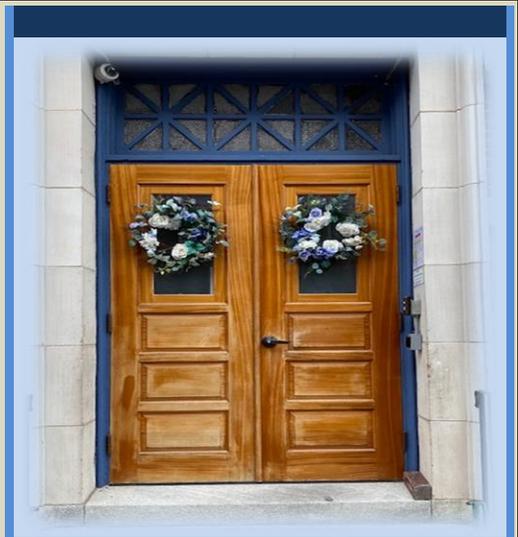




The doors of the Holy Family Home opened in July 2015, before anyone could have imagined that a global pandemic was on the horizon. Yet, just a few years after the opening ceremony, COVID-19 redefined the enormous challenge of maintaining a safe environment for mothers and children in need of a home. In addition to the everyday rules and policies that have been in place since the opening, a whole new set of regulations was needed during the pandemic. Frequent testing, masks in all common areas of the Home, restricted use of the kitchen, limited interaction between families, little in-person contact with volunteer staff, diligent hand washing, quarantining when necessary, and strict sanitizing routines - these are a few of the COVID regulations that have been in effect for the past 18 months.



*979 Branch Avenue  
Providence, RI 02904  
401-304-7744*



The Home became a quieter-than-usual place during COVID. Children's toys were tucked away, kitchen tables were distanced, and the semi-circle of chairs in the library, where mothers once gathered for a weekly discussion of life skills, remained empty ... eerily frozen in time. Even the wooden rocker, an invitation for storytellers and children to gather, was still. The voices that once filled the main foyer became silent, as residents stayed in their rooms, talking to one another, on occasion, from across the hall and through partly open doorways. "I like the strictness of the rules," said one mother. "We need them."

During this time, the residents "rose to the occasion," one volunteer offered. The mothers followed every rule and regulation, and they became a community, "a microcosm of interdependency," she explained. The families watched out for one another and for the volunteer staff as well. They knew the importance of staying well and the consequence of becoming ill, as they checked on each other and shared needed items. With the two instances of COVID at the Home, the residents were in quarantine, watching and waiting from their rooms. One child offered an explanation about why he was keeping a distance from the on-site volunteer. "Miss R," he said, "I can't go near you 'cause you're old, and you could get COVID." Even this young child knew that Miss R and the rest of the volunteer staff needed to stay well and that even he had an important role in this outcome.

"I'm ready for the world to go back to the way it was," one mom said with certainty. As she recalled "the way it was," her eyes filled and her thoughts drifted off. "Be around friends and family ... travel," she added softly. Referring to a pre-COVID world and a former life of independence, this mom assures her children: "Mommy will bring that [world] back to you ... but better."

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and exceptional leadership, the mothers and children at the Holy Family Home are making their way out of a strange COVID world to a life that is more hopeful than before. The Holy Family Home is also making its way through this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, bearing witness to the familiar saying: "It takes a village."



## Signs of Hope and Gratitude

While the pandemic may not be entirely over, a new and exciting energy is emerging at the Home. Nine families currently live at the Home, with a total of 16 children ranging from infant to teenager. While the Home remains unusually quiet, the mothers interact a little more as they prepare meals in the kitchen, greet each other in the laundry room, or venture outdoors to the swings and sandbox with their children. One mom offers support to a new mom with an infant, assisting with feedings and watching over the baby while the new mom runs to the kitchen or a nearby store.



The older children continue to develop their personal interests and talents, perhaps inspired by months of unusual quiet. One teen-age resident used some COVID time to pursue her interest in art, painting on canvas and cardstock in the newly created 'art corner' of her room. After proudly arranging her daughter's artwork on a table, this mom pointed to the canvas paintings outside the library on the second floor of the Home and explained, "She wants to paint one of those."



Spending their days at the Home during COVID gave the residents time to notice its many beautiful wall hangings and inviting nooks. Artwork and writing corners, each uniquely furnished, hadn't escaped the eyes of the younger and most curious residents. "Show her your favorite picture," one mom suggested. No additional prompting was needed, as the child bolted over to the stairs, landing before the painting of a cobblestone street in Paris with people going about their daily business. "...so many people I can make friends with," the boy commented.



Then, leading the way to the lower level of the Home, the child stopped at a painting of flowers, pointing to the largest flower, the one in the middle of the canvas. "It's golden," he offered, referring to its color. Finally, the child zoomed off to the laundry room to a picture he had noticed many times before. "I like the big waves," he began. It's so realistic."





When asked about his favorite space at the Home, the child started a high speed chase to the kitchen, his favorite place outside of his friend’s room. “I like being the helper in the kitchen. I like to eat,” he explained. “I like Chinese food and butternut squash pasta. I like pizza.”

The outdoor play area is also a favorite spot for the children. Shady spaces, sunny spaces, sandy spaces, paved spaces, grassy spaces, pebbly spaces – all provide the children with a beautifully organized play area for them to explore and to learn how to interact safely outdoors. Though the youngest children may not express their joy in words as they move from swingset to sandbox, their expression reveals more than their words could possibly say, and it becomes apparent that this outdoor play area is vital to their physical and social development and well-being.



\* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \*

\* \* \*

### Recent Visit from the Rhode Island Department of Health

A three-person team from the Rhode Island Department of Health recently conducted a walk-through inspection of the entire building. Concluding that the Holy Family Home exceeds standards set by the state for COVID, the team also noted that this shelter is among the best they have ever seen, both in its physical appearance and in its “holistic” support of its residents. Thank you, again, to the many volunteers and generous donors who make this Home exceptional.

Once COVID is said and done, the memories from this strange time in our lives and the lessons we learn from this experience will likely remain with us for a lifetime. Though we may long for a time we once knew, we emerge from this experience to a somewhat different world and, perhaps, slightly sharpened values. As one of the volunteers concluded, COVID has left us knowing that what truly matters in life is what we do for one another. Reflecting on her experience with families at the Home and perhaps speaking for all those who are committed to the mission of the Home, she thought: "They do more for me than I could ever possibly do for them." The joy of giving and of being a guiding light in the lives of these families, just as the guardian angel on the front lawn of the Holy Family Home signifies, is the greatest gift of all, especially during a global pandemic.



---

*Dear Friends and Benefactors,*

*As you read in this summer edition of our newsletter, the Holy Family Home continues to shine forth as a beacon of hope to the homeless of our state with a unique loving environment fostered by so many dedicated volunteers. Your contributions have also made you a part of this great service to the poor, as we provide continued peace and guidance to these women and their children.*

*I am pleased to announce that the **North American Catholic Educational Programming Foundation (NACEPF)**, under the leadership of John and Barbara Primeau, will match every donation up to a total of \$250,000.00. Your contribution to the Holy Family Home at this time will be doubled. Since we are funded entirely by private donations, we are deeply grateful for your sacrifice.*

*Please know that you are always in our prayers of thanksgiving. God bless you.*

*Father Ed Cardente*

