Dear Friends of Hour Children,
Blessed greetings to all!
The photos on the right were recently taken at one of my favorite days of the year; Hour Children’s trip to Rye Playland. The day is special not just for the joy on the children and parent’s faces, but for the chance to reconnect with families who formerly reunited at Hour Children. It is such a blessing to see that they are doing well and living independent lives with their children.

It has been more than 30 years since we first opened My Mother’s House in Long Island City to provide a home to children whose mothers were incarcerated in Bedford Hills. This newsletter brings a touch of “hour history” in an article about Sister Carole Lessard, CSJ, who currently lives at My Mother’s House, and has been a part of Hour Children for more than two decades!

We’ve decided to celebrate our 30 years in style this fall, in the form of Hour Children’s 30th Anniversary ARTrageous Gala. ("ARTrageous" because the event will feature silent and live auctions of art, many of which have been created by known artists in collaboration with children.) More information can be found here and on our website. We hope you can attend or support the event.

Thank you all for your continued support!

Gratefully,
Sister Tesa

Letter from Sister Tesa
Although individual volunteers play an important role in Hour Success, groups of volunteers can also come together to do very meaningful projects. Recently, the staff of local power company NRG helped us to renovate our Corner Thrift Store into a new space for Hour Teen Scene. This was on the heels of their great renovation project last year in the lower level of our Astoria House residence.

Although many of these projects are completed in a day, we’ve had some inspiring college students volunteer to spend their spring break helping us. This year saw the second annual visits from Gonzaga’s Mission Possible program, and the University of San Diego. They helped out in the daycare & after-school programs, worked in our thrift shops, and also learned a lot about what we do.

The staff and board from Youth, Inc. have visited us several times, including a truly productive day of spring cleaning in our after-school classroom. Youth, Inc. has supported Hour Children for many years, and has truly been significant in expanding our capacity to work with kids. As you can see from the photo, they even do windows! (In December, we were visited by the staff from the Tiger Foundation, who helped out in “Santa’s Workshop.” As that location is, of course, highly classified, no photos could be taken.)

Volunteer projects can be a great team building activity, and spending a day here can be a great morale boost. For more information, contact Sister Echo Perry at eperry@hourchildren.org.

On January 28th, at a beautiful liturgy held at St. James Cathedral in downtown Brooklyn, Hour Children was honored by the Long Island Council of the Knights of Columbus at the Diocese of Brooklyn’s annual Pro Vita Mass. Sister Tesa and nearly 40 members of the Hour Children community were present at the cathedral to receive The Father Michael J. McGivney Award, named for the founder of the Knights of Columbus, in recognition of our work on behalf of women and children impacted by incarceration.

The Pro Vita Mass is an annual event that honors the efforts of individuals and organizations in Brooklyn and Queens to promote the dignity of all human life. This year’s event, celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn James Massa, was a wonderful opportunity to affirm the dignity of Hour women and children as they reunite after incarceration and work to build lives that are positive and purpose-filled.

In 2014, Hour Children agreed to be the fiscal sponsors for a group of volunteers in Suffolk County who wanted to bring reentry services and support to women and children impacted by incarceration in Long Island. (Fiscal sponsorship involves an established 501(c)(3) charity processing donations and supporting a new project related to their mission.)

Sister Tesa and Hour Children’s staff, along with board member Jane Stanicki, provided guidance and support. The Suffolk group had benefited greatly from the ongoing support of George and Patty Kraus, and the efforts and dedication of the founding board of directors. We are happy to report that the group has now become their own, independent charity; New Hour for Women and Children-Long Island.

Lead by their Executive Director Serena Liqouri, they provide services to women incarcerated at the Riverhead and Yaphank Correctional Facilities and their children. They also provide programs for formerly incarcerated women in the community. Their wrap-around services include parenting workshops, re-entry planning, mentoring, tutoring, advocacy, visitation services, college and career professional support, and more.

Safe space holiday gatherings throughout the year are often offered to enable their families to feel a sense of community and support. Their caring staff and effective efforts for their families reemphasizes that Hour Children’s programs are replicable in other communities. We look forward to watching their continued growth!

Hour Children Honored at Pro Vita Mass

Hour Children is grateful to the Diocese of Brooklyn and the NYS Council of the Knights of Columbus for this great honor!

New Hour Flies Solo
Spotlight on: Sister Carole Lessard, CSJ • By Guest Reporter Nuala Purcell

For the past thirty years, Sister Carole Lessard, CSJ has been involved with Hour Children in various capacities. Even after an illustrious and lengthy career in both teaching and administrative positions in education, Sister Carole has no plans on retiring. Having celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 2014 as a Sister of Saint Joseph in Brentwood, her latest role at Hour Children is twofold, as she works in the Finance Department by day and also helps to run My Mother’s House, a home where she lives with reunited mothers and children enrolled in the Hour Children’s reentry program. As a graduate student at Fordham University doing research, I had the opportunity and honor to interview Sister Carole, to learn more about her background and affiliation to Hour Children.

NP: Sister, tell me about yourself. Where are your parents from? What is your ethnic background?
SCL: While my family tree can be traced to France in the 1700s, my parents were from Canada. They immigrated to New York from Canada and were active in a French Church in Manhattan, St. John the Baptist. I have three siblings and we grew up in Astoria.

NP: What attracted you to the religious life?
SCL: Curiosity. Every year at school you’d get a vocational talk from a visiting speaker. In the 2nd grade, a nun spoke to our assembly and some of the kids said, “How could you live this life?”’ I said to myself, “How could you not?” So, upon finishing high school, I told my parents I wanted to enter the convent. They were a little surprised, but they would never stand in my way. However, we compromised and I waited a year after high school to make the final decision.

I spent five years at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent in Brentwood, Long Island, NY. It was an educational and religious experience where many of the sisters chose a career path typically in teaching or nursing, but I chose teaching when I graduated in 1969. Sr. Tesa Fitzgerald was in the convent at the same time I was, so that’s how we first met and we’ve been friends and colleagues ever since.

NP: So, what did you do after you left the convent in Brentwood?
SCL: My first teaching assignment was from 1969-71 at Immaculate Conception in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I taught all subjects to 48 students in the 5th grade.

Then, my father passed away and I needed to help my mother who was ill at the time. So, I went into administration in the Diocese of Brooklyn/Queens for Special Education from 1971-1986. I was a resident manager for hearing impaired adults from 1986-88.

Then, from 1988 till September of 2016, I worked at St. Joseph’s College in Brooklyn as an Assistant Dean in the Adult Division.

NP: You’ve been a part of Hour Children from its inception, how did you become involved?
SCL: Sr. Elaine Roulet, CSJ started a family advocate program in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in the 1970’s. Sr. Elaine negotiated with St. Rita’s Parish for their convent, which is now known as, “My Mother’s House” here in Long Island City. Five sisters moved into it, including Sr. Tesa, for children whose mothers were in prison. In 1996, Sr. Tesa opened Hour Children at St. Benedict Joseph Labre’s in Richmond Hill. I moved in there shortly afterwards. But, in 2003, I moved into “My Mother’s House”, which is just across the street from Hour Children’s office. Currently, we house eleven women and six small children, oh, and two cats!

NP: What is the most challenging aspect?
SCL: Well, the challenges are what brings out a lot of changes in ourselves. I come from a different background to many of the women, so it’s important for me to always show love and respect toward them. But, in terms of Hour Children, some of our main issues are housing, employment, and funding. We just want people to give the women a chance. If you can shift people’s attitudes to be more receptive to women who’ve been in prison, that’s when you see the difference. It’s about raising people’s consciousness.

NP: Tell us something we may not know about the people who go through the Hour Children program?
SCL: These women and kids are just like you and me. Give them an opportunity and they may surprise you. Everyone learns from each other. It takes a lot of work to change. But, it’s been a great calling to be involved with Hour Children.

Clearly, Sister Carole’s call to serve has had a huge impact on the women, children, and staff of Hour Children. The takeaway I received from Sister Carole is not so much what she’s done for Hour Children, but what the organization and its members have done for her. Sister Carole’s humility always shines through while her willingness to help knows no bounds. Sr. Carole, thank you for all you do!
Please Save the Date for Hour Children’s 2017 Gala!

On November 6th we will honor 30 years of Hour Children’s efforts to reunite families impacted by incarceration at “ARTrageous.” The gala will feature a silent and live art auction, including one-of-a-kind pieces created by well-known artists in collaboration with children from our programs.

ARTrageous, developed in 2001 by Linda Argila of Solutions from the Heart, has a long history of supporting women and children in need. We are excited that this year’s event will honor Hour Children and Sister Tesa’s three decades of work with families impacted by incarceration.

Cipriani 25 Broadway will provide a magical setting for this very special evening. For more information about Hour Children’s ARTrageous Dinner and Art Auction, please go to www.artrageousevent.com. To ensure that you will receive an invitation: email rob@hourchildren.org or call Rob Zopf at 718-433-4724 x305.

Christmas at Hour Children

Christmas came early for hundreds of members of the Hour Children family with a festive gathering on December 17th in the gym at Voice Charter School in Long Island City. Santa was in attendance and kept quite busy due to the incredible generosity of hour supporters. The kids loved the arts & crafts and face painters, and parents and children loved the photo booth.

Special thanks to Patrick Ford & Voice Charter School, Evodio Salazar (catering), and Santa... and literally hundreds more groups, churches, and individuals that helped make the holiday special for our families.

We also want to thank George Weiss and all of our friends at Weiss Multi-Strategy Advisers, LLC for once again inviting more than 100 kids from Hour Children to their party in Manhattan. Their warm friendship and generosity means a lot to our families!

Mother’s Day Luncheon 2017

On May 11th more than 220 guests came out to be a part of our largest Mother’s Day Luncheon. Held at the Whippoorwill Club in Armonk, we proudly honored Sue LaColla (at center below) for her long-term dedication as a host mother for our visitation programs at the Children’s Center at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. The tables were decorated with origami centerpieces and poems created by women inside the facility.

The afternoon was highlighted by a panel discussion on “Mothering From the Inside.” Moderated by volunteer Sally Fay, the panel of three current Hour Children participants informed, energized, and moved the capacity crowd. Delaisia Hasbrouck and Stephanie Reis described the support they received while living with their infants in the Bedford Hills Nursery. Aisha Elliot spoke about her experiences in having visits from her children, as well as in her own work as Inside Coordinator of the teen program. All three (photo below) discussed their new lives at Hour Children in Queens.

Thanks to the generosity of those in attendance, funds were raised to enable us to purchase a much-needed new vehicle, ‘Charlie’s Van,’ to transport children for family visits.

SORRY

I am sorry I am here
I am sorry I am not there
I am sorry I accepted the Devil’s Dare
I am sorry it has been so long
I am sorry you’ve been without your mom
I am sorry does not explain emotions I feel
Saying I am sorry doesn’t take the pain away
Saying I am sorry is just the start
To mending the gaping hole I left in your heart.

--written by a mom at the Children’s Center