You granted over 300 wishes!

Hope for the holidays

Thank you from families like Hilda's!

With 4 children under the age of 10, it was beginning to look like there would be no Christmas for Hilda and her children. Being unemployed, gifts were the last thing on her mind. She was focusing on keeping food on the table and a roof over their heads.

Our New Moms’ Support Group struggled to keep her connected to other moms to help lift her spirits and break some of the isolation. She had trouble navigating Zoom. (Who hasn't?) And let's face it, motivation is hard to come by these days.

Our staff kept at it with constant check-ins, and emotional and material support. Then came Hope for the Holidays, an effort spearheaded by our Board of Directors to fill 300 wish lists for vulnerable children in Lynn. But the Board needed help, and good-hearted people like you did not disappoint. Hilda's kids wished for simple things: socks, blankets, clothing. Hope for the Holidays sponsors were able to fill all of the children's wish lists and one sponsor even donated a gift card for food.

Board members, sponsors, and volunteers from the community quickly purchased, wrapped, and delivered gifts, filling every wish list!

Your generosity delivered hope and smiles to over 300 children, and made a huge difference to families like Hilda's. Thank you!
Healthy Families Harbor Area is a home-based family support and coaching program that targets first-time parents who are 20 years old or younger, pregnant with their first child, or parenting a child 12 months old or younger. The program is available to residents of Charlestown, Chelsea, East Boston, Revere, and Winthrop where the need is great. Chelsea, for example, has one of the highest teen birth rates in Massachusetts with 7.7% of mothers less than 20 years old, and 53.4% of children living in a single-parent household.

Healthy Families is just one of three Family & Children’s Service home visiting programs that strive to empower first-time parents to create stable, nurturing environments for themselves and their children. The program currently employs five Home Visitors who serve 41 clients. During the three years that participants are in the program, they receive intensive intervention in the form of coaching, parenting education, life skills training, and goal-setting support. Their children also receive developmental screenings every 6 months through the Ages & Stages Questionnaire which identifies delays in cognitive or social-emotional development and recommends early interventions.

Families work through a curriculum during weekly home visits for the first six months until visits move to bi-weekly. “We work with a lot of new immigrants who are learning a new language and learning how to navigate our system. They come from different cultural belief systems that may not be in accordance with U.S. norms and laws. So we hire home visitors that reflect the backgrounds of the participants we serve. We answer questions, explain child development, and help them to minimize the stress that comes with parenting,” says Program Director, Xandra Negron.

So far, over 60 families have successfully completed the program. Many young participants struggle with parenting and going to school. One young mom had this to say, “Thanks to my home visitor, I finished high school. I was ready to quit every week of my high school years because raising a child alone and going to school is no joke. My home visitor kept encouraging me by saying, ‘you can do it, remember, you are doing this for yourself and your child’s future.’ I finished high school with excellent grades, was admitted to community college, and graduated a few months ago. Thank you for all your support.”

Young families are learning how to confront the challenges of parenting.

"Thanks to my home visitor, I finished high school. I was ready to quit every week of my high school years because raising a child alone and going to school is no joke."
Healthy Families program participant

One of the most positive things about this program is how wonderful my home visitor is. She gives me positive feedback on things I’m doing and offers ideas on how to work on challenging issues.” Healthy Families program participant.
Meet Xandra Negron

Xandra Negron has been serving families in the most vulnerable communities for over 24 years. She is the Program Director for Healthy Families Harbor Area, a home visiting program funded by Children’s Trust, which is a statewide child abuse prevention organization.

Part of the Family Since 2016:
Program Director of Healthy Families Harbor Area since 2016.

Committed because: “I’m passionate about maternal/child health because the development of a child is extremely important, especially in the first 3 years of life.”

Unshakeable belief: “We can be agents of providing the best service possible so that families can reach their maximum potential.”

Proud because: “I love seeing a first-time mom or dad acquire positive parenting skills, finish their education, and get a meaningful job. It is perhaps one of the most satisfying accomplishments I have experienced.”

How has COVID-19 affected the program?
“The biggest challenge during this pandemic is the social isolation and the lack of diapers. It’s unbelievable! To meet this need, and to outreach to more young families who can benefit from the program, we are sponsoring a Diaper Drive. Any eligible family that registers for the program or refers someone who becomes a participant will receive a month of free diapers. We are doing all we can to get the word out.”

And in our “free” time?:
“I have many wide ranging interests. I was once an Arthur Murry dance instructor back in Puerto Rico and I’ve attended culinary school.”

We had one mom who was drinking the baby’s formula because she didn’t have anything to eat—no bread, no cheese, nothing. She reached out to us and we were able to provide a supermarket gift card. We accompanied her to the store and referred her to other resources that were emerging in Chelsea. She didn’t call 911; she didn’t call her mom; she called Healthy Families.

Healthy Families empowers first-time parents to create stable, nurturing environments for themselves and their children.

This program and my home visitor makes me feel more positive and secure about my own abilities now that I’m alone with my child. I’m working and studying English.”

Healthy Families program participant.
Teen Scene Learning Pods

Last year, going to school was not easy. Months of remote learning and isolation were beginning to take its toll on students in our youth development programs. So, in October when Teen Scene got the go-ahead to be a Learning Pod site, it was a welcomed change to the “sameness” that seemed to define the COVID-19 pandemic.

A learning pod or “pandemic pod” is a micro school where students learn together in small groups outside of the classroom, but still in person. The pod is supervised by an adult who keeps the students on track and provides academic support.

Eighth grader, Dev says, “I was at home all year, sitting in my bed, watching wrestling, and eating alone. The learning pod is helping me to not be so depressed.”

“The learning pods have been extremely helpful. I’ve gotten my assignments done 10x quicker, and also it has been easy to focus now!”

It’s not just the students who are benefiting from being together. Teen Scene Coordinator, Richard Valentine, says “We’d been in isolation for so long that I was starting to feel like I wasn’t actually doing anything to help the kids. Now that we have the Learning Pods, it feels like I’m actually supporting them at a time when everyone needs a little extra support. I realize the impact that isolation is having on the kids. I just want to alleviate some of the stress and create some sort of haven for them.”

The Teen Scene Learning Pod is held at our main office in Lynn for four days a week, during school hours. The space has desks which are separated by 6 ft. to adhere to social distancing, and accommodates five students at a time.

Beyond Walls

Several youth from our programs were included in a public art installation gracing the wall of the Lynn Community Health Center building. The mural, entitled Inside Out – Truth Be Told Edition, features 127 hand-painted portraits that capture the 2020 experience through the lens of youth. The large format project was curated and produced by Atlanta designer Keif Schleiter.