

## Always moving forward

by Carl Foster, Board Vice President

### A new kind of scale

Over the past 18 years, the LBH has gone through many transformations: from the premier residential home for abandoned infants to a multi-program neighborhood-based agency that focuses on helping entire families.

Over the summer, the LBH hosted its largest program ever, offering a **summer camp** that served 35 kids ages 2-15, and providing a variety of support services for 10 families. To do this, LBH employed an additional **seven local college students as summer associates, and a licensed DCPS school teacher**, along with the entire LBH social work and therapy staff.

Our summer program was significant in that it was our first opportunity to make full use of the **LBH Scales Project**. Our agency tagline is: "We actually help people." And we do. Our newly developed Scales Project provides standardized benchmarks to document our clients' individual progress, especially the progress of our school-aged children. Among the most important measures LBH records, for purposes of improvement, are each child's level of socialization, verbalization, and impulse control.

LBH youth programs prepare children to do well in school, develop life skills, and identify goals for after graduation. Empowering these students to manage their own behavior and their future requires more than just providing another after-school program. LBH staff help students to manage the issues of their immediate environment (in-school and out) and then encourage these students to imagine and prepare for a future after successfully completing school.

In addition to our continuous involvement in the schools with teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents, we stress to our kids the importance of doing well in school. But we stick to the basics. We want our kids to go to school every day, on time, stay in school all day, and learn. We talked with our kids about barriers to going to school on time every day and learning. We want them to "manage" their behavior and to be less impulsive. We talk a lot about their "out-of-school" time and the choices they make. We have spent the last half of the summer talking about being ready for the start of school, being "in control" during afterschool hours, and then thinking and talking about what we are going to do after graduation. We constantly seek to expand the horizons of our kids.

One of the kids told me this summer, "**The Little Blue House has really fresh stuff.**" That "fresh stuff" is available as rewards for good grades, positive behavior, and healthy lifestyle choices. During this school year, we will revamp our Scales Project. We will measure success in terms of how our kids behave in school and out, in our presence, and when they are off-site. How are they interacting with the rest of their environment? Are they preparing for their future? The LBH Scales Project will help us measure their progress and document that success.

### Parents in the loop

The LBH is also innovating our parenting program, **expanding on our "parenting lab" concept** developed by the LBH years ago to provide information to parents on a variety of topics including understanding child development and advocating for children in the school system. The enhanced program provides more family-to-family support, linking families who have more experience managing particular issues with families who have less experience managing those same issues under the guidance and with the support of LBH staff, social workers and therapists.

As always, we are very proud of our LBH programs and our ability to make a permanent difference in the lives of the people we "actually help" every day.

## Parents = Advocates

by Holly Rutter, LBH Social Worker

It's Friday afternoon, and after a long week of youth activities, parent meetings, casework, and writing reports, the LBH staff prepare for our **Saturday morning Parent/Child Stimulation class for children with special needs**. Youth in our after-school programs assist staff in vacuuming and preparing for tomorrow's activities.

LBH developed our "**Stim Class**" to provide supplemental services needed when the city failed to provide therapy and supports in a timely manner. LBH began offering parents a once a week class informally covering such topics as **parenting children with developmental disabilities, advocating for your child, positive discipline techniques, active listening, and issues of specific interest to the families in the class**. The class is facilitated by a **pediatric occupational therapist** who shares her insight as both a therapist and mother. As a result of these LBH classes, our parents have become their children's best advocate and soon became resources to each other – each parent adding their experiences and knowledge to every topic.

Some of the children served in our class have specific diagnosed conditions such as autism and blindness. Some have severe developmental needs, and still others do not eat, or speak. All are beautiful and amazing little human beings. The children teach us as much as we teach the parents. Their heartwarming smiles and bright eyes show the true essence of what we do and why we continue our daily mission to "**actually help people.**"



# What I did on my summer vacation

The **2008 Summer Camp** is the biggest LBH program ever. Supported by a grant from the **DC Children and Youth Investment Trust** and a large grant from the **LBH board**, this program provided services to over 35 kids, ages 2-15-, for 10 weeks. As usual, all LBH services, including the summer camp, are provided at no charge to the clients.

We added **seven local college students and one DCPS teacher as summer associates**. Like all LBH staff, our training for the summer associates included CPR certification, training in LBH policies and practices, and an introduction to the LBH Scales Project. The staff also received training in early childhood development from child psychiatrist **Alberta Vallis, MD**.

We asked our summer associates to write about their experiences, and here is some of what they said.

When I accepted the job at the LBH this summer, I didn't expect any of the things that have happened so far. I did not think I would wake up and be happy to go to work, or that I would think about the kids and wonder what they were doing on the weekends.

I am excited and proud to tell people about the LBH. The LBH gives hope and safety to children and families, and really makes a difference. The laughter, smiles, hugs, stories, and love that these children have put into my life this summer are more than anything that can be taught in a classroom or experienced in an office internship.

*Meghan Lynch, Catholic University*

From day one at the Little Blue House there was this one kid who caught my attention. When I first met him I was intrigued by his demeanor because half the time he walked around as if he were looking for a fight. It made me wonder what would make him behave this way? He always seemed tense. Never calm or relaxed. I later learned he was one of eight siblings split apart by foster care and living in three different homes.

I spent hours talking with him, but mostly listening when he talked. Over time, he

calmed down and showed me a very kind soul. He is also very intelligent and he really wants to learn. I have never seen so many good things come out of one person. The change is dramatic. He now gets along with all of the other kids in the group. He still has meltdowns – but much fewer and milder. Most important to me is that when he does have a meltdown, we can talk about it and reach an understanding.

When I learned that he was reading a book about Ancient Greece, I asked him about it. He brought the book to camp the next day and answered all of my questions. He stands out to me because of the progress he has made over the summer and because my perception of him has changed so much from that first impression. Lifelong transformation? Maybe not. Big improvement? Something to build on? You bet.

It really affected me to see such a big difference and to know that I had a part in that. A big part.

*Thomas Burke Hill, Florida International University*



My summer working at the LBH can be summed up in three words: challenging, frustrating, and rewarding. Any frustration is followed by days that shock (in a good way) and amaze me. I will never forget my first day at the LBH. No matter how nervous I was, I fell in love with the kids that very first day. I have learned so much about the kids, the Little Blue House organization, and how a

little government support and a caring staff can make a difference in the lives of our children.

I remember my training with **Dr. Vallis**. This training opened my eyes to a new way to change a child's behavior. I hope the kids continue to "wow" me with their progress. I have even surprised myself with how crazy I am about my kids.

*Mary Shashaty, Catholic University*

Training for working at the LBH began with visits to **Dr. Alberta Vallis** and observing how she uses behavior scales to measure her students' progress and self-control. What I learned from Dr. Vallis was how to help our children exhibit better self-control. Once the summer camp began, the children showed different



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- ☆ On-line donations. Visit our website at: [www.littlebluehouse.org](http://www.littlebluehouse.org) to view our **Wish List** and use the **Donate Now** button. Donations are processed through JustGive.org
- ☆ Send us a check.
- ☆ Designate CFC #81871 or UW #8378

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personality types. Some were very social and outgoing. Some were so quiet I thought they would never utter a sound. And some children were out-of-control when they did not get their way. Using my training, the children who were out of control were able to practice more self-control, the quiet ones began to speak, and the ones that were outgoing became even more confident.



tions made me feel as if I were invisible to her. It seemed as if she didn't trust anyone here, starting with me. One month later I talk to a tender, kind, helpful, and intelligent girl who loves and excels at learning.

I will always remember the little girl who called me "mommy." I found out later she has spent half of her life in foster care and has no constant caregiver. I have experienced how important love and caring is for the development of a child, and the LBH does a great job of that. The LBH is not only a place for the nurturing, but it is a place where the staff actually cares about the families. We help parents become better parents and my work with the LBH is a really important part of that.

*Evelyn Jimenez, Trinity University*

I must admit that choosing just one child to write about is rather difficult, because all of "my" eight summer camp kids have such unique and amazing personalities. But there is one – **Angela** – that has taught me, surprised me, and made me smile every single day during this summer.

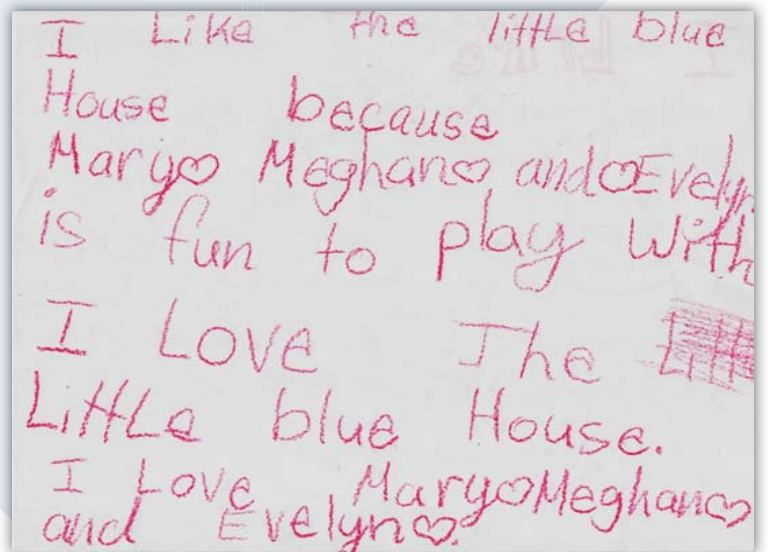
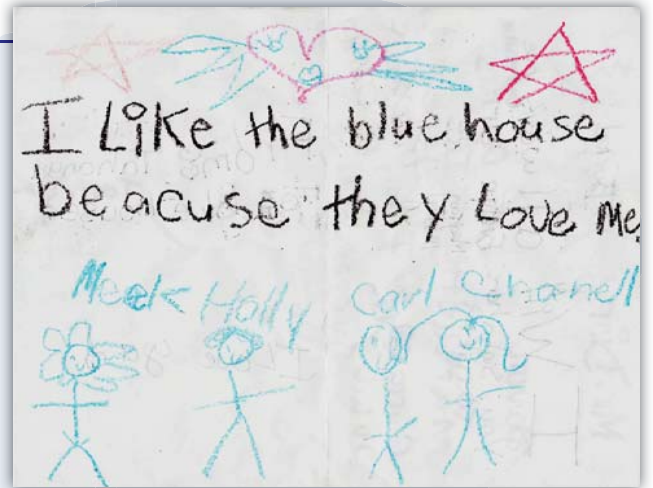
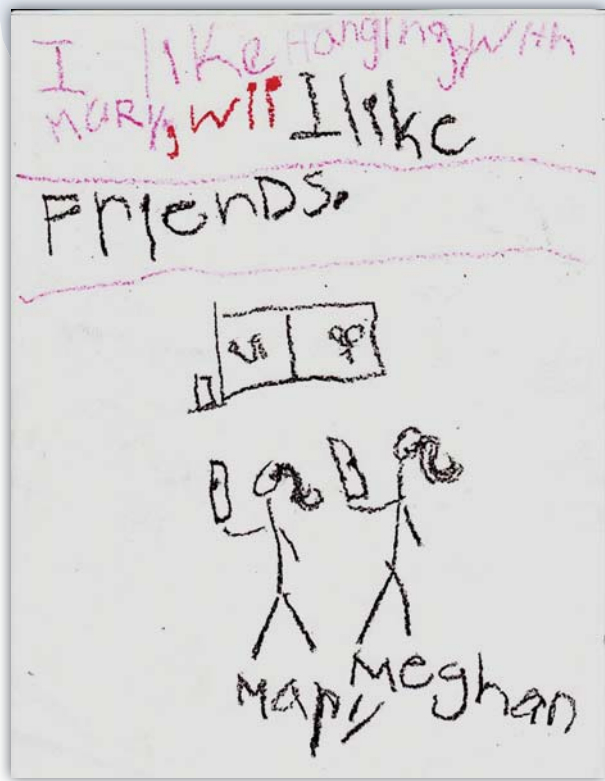
The Angela of today is very different from the girl that came through the door and sat in the corner of the classroom the first day. Initially, she was uncontrollable and extremely impulsive. Her disobedience and obdurate defiance of my direc-

Together, we chat about her life, her worries, and her aspirations. Equally important, she trusts me enough to be her outlet for "girl stuff." Her growth and transformation throughout this short time inspire my own introspection.

I am extremely proud of Angela's positive affect on the rest of the children, and look forward to being a part of her continuing progress. Thanks, Angela! I hope I get to have a coffee with you 10 years from now and we remember all those things that once happened that summer at the LBH.

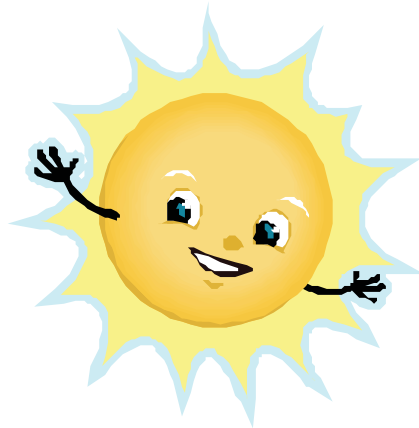
*Julia Caruana, Catholic University*

# Kids say it best . . .





# The joys of summer at the LBH



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## A visit from our Cyrus angels

The LBH thanks the people of **Cyrus, MN** (population 303 and hometown of **LBH social worker Holly Rutter**) for their long time support of the LBH. This past July a group of 60 people from Cyrus made a trip to the east coast, stopping in DC for lunch and tours of the LBH. The LBH youth prepared and served lunch for the group and had fun learning about Minnesota from their new friends.