



# Turning Points

Building futures for children, families, and communities



## *Baby Basics* making a world of difference to families in need

*Baby Basics is a program designed to provide infant formula and diapers to babies of low-income parents. It was started in 1995 at Westside Presbyterian Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey. The Head of Volunteer Ministries at the church wanted to participate in a volunteer mission to help children. After extensive research, it was determined there was no program to serve working parents who needed help with such "basic" baby expenses as diapers and formula. Thus, Baby Basics was born to children 2 years and younger; the families receive formula for one year and diapers for two. The first year, 10 clients were served and the program was supported through fundraising done at the church. Today, about 60 babies from 40 families are served by Baby Basics. Most of the clients are referred by social workers at Valley and Englewood hospitals, while a significant number hear about the program through word of mouth.*

*In July 2005, Children's Aid and Family Services adopted this vital program from the Bergen-Hudson Chapter of the American Red Cross. The following true stories are just two examples of how Baby Basics makes a world of difference to families in need.*

### **Single mother gets help rebuilding her life**

Sarah\*, a single mother living in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, is just starting to piece back together her life after enduring a traumatic ordeal. Not too long ago, she had a job, apartment, car, and was attending school. However, after becoming involved in an abusive domestic situation, she lost everything and was forced to seek help. She went to Shelter Our Sisters, a non-profit organization that provides emergency housing to women and children who have suffered from domestic violence.

When she came out of S.O.S., Sarah found herself in the difficult position of having to start over. Her old life was gone, and she was left with almost nothing and a 19-month-old baby to care for by herself. An S.O.S. counselor referred her to the Baby Basics program, and in September 2005 she contacted Cori Blake, coordinator of Baby Basics. Sarah immediately began to get much-needed assistance, receiving diapers and baby wipes, which for a single mother with limited means is a big financial help. Diapers and wipes cost about \$40 a week, but through the program she receives a month's supply, saving her about \$160 a month. Though it may not sound like a lot, for Sarah it gives her peace of mind to know she doesn't have to worry about her baby's basic needs.

"Without Baby Basics, I don't know where I'd be," says Sarah. "I struggle as it is with only a part-time job, but without their support, I don't think I'd be able to make ends meet."

Sarah, who has no car and lives far away, has to take two buses to get to the distribution center in Englewood. To better accommodate her needs, she is

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Winter has been an extraordinarily busy time for Children's Aid and Family Services, particularly for the volunteers who make the work the agency does possible. The agency's Special Events Committee — Jennifer Contrucci, Martha Fickinger, Karen Hofstetter, Katherine Lucas, Barbara Ricciardi, Eve van den Bol, Carol Whaley and Marcy Wimbish — has been hard at work, making sure the many details associated with the upcoming April Fool's party are attended to. This year's event is going to be our biggest and best yet. This group amazes me with their energy and interest in the agency.

The agency is fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers who are passionate about what they do, from tending the Healing Garden to reading to the children attending Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center. During this past holiday season, many generous individuals and companies volunteered for the first time with the agency. Several individuals from KPMG spent a Saturday painting one of the bedrooms in the Woodlea group home, and employees of Stryker Corporation and Nokia spent afternoons planting flower bulbs and trees in the Healing Garden. In addition, many kindhearted individuals, as well as some local companies, donated gifts to the children in the agency's care.

These dedicated volunteers give a wonderful message to the children in our care — who have ventured into volunteering themselves. These are kids who have often been disappointed by people in their lives, yet still go to great lengths to be there when others need them. As you read in this issue of *Turning Points* about the children in the adolescent group homes who give to those less fortunate, take some time to think about volunteering for the agency. Perhaps you can act as a mentor to the children in PATH and group homes, helping them learn valuable skills and providing friendship. Or you can use your gift for sales at The Depot, the gift shop in Midland Park run by an all volunteer force. The agency has a broad range of volunteer opportunities. Be sure to visit [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org) for more information.

Robert B. Jones, Ph.D.  
President & CEO

# The importance of

The teens residing in Children's Aid and Family Services' adolescent group homes in Bogota, Park Ridge, and Ridgewood have experienced traumatic childhoods where they suffered from abuse or neglect. However, that doesn't stop them from lending a helping hand to those that need it most.

This past winter wrapped up a great year of community service for the group home children. The girls from Eastlea and Woodlea group homes in Bogota and Ridgewood made gift baskets for Isaiah House and Tillman House, two group homes for girls in East Orange.

"We wanted to show teens living in our group homes that even though their lives have not been easy, there are those in worse situations that need help," says Lisa Dolmatz, assistant director, case management services for group homes and transitional living.

While service projects like this have been done in the past, the group homes staff wanted to have the children make a more focused commitment to community service. This summer the staff offered volunteer options for the teens that didn't have jobs lined up. The boys from Children's Haven group home in Park Ridge, and the girls from Woodlea decided to volunteer at Eva's Kitchen in Paterson, which serves about 1,000 meals daily, year-round, to mostly homeless people who would not have any nutritious food if not for the 24-year-old kitchen. The children assisted in the serving of food and cleaning up eating areas.



Additionally, the Woodlea girls worked at the Saddle River County Park in Ridgewood, assisting at the seasonal camp for mentally challenged adults and children, which is called "Camp Sunshine" in the summer and "Camp Snowflake" in the winter.

"The whole experience of helping those less fortunate is a great self-esteem builder for these children," says Rose Zeltser, senior vice president, child welfare. "They feel a true sense of accomplishment and pride in knowing they are making a difference in someone else's life."

# showing up

In addition to their volunteer efforts, 2005 marked another year of achievement and success for the group homes. In 2006, three high school seniors in the group homes have high hopes for the future. One is planning on attending a four-year university, another is planning on going to The Capri Institute of Cosmetology, and another is planning on enrolling in a culinary school.

These statistics are the latest in a tradition of excellence. In 2005, three seniors from the group homes graduated. Two went on to college, and one went to JobCorp to learn a trade and be placed in a related job. In 2004, six high school seniors from the group homes graduated. Three went to a four-year university, two went to a two-year college, and one was reunited with his adoptive mother.

“The accomplishments of these teens are a testament to how special they are, and how dedicated and hard-working the staff is,” says Lisa. “Thanks to them, these kids know and feel they are loved, and respond accordingly by striving for success.”

## **Baby Basics**

*continued from page 1*

given a larger monthly package so she only has to make the trip once.

According to Sarah, the program is really helping people that are trying to do the right things in life, like working and providing for their children. In fact, Baby Basics picks up where the government program WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) leaves off. Baby Basics helps those who earn low salaries but don't qualify for WIC. Having her own apartment is just the first in many steps to rebuild her life, and with the help of Baby Basics and other support programs, Sarah believes she will be able to get back on her feet.

This past holiday season, Sarah was concerned that she wouldn't be able to provide her son with gifts. However, business students from Fairleigh Dickinson University's Teaneck campus organized a toy drive and party for the families in Baby Basics. Her son received an Elmo doll and stuffed puppy dog that he absolutely adores. “That really made the holiday special,” says Sarah. “Just knowing that a complete stranger would donate like that and help out is so touching.”

## **Hardworking family gets help after birth of triplets**

Amy\*, a mother living in Park Ridge, New Jersey, who has one stepdaughter, realized she was going to be in a tough situation when she learned she was expecting triplets. Even though both she and her husband had

“Just by knowing someone else is counting on them to show up is important, because so many times in their lives, people haven't shown up for them.”

~ Lisa Dolmatz

well-paying, full-time jobs, she knew she was about to have a huge financial responsibility.

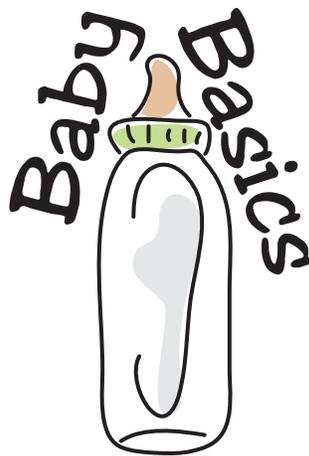
She was recommended to the agency by a friend she had known from grammar school who saw her birth announcement in the local paper. His wife had also had triplets, and enlisted the help of Baby Basics, so he referred Amy to the program. She put in the application in May 2004 and began using the program after the birth of her babies.

Although she was planning to breast-feed her infants, after their birth there were medical concerns that necessitated the use of formula. Not only was this expensive, but it meant she would have to leave the house to get it, not an easy trip with three babies in tow. Even though she still has to travel to the distribution center in Englewood, because she also picks up diapers and wipes, it has become a one-stop shop for all her baby needs.

In addition to baby necessities such as diapers, wipes, and formula, the volunteers collect donations of other baby items such as snowsuits, sneakers, and toys. “The program is a great supplement and a huge help to a new family,” says Amy. “It's truly a godsend.” Amy's triplets are now 20 months-old and are thriving, growing, and doing well.

For more information about how to conduct a Baby Basics drive and support this valuable program, contact Cori Blake, coordinator of the Baby Basics program at 201-261-5970.

*\*Denotes name has been changed.*



Dear Fellow Parent,

I have two small children, a son, who's 2 years old, and my 5-month-old daughter. Like many moms today, I work full-time. I'm a teacher in the Paramus public school system. After I had my son, my maternity leave flew by, and before I knew it I had to go back to work and arrange for child care. I was fortunate in that I didn't have to look far.

You see, years ago I was an employee of Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center in Paramus, and knew first-hand what a nurturing and supportive environment it was for little ones. I hadn't been there in awhile, though, so I called and arranged for a tour. I was certainly impressed. The entire staff was friendly, warm and helpful, the facilities were clean and well maintained, and the children were happy and well cared for. Without hesitation, I enrolled my son.

Additionally the friendliness of the parents and staff put me at ease. Placing our son in Turrell brought my husband and me peace of mind.



“I remember my son's first day at the center so well. I was sad about leaving my baby to return to work, but I knew he was in good hands.”

It allowed us to go to work without worrying that his needs were being met. We saw for ourselves that he was safe, happy and growing both socially and developmentally.

As a parent and teacher, I'd recommend Turrell without hesitation to anyone looking for high quality child care and early education.

Please call 201-261-5970 to arrange for a tour and see for yourself why Turrell is so special.

Sincerely,

*Malissa Jockish*

## Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center

*Educational excellence and top-quality infant care*

Visit <http://turrell.cafsnj.org> for a virtual tour



# Opening their home and hearts to fragile babies

Patty and Raymond Dansen have energy and compassion to spare. The Haledon, New Jersey couple has been involved in Children's Aid and Family Services' "Boarder Babies" program since 2003, giving love and nurturing to several infants. Boarder Babies is a program in which individuals or families provide foster care for infants whose mothers are unable to care for them for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse and homelessness. The goal of the program is family reunification, and this happens about 50 percent of the time.

The Dansen house is full and lively, echoing with the laughter and chatter of five children. While the Dansens already have three biological children – Nicholas, 8; Zachary, 4; and Rebecca, 2, – they have welcomed two additional members into their family. The Dansens have been fostering 11-month-old Chris\* for 9 months and Ladai, who just turned 3, was recently adopted by the family.

Holding a child in each arm, Mrs. Dansen has the warm, welcoming presence of a mother who has opened her home and heart to several fragile babies. Her extensive experience as a foster mother began with Ladai, who stayed with the family for 10 months before she left to join another family. James\* then joined the family and stayed for 10 months, during which time Ladai returned to the Dansens. The family who intended to adopt her was unable to do so. When she got the phone call asking if she would take Ladai back into her family, Mrs. Dansen quickly agreed. She

always felt a special connection with Ladai, and it seemed the adorable little girl was meant to be part of the Dansen family. It was with this in mind that Mr. and Mrs. Dansen decided to adopt Ladai.

While the adoption progressed, Mrs. Dansen continued her involvement in the Boarder Babies

program. Lindsay\* stayed with the family for a little more than a month, followed by Jenny\*, who stayed the same amount of time. Currently, Chris has been with the Dansens for 9 months. Though it can be hard to let the children go, Mrs. Dansen says all of them have gone to loving families.

"Ultimately, I want what's best for these kids, and that's having a permanent, loving family to take care of them," says Mrs. Dansen. "I feel like I'm making a positive difference in their lives, and they in turn are making a positive difference in my life. It's been such a wonderful experience. Just by showing these kids love, you get so much more love back."

Mrs. Dansen has received tremen-

dous help from her family and has also taken advantage of the many resources Children's Aid and Family Services offers to foster families.

"If you have any questions at all, someone will always be there with an answer for you," she says. "They keep me informed, provide help when needed, and are encouraging and great to work with."

*\*Denotes name has been changed.*



Happy family: Patty and Ladai Dansen outside the family home

# Meeting the needs of the community



Since opening last fall, the Wellness Center at Family Counseling Service of Ridgewood has become a valuable resource to the community. It is comprised of the Healing Garden, a serene, park-like natural sanctuary where many of the program's fitness offerings, such as "Introduction to Gentle Yoga," take place. It also includes the Family Resource Room, which has an extensive collection of books, videos, DVDs and articles on topics including child development, parenting, achieving family balance and managing stress.

Many area residents recently celebrated a *Week of Wellness* at the Center, and enjoyed complimentary facials offered by Town & Country Apothecary and Fine Cosmetics,

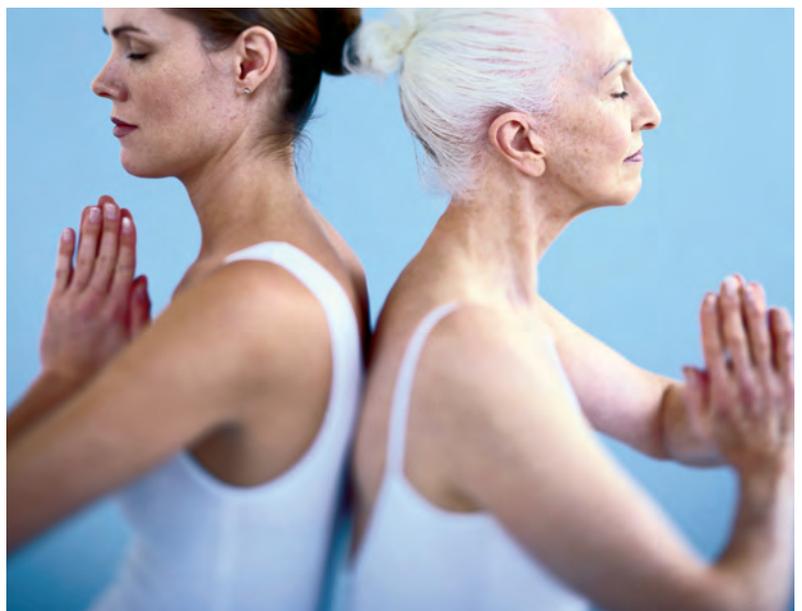
makeovers by Araya Rebirth and chair massages by Renee LeBental. Additionally, local caterers Silver Spoon gourmet food market, Kevin's Thyme, Natalie's, Town & Country Caterers and Rigoletto's generously donated delicious and healthy lunches for all to enjoy. Sample workshops were presented during the week so guests could see first-hand how the Wellness Center can help them lead healthier lives.

## Spring courses focus on family life, book discussions, and health, nutrition and fitness

This spring, an array of workshops and educational seminars that focus on the well-being of mind, body and spirit, and cover topics including family life, nutrition, health and fitness, and personal improvement are being offered. Clients can choose from an extensive menu of single-session workshops that explore topics of wellness, without having to commit to a time-consuming program.

Presented by experts from Family Counseling Service of Ridgewood, as well as special guests, courses include "Busy but balanced: managing our overscheduled lives," "What's driving you? Teen driving awareness workshops," "The five secrets to feeling and looking younger," and "Introduction to T'ai Chi," which takes place in the Healing Garden, weather permitting.

Wellness Center members receive special benefits, including a 20 percent discount at Bookends in Ridgewood on materials related to health issues, discounts on all workshops, invitations to open houses and special events, as well as unlimited use of the lovely and tranquil Healing Garden. Please visit [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org) to view a spring course schedule, or call 201-445-7015.



# Easter in Ridgewood

Each year, the much-loved “Easter in Ridgewood” celebration is advertised with a poster displayed throughout the village. In a fun twist, this year area residents will participate by voting for the winning photo. Be sure to visit one of the following Ridgewood merchants from March 1 – 15, 2006, to cast your vote in the “Easter in Ridgewood” poster contest: **Happy Tuesday, Kicks for Kids, Town & Country Apothecary and Fine Cosmetics, the Silver Spoon gourmet food market and Oliver’s Chocolates.** The photo garnering the most votes will adorn the 2006 “Easter in Ridgewood” poster. The poster will be unveiled by the Easter Bunny at Bank of America, 54 E. Ridgewood Avenue, Ridgewood, on Tuesday, March 21, 2006, at 4 p.m.

Ridgewood-based photographer **Josephine Dvorken** photographed all of the children participating in the 2006 “Easter in Ridgewood” poster contest. She



offered a deeply discounted session fee, and donated all of the proceeds to the agency. Ms. Dvorken will offer the same promotion starting Saturday, March 4, for the 2007 “Easter in Ridgewood” poster contest. Again, she will generously donate all proceeds to Children’s Aid and Family Services.

For information on next year’s “Easter in Ridgewood” photo contest fundraiser, please call Happy Tuesday at 201-447-0074 or visit them at 210 E. Ridgewood Avenue, Ridgewood.

## Revamped agency website attracts visitors

*New secure server allows you to honor a loved one by donating online*

Have you visited [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org), Children’s Aid and Family Services recently re-designed website? The site has a streamlined, eye-catching, colorful look and is full of valuable information about the many services the agency offers.

Visitors can read the latest press releases and event news in the “Press room” section, view videos of the children in the agency’s care who are awaiting adoption, and even donate online. A link to the latest *Turning Points* newsletter is available, as well as information on numerous volunteer activities and opportunities.

Upcoming events, such as our April Fool’s event benefiting vulnerable children and families and “Easter

in Ridgewood” are also prominently displayed. Since being re-launched in August 2005, our site has been



receiving a steady stream of visitors. Just this past month, there were 85,266 hits alone.

Additionally, a new feature has been added to our website that

makes donating to Children’s Aid and Family Services even more rewarding. Now a donor can make a difference not only in a child’s life, but also in the life of family and friends. When a visitor makes a donation online via the secure server, they will have the option to personalize their gift. This can be a meaningful way to express sympathy at the passing of a dear friend or family member, or to honor a living person or commemorate a special event.

To make a donation or to buy tickets online, visit [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org). If you would like to sponsor our website, or any of our events, call Lyn Rumage at 201-261-2800.

# April Fool's event to benefit vulnerable children

It's no joke. Mark your calendar! Children's Aid and Family Services' April Fool's event to benefit vulnerable children is Friday, March 31, 2006, at the elegant and stately Hackensack Golf Club in Oradell, New Jersey.

Our fun, fabulous, festive cocktail party will feature live music and entertainment, silent and live auctions, dancing, and sumptuous food and drinks. Fox News Channel anchor Martha MacCallum will emcee the event. It's an evening of fun and fundraising, and it's not to be missed.

It's a win-win situation: While you are enjoying the festivities, you will also be helping many of the children in New Jersey who are hoping to find adoptive or foster families; low-income families seeking affordable childcare; and ensuring the availability of educational, counseling and

other assistance to children, adults and families during times of transition and crisis. Applebee's and Hudson City Savings Bank have pledged support through "King of Diamonds" and "Queen of Diamonds" sponsorships respectively, and BD (Becton, Dickinson and Company) has agreed to be a "Jack of Diamonds" sponsor as well.

Please join us for this truly special event. Tickets are available for \$125, and are going fast. Visit the agency's website at [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org) to purchase tickets and preview some of the exciting auction items, including signed sports memorabilia, exotic travel packages, and other special luxuries.

If you'd like to lend your support to vulnerable children and families through a sponsorship, ad journal placement, ticket purchase, or as a volunteer, please call Lyn Rumage at 201-261-2800.



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*The mission of Children's Aid and Family Services is to help children, families, and communities to heal, to learn, and to grow. Since 1899, the agency has helped thousands of individuals—of all ages and from all walks of life—to thrive in their communities. Whether we're working with a child seeking an adoptive family, providing a low-income family with affordable child care, helping a teenager resist the pressure to take drugs, providing a mentor for a vulnerable child, or offering support to those caring for elderly loved ones, we're helping to build futures for children, families, and communities throughout New Jersey. For more details about the agency's more than 20 programs and services, please visit [WWW.cafsnj.org](http://WWW.cafsnj.org) or call (201) 261-2800.*



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