

New Officers, Board Members Elected

Attorney Marilyn Toland has been elected chairperson of the Board of Directors of Christian Community Action for 2009-2010. A longtime supporter of CCA, Attorney Toland is a member and trustee of Church of the Redeemer in New Haven.

Elected vice chair was Joan Reynolds of West Haven. A retired teacher, Reynolds is a member of Our Lady of Victory Roman Catholic Church, where she is very active in the social ministry program. She was recently recognized for her work by the Archdiocese of Hartford.

Elected Secretary was Rev. Carolyn

L. Young, the pastor of Whitneyville United Church of Christ in Hamden, and Abraham Colon of New Haven, an officer / emergency medical technician / trainer with the New Haven Fire Department and member of Church on the Rock in New Haven, was elected Treasurer.

New members elected to the Board were Nancy Beals, a former state representative, former educator and member of Spring Glen Church UCC in Hamden; Attorney Duane Isabella of New Haven, a member of Saint Thomas More, the Roman Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University; Jennifer Pugh, deputy chief administrative officer with the

City of New Haven and a member of United Church on the Green, and Evelyn Streater-Frizzle, associate director, customer service group, Central Area, Yale University, Office of Facilities and a member of the Church of Christ in New Haven.

Re-elected to the Board were, William Johnston of New Haven, a retired business executive and former social service administrator at Columbus House; Dr. William McCullough of Madison, a retired surgeon and John Padilla of New Haven, an executive with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Inc.



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S U M M E R 2 0 0 9

Stepping Stone Helps Mother Shape Her Future

Like most of us at one point or another in our lives, Laura Jackson, a resident in CCA's Stepping Stone Transitional Housing program, has a dream.

Laura's dream is to become a nurse, one who specializes in helping mothers like her with children who have special needs

"My dream is to give back for all that I have received in recent years, to assist women like myself to take better care of themselves and their children," she said.

Thanks to the help she has received from Stepping Stone's staff, Laura has already started down the road she needs to take to reach her goal. She is currently enrolled in a program to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and will complete the program this summer.

The job market for CNAs is good. A job in that field, she believes, will give her the financial stability she needs right now to take care of herself and her two-year-old daughter, Gia-Laryn, while she



After facing a series of health-related challenges, Laura Jackson, right, and her daughter, Gia-Laryn, are facing the future with hope and optimism.

continues her studies to achieve her ultimate goal - a RN degree.

"I have always loved medicine and always wanted to be a nurse," Laura noted. There is no doubt, however, that she and her daughter's recent health care experiences played a role in shaping her dreams as well.

A New Haven native, Laura, up until

about two years ago, had a good job at the Verizon Wireless call center in Wallingford. She was living in Meriden when she became pregnant with Gia-Laryn (named in honor of the Italian actress Sophia Loren, of whom Laura's adult daughter is a big fan).

Problems began, however, when Laura learned her baby had spina bifida, a birth defect in which the baby is born with its spinal chord exposed and for which surgery is required. Then she learned she herself had a health problem, for which additional surgery was needed.

The result was multiple operations and hospitalizations at Yale-New Haven Hospital for both Laura and her daughter, episodes that ultimately made it impossible for Laura to continue working or to keep her home in Meriden.

For a while, Laura was able to live with her mother in an assisted living facility in New Haven.

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CCA Things-To-Do List

Thanks to the generosity of several individuals, CCA was able to purchase a new computer server recently for our main offices. The equipment serves all of our core operations, including bookkeeping, the operation of our Food Pantry and our development fundraising tracking records. We are very grateful for the generosity of these fine individuals whose gifts helped us over this hurdle.

Next on our list of projects to tackle is the replacement of all 57 windows in the Sylvan Avenue building that is part of our Hillside Family Emergency Shelter. The best price we have been given is \$400 per window. Persons interested in contributing should write "Window Fund" in the memo part of their check and send their donation to Christian Community Action, 168 Davenport Avenue, New Haven, CT 06519.

Last but not least, our phone system is badly in need of repair. We are beginning to experience total outages and the equipment is so out of date that it cannot be replaced. We have been told a new system would cost \$16,000. We are looking into grants that might cover this and would appreciate any leads anyone might be able to supply. Call the CCA Development Department at (203) 777-7848 x 112.

Save The Date! They're Coming Back!
Thursday, October 15, 2009,
The Shubert Theater



The funniest group in Washington, D.C.
(outside of Congress).

Check out their work at www.capsteps.com

Presenting sponsor: **Stratton Faxon**
Connecticut's Firm for Trial Law

Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.

-Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Here's a way you can help CCA and it won't cost you a dime. Simply use the search engine www.goodsearch.com whenever you do an Internet search or make an online purchase. If you do and designate CCA as the beneficiary (be sure to indicate Christian Community Action - New Haven), we will receive one cent per search and between 1-30 percent on each online purchase. You can even download the [goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) icon onto your Internet tool bar to make using it easier. You'd be surprised how quickly those pennies / purchase donations mount up!

Gospel Concert Raises Spirits and Dollars for CCA

The sound of hands clapping in unison amidst shouts of "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" filled the sanctuary of Star of Jacob Christian Church in New Haven this past May. The "joyful noise" came from the audience at CCA's Second Annual "United in Praise / Unidos Para Adorar" bilingual gospel music, benefiting the agency's Hillside Family Emergency Shelter and Food Pantry.

The event raised nearly \$2,000 for 17 families and the Food Pantry, which serves an average 600-700 individuals a month, 50 percent of whom are children.

"I don't speak Spanish, so I did not understand the lyrics of some of the songs," noted one attendee, "but that did not stop me from being overwhelmed by the talent of the performers, all of whom donated their time to participate in this event."

"These people all could have been *American Idol* finalists, in my opinion, they were that good."

Several of the performers, indeed, have recorded their music.



Thirteen-year-old recording artist Bridgette Ortiz was one of several performers featured at a May benefit concert for CCA's Hillside Family Emergency Shelter.

Samples are available on the artists' websites,

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Rev. Bonita Grubbs

“I Shall Not Be Moved” is a song I learned as a child in church. It conveys a strong sense of determination. It articulates the resolve needed to move forward, even in the face of danger or uncertainty. It also suggests that unwavering principles are being put into practice.



Over the years, its meaning for me has deepened and grown. It has been my theme song, but not as much (or for as long as) it could be considered a theme song for the mission of Christian Community Action.

For more than four decades, CCA's efforts to provide services to families have remained constant. If the need was for a place to sleep, food to eat or heat to stay warm, we addressed those needs, putting the faith upon which CCA was founded into practice.

If CCA staff, including me, felt there was a need to advocate for improvements in public policy, there was no option but to also involve the individuals who were poor and homeless in the enterprise of advocacy. Theirs were the most vocal and authentic voices and they were the ones who needed to be heard. Even if we were the only faith-based organization involved, our goal was to ensure that the principles of justice, fairness, equality and dignity were articulated with integrity.

In 42 years, Christian Community Action has not changed its core mission. What has changed and grown over time, however, is the way we approach this mission.

CCA started as an organization that “gave people fish to eat,” as it were, through our Food Pantry and our Hillside

Family Emergency Shelter. While continuing to do that, we expanded to “teaching people to fish” through our Stepping Stone Transitional Housing Program and Program for Internships, Vocational Opportunities and Training (PIVOT).

More recently, we have begun, through our Advocacy and Education Project, our Parent Leadership Training Institute and our People Empowering People initiative in New Haven, to improve the quality of the "water," that is, the environment, in which all this "fishing" activity takes place.

The times in which we now live are different from what existed in 1967.

We know, for example, that the needs of families and children today are more complex and complicated than they were then, and that the economic conditions are less certain. Never before have we seen as many layoffs, retirements, bankruptcies and foreclosures as we see now. The pace at which we work - with email, text messaging, Twitter and Facebook - and the immediacy and far-reaching nature of our contact with people is staggering. The technology that has developed in the last five years has transformed our reality and our relationships.

At the same time, many more nonprofit organizations exist now than did back then. This has made the environment within which Christian Community Action functions much more competitive. It has forced - and will continue to force - us to make some difficult choices about our future.

Yes, CCA has changed and will continue to do so as we respond to any emerging issues that may surface. However, we shall not be moved. We invite your support and prayers as we do this, as we endeavor to keep our essential programs, services and staff members in place during these changing times.

Stepping Stone Helps Mother Realize Her Dream

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Eventually, however, with her non-medical debt mounting (Verizon generously kept Laura on its medical insurance plan until after the baby was born "for which I will be eternally grateful"), she found herself out of work, homeless and with a baby.

With help from the state Department of Social Services, Laura was able to find a place to stay in a local shelter. From there, she was referred to Stepping Stone, where she and her daughter have lived since March. With the help of her mother, who helps care for Gia-Laryn, Laura studies for her CNA certificate during the day, while working at Wal-Mart at night.

“In some ways, living in a shelter

and now in Stepping Stone is the best thing that has ever happened to me,” Laura said. “At Stepping Stone, everyone is so supportive. It gave me my confidence back. I have learned there are new beginnings in life, and that anything is possible if you are willing to work at it.

“I have also learned that life is a promise, not a gift...never, ever should anyone take anything about life for granted.”

Laura and Gia-Laryn are one of 18 families currently living at Stepping Stone. In each case, the family is working with staff to achieve goals they set themselves when they moved into the facility.

An up-to- two-year program, Stepping Stone's objective is economic independence and self sufficiency.

“We are proud of the fact that 78 percent of our residents move on to permanent housing, as compared to 61.5 percent nationally,” noted Stepping Stone Director Judith Rich. “We are also proud that 80 percent of Stepping Stone's residents are employed upon completion of the program, as compared to only 18 percent nationally.”

For more about Stepping Stone, visit www.ccahelping.org. Stepping Stone is located in a former school on Winchester Avenue.

Institute Helps Parents “Find Their Voice.”

June is the time for graduations and such was the case at Christian Community Action (CCA) as the first graduating class of both our Parent Leadership Training Institute and our Children Leadership Training Institute celebrated their achievements at ceremonies at New Haven City Hall.

A total of 17 adults and 18 children from throughout greater New Haven took part in the graduation, which followed the 20-week program, held at the Hospital of Saint Raphael.

The New Haven program is a collaboration between CCA and the Connecticut Commission on Children, which is involved with similar programs elsewhere within the state. It is designed to show parents and children how they can be leaders in their communities and achieve goals they may not have thought possible previously. Or as one of the participants, Kimberly Clark, put it:

“These 20 weeks taught me that I have a voice and how I can use that voice.”

“The PLTI curriculum prepares parent leaders to become positive change agents in their various commu-

nities by enhancing their skills and actively advocating on behalf of all children,” said Tironda Newton, another graduate.

Among the goals parent graduates set for themselves were establishing a statewide help line for families served by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families; creating a special school curriculum for autistic children; building a community playground; running for political office; establishing a food pantry and other social service programs, and obtaining a college degree and using it to “gain good full-time employment, while opening doors in my community.”

Highlight of the ceremonies was the presentation of a quilt by the participants in the children's program to Elaine Zimmerman, executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Children. Each square in the quilt represented one child's thoughts on what leadership meant.

“We deeply appreciate the support



Tironda Newton, left and Nina Aponte were two of 17 adults who recently completed CCA's Parent Leadership Training Institute. Newton plans to use what she learned to open an after-school program. photo by Adzua Agyapon, New Haven Independent.

of the Commission on this project and that of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Hospital of Saint Raphael,” said Sylvia Cooper, program coordinator. “The state's current fiscal crisis has put continuation of this program in doubt for the moment. We remain hopeful, however, that state officials will recognize its value and provide the funding so that these institutes can be held again in the future.”

Concert Raises Dollars for CCA

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The performers included:

- from *Second Star of Jacob Christian Church in New Haven*: recording artist Wanda Aponte; dance group Ministerio de Danza Sjajah and saxophonist Nelson Garcia(www.myspace.com/nelthesax);
 - from *Promised Land Church of God in West Haven*: recording artist Bridgette Ortiz (www.myspace.com/bridgettediane2008);
 - from *Church of God of Prophecy / Cathedral of Higher Praise in New Haven*: The Cathedral Praise Dancers;
 - from *Church on the Rock in New Haven*: the Gospel jazz group Tapestry (www.tapestry-jazz.com).
- Although the style of music came

under the general heading of “Contemporary Gospel,” fans of jazz, rock, salsa, and other contemporary sounds also enjoyed the event.

Sponsors for the evening included **Budget Transmission; Community Health Network; Cathedral of Higher Praise / Church of God and Prophecy; Iglesia Bautista Emanuel of Bridgeport; Iglesia Casa de Refugio; Iglesia Emmanuel Camino de Restauracion; La Voz Hispana de Connecticut newspaper; Second Star of Jacob Christian Church and The Chosen One Building and Home Repair.**

The concert was organized by Hillside Family shelter staff, under the leadership of Juan Marquez. Plans are already underway for a “bigger and better” event in 2010.