



# STORYTELLER

## CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN

ALMOST A YEAR AGO, VERONICA ALVAREZ and her 2½-year-old son were in a desperate situation. She had no job, no job skills, no childcare and no housing. She needed to get out of an abusive relationship. Just when she felt as if she had nowhere to turn, a woman at the bus stop told her about Storyteller Children's Center.

When Veronica came to Storyteller, Program Administrator Jaime Quirino quickly realized the severity of her situation. Luckily, a spot became available in the toddler classroom for her son, Aaron. Jaime also referred Veronica to Domestic Violence Solutions, where she was able to find help with her other problems.

When Aaron started at Storyteller, he had difficulty talking. "He isolated himself from other children because he couldn't verbally communicate," toddler teacher Teresa Flores explains. As with every child enrolled in Storyteller that has special needs, Aaron immediately began receiving speech therapy.

"Aaron was very responsive to speech therapy and showed strong improvement in effective communication skills. Aaron himself was a pleasure to work with and Veronica was very pleased with his improvement," Speech Language Pathologist Sarah Bartholomew said.

Having Aaron in reliable and safe childcare allowed Veronica to pursue a job and find housing. She is currently working full time and can now afford to rent

a room in a house. She also receives onsite counseling through our collaboration with New Beginnings Counseling Center and has enrolled in our Life Skills program. She is working toward completing the 9-month program (see page 5 for more information on this program).

"Storyteller has helped me very much by connecting me with other agencies in Santa Barbara. The most important thing to me is that I am now able to work because Aaron is safe," Veronica says. "Things are still difficult but they are much better. I don't know what I would have done without Storyteller."

Photo: Roe Anne White



She also sees a drastic difference in Aaron. "The speech therapy has made him much more independent. He doesn't rely on me so much and relates well with children inside and outside of the center."

When Aaron turned 3 he graduated from our toddler classroom and is currently in the preschool group, where his teacher has seen much growth. "His social skills have greatly improved due to his increased vocabulary. He interacts with all the children," said preschool teacher Ayidee Alvarez.

Veronica is now able to think about her plans for the future. She wants to learn English proficiently and to develop a career in helping other women in crisis. "I've gone through many crisis situations, and I want to help other women who are dealing with similar situations."

## MISSION STATEMENT

Storyteller Children's Center provides quality, tuition-free early childhood education for homeless and at-risk children, as well as comprehensive support services for their families.

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# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The need for programs like Storyteller's is great. According to recent statistics, the number of homeless people living in Santa Barbara County doubled over the last twenty years. One in five children in the county live in poverty. For every three children needing childcare, there is only one licensed space available regardless of income level. This is not acceptable.

We are concerned with the plight of these children, many whose need for safe and consistent childcare is not being met. We are concerned that without suitable childcare, their parents cannot proceed with the work, education, or therapy necessary to improve their lives. We feel fortunate that through our work, we are able to help some of the most vulnerable of these children and families.

Storyteller is the only local agency specifically focused on providing a tuition-free early childhood education program for homeless and at-risk children ages 18 months through five years. Partnered with comprehensive family support services, our program helps families achieve stability and overcome homelessness. Our relationships with agencies such as Sojourn, Tri-Counties

Regional Center, Santa Barbara County Health and Preschool Departments and New Beginnings Counseling Center ensure families receive the on- and off-site services they need to help them succeed.

The benefits to our children are many... leading to improvements in health, cognitive and language functioning, social and emotional development, and school readiness. Our program helps improve parent-child relationships and increases parental involvement with their children's education.

We know the Storyteller program works. We know, too, that it would not exist without the generous support of our community. Our heartfelt thanks to our board, staff, donors and volunteers, whose selfless contributions make a significant difference in the lives of the children and families we serve.

With gratitude,

Terri Allison  
Executive Director

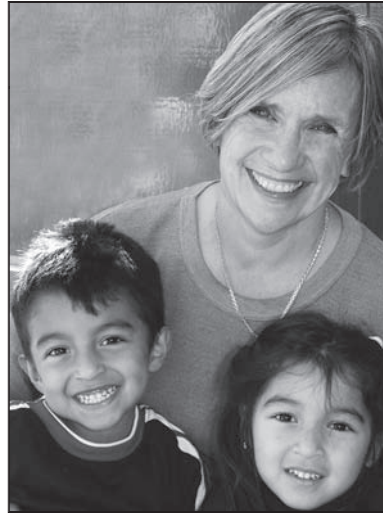


Photo: Roe Anne White

Terri Allison with Freddy & Stephanie



Photo: Roe Anne White

Michael Schaeman is the newest member of our Board of Directors. Mike has an extensive background in sales and marketing. He is a senior vice president and managing director for Iconoculture, a consumer research firm. We are pleased to welcome him to the Storyteller family.

Spring 2007 newsletter created by Storyteller Development Office  
Designed by Molly Green-Brock of m.green graphic design  
Printing by Printing Impressions

Photos courtesy of Roe Anne White Photography [www.roeannewhite.com](http://www.roeannewhite.com)

# OUR STAFF

## ADA VALLADARES

Six years ago, Ada Valladares went to Transition House looking for work. Luckily, they directed her to Storyteller and she has worked here ever since. Her title of "Food Service and Support Staff" barely skims the surface of all that Ada does for Storyteller. Everyday, she opens the center at 7:30 a.m. Meals are delivered to Storyteller through a collaboration with the Community Action Commission Head Start program. Ada's job is to inspect and serve the two meals and a snack for up to 42 hungry children, and then complete all the paperwork required by the CAC. She sanitizes the kitchen, classrooms and bathrooms daily. In addition, she assists the toddler teachers with the children and anything

else they might need.

"Ada is sweet and very caring with all of the children and staff members," toddler teacher Imelda Zarate says.

Ada was born in Honduras and came to the United States with her husband and three children in 1991. Now, her oldest child is married with three children of her own, while her younger children are in college and high school.

Ada says her favorite thing about Storyteller is simply, "the children."

Executive Director Terri Allison smiles when asked about Ada's role at Storyteller. "Recently our staff did an exercise regarding personality profiles as part of our staff retreat. Ada's profile

was "guardian" and that's exactly what she is. She takes care of everyone here. Storyteller wouldn't be the same without her."



Photo: Roe Anne White

# OUR BOARD

## YVETTE GILLER CHAIRS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL GALA TO DATE!

This year, Storyteller's gala raised an all-time record amount of \$185,000, in large part due to the hard work and dedication of gala chair Yvette Giller, who also serves on the board of directors. With 440 guests, the gala was the biggest ever for Storyteller and gala sponsorship was up approximately 25 percent.

"Club Red" was the theme of the gala, which was held on October 21 at the Page Youth Center. It isn't easy to take a huge gymnasium known for its youth basketball leagues and turn it into a swanky New York nightclub, but Giller, the gala committee and event planner Tamara Jensen did it with style.

"The whole look was amazing," said Giller. "Seeing all this come together from behind the scenes makes you appreciate how much work it is. Everyone does it because they care so deeply for Storyteller."

Dinner was served in one side of the gymnasium draped entirely in white parachute material, while radio personality Matt McAllister of KTYD performed auctioneer duties. Guests then walked underneath a huge

Photo: Melanie Bess Hogan, Door 9 Studios



Jeff & Yvette Giller at club RED

platform VIP bar, elevated 11 feet in the air, to be surprised by a hidden all-black club side of the gym, where they danced to music played by a DJ flown in from Las Vegas. Guests sipped Red Bull martinis, Red Stripe beer, or an

exotic cocktail called Red Alert. There were red lights, red candles, and for dessert, red candy.

Yvette initially became involved with Storyteller when she joined the gala committee in 2001; she joined the board of directors in 2005. Everyone associated with Storyteller is extremely grateful for her hard work chairing the gala this year.

"We rely on having a great event every year to make our budget, and that puts a lot of pressure on the event chair. Yvette rose to the occasion and did so with tremendous grace and poise," said board chairman Jon Clark.

A Santa Barbara native, Yvette and her husband Jeff have three children: Ben, 11, Nathalie, 9, and Andrew, 6. She is also involved in Marymount School. Her parents, Ed and Sue Birch, are longtime supporters of Storyteller.

# STORYTELLER HAPPENINGS

Photo: Amy Calvert



## ZOE'S BIRTHDAY CLUB

Thirteen-year-old Zoe Brier, founder of Zoe's Bday Club, has put her mission of "encouraging kids to help out in their community by donating toys to the less fortunate" into action. She recently donated her first gifts to the children of Storyteller. For more information, or to find out how you can join, check out [zoesbdayclub.org](http://zoesbdayclub.org). We wish Zoe the best of luck.

Photo: Roe Anne White



## SANTA COMES TO TOWN

Santa came for a special visit to Storyteller in December! Thank you to all the people who sponsored Storyteller families and purchased a gift and clothing for each child and sibling enrolled in our program. We are also grateful to the National Charity League members who donated goodies to make the party merrier.

Photo: Roe Anne White



## NEW PLAYGROUNDS INSTALLED

Thanks to generous grants from the Annenberg Foundation and the Santa Barbara Foundation, all three playgrounds are being fully renovated to meet licensing standards. The children are enjoying their new, safer play areas.

Photo courtesy of Cox Communications



## COX COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Executive Director Terri Allison and Board President Jon Clark recently appeared on Cox's "Community Connection" with David Edelman. Everyone at Storyteller would like to thank Cox for allowing us to share our program with the community.

Photo courtesy of Citrix Online



## CITRIX EMPLOYEES VOLUNTEER

Employees of Citrix Systems, Inc. helped to make the holidays brighter for the children of Storyteller. They brought materials for an art project that became a gift for the parents, sponsored two Storyteller families for our Christmas Sponsor-A-Family program, purchased the tree and decorations for our holiday party and purchased items on Storyteller's wish list. A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone at Citrix.

# OUR PROGRAMS

## LIFE SKILLS AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES NOW OFFERED FOR PARENTS

Parents whose children are enrolled at Storyteller now have the opportunity to take free "Life Skills" classes to help them learn how to take responsibility for their children and their own lives. The classes are held at Storyteller and are being taught by an experienced mentor and counselor from New Beginnings Counseling Center.

During the nine-month program, parents meet once a week for a two-hour group class and additionally for an individual one-hour mentoring and counseling session with Nimita Dhirajlal,

a mentor and counselor from New Beginnings. The group sessions focus on: teaching effective communication skills; managing time and money; improving self-care, nutrition and diet; getting access to medical care and stress reduction; and solving issues related to anxiety and depression. Importantly, the classes also cover parenting skills, such as character development, the stages of development, discipline and pre- and post-natal care.

"The individual sessions can be used for whatever the client wants or needs," explains Nimita. "For example, one client wanted me to teach her how to use a computer. Mentoring hours are also used for personal counseling or to review any material covered during the life skills class and how it pertains to the behavior of their own children. The whole purpose of the class is to engage people in taking responsibility for their children and their lives."

Limited to 15 parents, the classes are intimate and convenient, since free childcare is provided while the classes

occur. So far, the classes offered have been filled and the participants have been attending consistently. "At the conclusion of the class, the participants receive a Certificate of Completion which is really special because a lot of these parents haven't received a diploma of any kind. It really resonates with them," Nimita said.



Photo: Roe Anne White

*Nimita Dhirajlal counsels  
Asuncion Calixto*

family," said Asuncion Calixto, one of the participants.

Erika Rosales, another participant, feels the classes greatly enhanced her ability to communicate with her child. "Before I used to lose my temper, but now I have the skills to act calm," she said.

Nimita also offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes weekly at Storyteller in collaboration with the Adult Education program. The curriculum focuses on "baby vocabulary" so that the parents can understand the English their children are speaking at home. "Having a basic English vocabulary also gives the parents a better chance to get a job," she said.

The classes are all a part of Storyteller's effort to help families in crisis achieve stability. "Parent education is an essential part of Storyteller's mission," said Executive Director Terri Allison. "The Life Skills program is so great because it covers so many different and significant areas in one class."

Another big benefit of the classes is that a support group is formed among the participants, creating a network within the community. "The classes strengthened me as well as my

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Parent Support Groups

Parent Education  
Workshops

Mental Health Services

Disability Services

Physical Health Screening

Vision Screening

Dental Screening

Nutrition Services

Field Trips

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

## VOLUNTEER

*Editor's Note: For over a year now, Mary Lee Wren has been a faithful volunteer at Storyteller. Although she is a busy mother of two boys, she has found three hours every week to spend in the toddler classroom. We asked her to share her thoughts about volunteering at Storyteller.*

something to help the children and the teachers who are there every day.

### Why did you choose Storyteller?

I believe strongly that the consistency of a high-quality preschool can be invaluable in a child's life, especially for homeless children whose world is ever-changing. The love and support they receive every day from the staff, as well as the daily routine of meals, playtime and socialization, is just what these children need.

### What is your typical day like when you volunteer at Storyteller?

I usually arrive about 9:30 a.m. The children have already been dropped off, had breakfast and are doing a group circle time of singing or storytelling. I usually just try to slip quietly into their activity and before I know it there is a child on my lap or a hug coming my direction. During playtime, I get to build blocks, play with play dough, teach a child to catch a ball, practice new words with

a child or just hold them when they need it. After lunch, I help get the nap room ready and then sit with or hold a child until they are asleep. Then I slip out as quietly as I came.

### What has kept you coming back for so long?

I adore the children and I think my participation helps them in many different ways. I feel that any time I spend with a child one-on-one is time well spent. And any time I can allow a teacher to focus on other children because I have one child (or they have me) well entertained is my gift to the school.

### What advice would you have for someone who is considering volunteering at Storyteller?

You don't have to have special skills or a lot of time to make a difference. I worked in computer science and business for 13 years. It is nice to do something different that is so important. Giving time to a child at Storyteller is easy and very rewarding!



Photo: Roe Anne White

Mary Lee Wren with Sebastian and Luis

### How did you become involved with Storyteller?

A friend suggested I take a tour of Storyteller's preschool, so I did. I met Executive Director Terri Allison, saw the impressive and home-like facility and watched the wonderful teachers working with the children. They were doing such a great job. I wanted to do

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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*While every attempt has been made to insure accuracy in our donor list, omissions and misspellings may occur. Please advise the Development Office at 805.682.9585 ext.20 of any errors.*  
  
*We appreciate the opportunity to correct our records.*

Save the Date!

STORYTELLER CHILDREN'S CENTER PRESENTS



# STORYFAIRE

Sunday, May 20 from 2-5PM

Crane Country Day School  
1795 San Leandro Lane  
FREE ADMISSION

Complimentary refreshments  
Arts and Crafts with ARTS ALIVE! Creativity Center  
Book readings by special characters

## FEATURING:

"How to Save Your Tail" by Mary Hanson  
"My Life as a Chicken" by Ellen Kelley  
"Sheep" by Val Hobbs  
"Winston the Book Wolf" by Marni McGee

Book signings by local authors  
Open to the public! Kids of all ages welcome!



Photo: Roe Anne White



Photo: Roe Anne White

For more information, please contact Jenny at 805.682.9585 or [jenny@storytellercenter.org](mailto:jenny@storytellercenter.org)



## STORYTELLER

CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN

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