way.**

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Emergency Shelter
Assistance: Catch 22

Project Hope, in partnership with 7 shelters and other community organizations, founded *Transition to Work* in 1996 to support homeless families to plan for and obtain living wage jobs. As most of us know, **the ticket out of poverty is a family's ability to provide for its own needs.**

The families who come to *Transition to Work* want nothing more than to have their own home and the means to pay for it. Yet no matter how high their enthusiasm and determination, they often find themselves in a difficult catch 22. The majority of families in shelter receive *Emergency Assistance* from the Department of Welfare to help support shelter related costs. While this provides essential assistance to the family during a time of crisis, accompanying regulations make it difficult for the family to move forward.

Income Limits

Families receiving Emergency Assistance are limited on how much money they can earn while they are in shelter. *A family of 2 can earn no more than \$995, a family of 3 no more than \$1,252, a family of 4 no more than \$1,508 and a family of 5 no more than \$1,765.*

The Catch

If the family earns one penny over the stipulated amount, they run the risk of being becoming ineligible for Emergency Assistance and consequently lose their shelter. This puts the family in an extremely tenuous position given the Boston housing market where HUD fair market rates are \$953 for a studio apartment, \$1,074 for

a one bedroom, \$1,343 for a two bedroom, and \$1,680 for a 3 bedroom apartment. The effects of this catch 22 are evident on a daily basis at TTW.

Income Over Limit

A 20 year old father with one child recently worked some overtime hours at Marshalls where he earns \$7.50 an hour, pushing him slightly over the EA limits. Only the intervention of TTW and its partner, the Greater Boston Legal Services, prevented the family from losing its housing in shelter. In the end the father decided to resign his position rather than risk further complications.

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EA vs. Full-time Work

A young mother at Project Hope recently graduated from an American Red Cross CNA training. She is eager to put her new skills to work, but can not risk finding a full-time position (and be "over-income") until she has stable housing. Her situation is further complicated by the fact that Section 8 subsidies have been frozen throughout the state of Massachusetts.

Parents throughout the shelter system are caught in this state of limbo. Instead of being able to save for a security deposit, future education, or a down payment on a house, they are forced into idle waiting or very low wage part-time jobs.

EA regulations also make it difficult for shelter moms to access job training.

EA vs. Job Training

A woman at Project Hope with a strong work history is interested in changing directions in her life and moving into the Human Services field. She is unable to access the majority of available state and federal training and education funds because they require full-time employment upon completion of the educational program. Training organizations are reluctant to accept her because they receive half of the funds up front and the other half once the participant is placed in a full-time job. Their funding renewal is also dependent upon placement. They know she cannot take the risk of full-time employment and lose Emergency Assistance. So once again homeless families are left out of the loop.

TTW named **Emergency Assistance and "over income" issues as one of our priority advocacy agendas.** We will partner with *Homes for Families, Mass Coalition for the Homeless, and the Mass Family Housing Advocacy Network* in an effort to raise public awareness and lobby legislators in this current budget cycle.

The joint effort proposes changing Emergency Assistance requirements so families residing in shelters would be allowed to place over-income funds into an escrow/savings account to be used for relocation costs upon leaving shelter.

If you are interested in learning more about this issue and/or helping to lobby for change, please contact Mary at 617 265-4123 x602. ♦

We Are So Grateful for Our Volunteers

An Ode to Community Care Day

Last year we had a tremendous volunteer crew
Who painted the ALP classroom a new hue

They made the learning environment look
completely new,
And donated all the supplies for the job too!

We could not believe all that they could do
Painting, cleaning, gardening too!

We owe a big and very grateful thank you to
The hardworking volunteers of Meredith & Grew!



Meredith & Grew Volunteers

This Fall the **Community Care Day** volunteers came from *MetLife-New England Financial*. They took part in a Career C our adult learners, waterproofed a gazebo for the children, painted a kitchen, and boxed up boxes of in-kind donations. Thank you!

MetLife-New England Financial Volunteers





Ann Romney



Clinette

The First Lady of Massachusetts paid a visit to Project Hope recently to learn about the problems low-income families face and the programs that serve them.

She listened to and spoke with the children, the adult learners, and a shelter mom, Clinette, who shared with her what it feels like to lose everything.

[Clinette and her daughter recently moved out of shelter.]

A Mother's Transformation

The following story was written by Clinette and shared with Mrs. Romney.

I always thank God for what he provided me in my life. Having a good paying job made me achieve a lot financially as a single mother...Hardship, and juggling to pay bills was the last thing on my mind, 'til I lost my job.

Two months went by and I still couldn't find a job to cover the rent and bills. Everything I had worked so hard for fell apart, and I had no control over it.

My mind just kept replaying over and over, why me...what did I do wrong?...Did my child think I was a failure? During the day I would keep my head up and put on a smile, so my daughter would not see my pain. During the night, after she went to bed, the smile came off and the tears would fall.

All of this was a lot for me to handle, but I did it with faith in God. It took time but I realized that this was a beginning for me.

My daughter and I moved into Project Hope's family shelter and this was the beginning of my Transformation.

"Oh my God, I'm in a shelter," I thought. But it wasn't what I expected. It didn't look like a shelter and it didn't feel like a shelter...The staff was warm and compassionate. The residents were good mothers, like myself.

Every day I would ask my daughter, "Are you alright?" And she would say, "Yes, Mommy. I'm happy." But still as a mother I wasn't sure, 'til one day, while visiting my mother...my daughter walked in and said, "Mom, I am ready to go home." Tears rolled down my face. My daughter was going through our Transformation and she was doing well in school.

She is as strong as her mother, and I'm so proud of her...I thank God for putting me and my daughter here at Project Hope. ♦

(Profile, cont. from page 1)

Dramatic and humorous by nature, Lori has turned those talents into a means to serve the community by helping to shape the *Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP)*. The members have developed a skit which dramatizes the problems in the field and the need to address those problems in the political arena. In the 15 times they have performed this skit in the last 3 years, their audiences have included Senator Ted Kennedy, representatives and senators of the Dorchester cluster, parents, and a host of early childcare

professionals. The work of LEAP is:

- √ to educate the general population,
- √ motivate the committed, and
- √ move the politicians.

Lori sits on the *Public Policy Committee of the Boston Childcare Alliance*, an association she has served since 1998. Many times she has testified at the State House on the impact of pending bills (and their amendments) which affect early childcare. To bring these issues to national attention, she

has also served on the National "Worthy Wage" Committee.

Lori also has served on the Planning Committee and as the Moderator of the *Early Childhood Professional Gala*, now in its 3rd year, at which teachers are recognized for their contribution to the field.

In the past 15 years Lori has touched the lives of more than 500 children directly and thousands indirectly. An excellent educator, a caring director, a catalyst for social change - Project Hope and the Dorchester community are fortunate to have Lori Thames. ♦

Woburn Mom Wins Grand Prize at Project Hope Fundraiser

"It's me, it's me!" Patricia Devine shouted as her winning number was called at the fundraising event for Project Hope that was sponsored by Domain Home Fashions in their new Natick store. The prize for her \$100 ticket was \$10,000 worth of exclusive furnishings of her choosing! Patricia was in shock and bursting to call her husband, Steve, but he was out of reach, flying cross country on business. As she drove home to Woburn that December evening with her mother-in-law beside her, she was laughing or shouting, "I won!" as far as Waltham.

The Devine family and Project Hope have been connected over the years. One relative, now deceased, was a Little Sister of the Assumption, a member of the congregation that founded this mission. Another cousin, a long term donor, bought a set of tickets for the Project Hope fundraiser and a Devine family member assigned each person a number.

When asked if she wanted to attend the event in person, Pat explained, "I'm a stay at home mom with my two little girls, Rachel and Jessica. If someone says, 'Do you want to go out?', I say 'Yes.'" Being present for the announcement was thrilling.

Already Pat and Steve have started preparing their living room for the "makeover" by stripping the wallpaper and choosing their new couches, chairs and armoire. ♦



*"Hope Comes Home" event netted over \$50,000 for Project Hope. Pictured here are **Judy George**, Founder and CEO of Domain Home Fashions, **Sr. Margaret A. Leonard**, Executive Director of Project Hope, and **Patricia Devine**, grand prize winner of a \$10,000 room makeover. We thank Judy, her staff, and everyone who bought Dream Room tickets, raffle tickets, or who helped out in any way.*

United  Way

*Appreciative staff mounted a Sound of Music production January 29, 2004 to bid fond farewell to **Meg Lusardi** who came to Project Hope as a LSA volunteer six years ago and left as the Chief of Operations! Her warm spirit, her ideas, her example will remain with us.*



PROJECT HOPE

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