

LEGACY FOR OUR MISSION:

For Our Children and the Future

ST. MARY'S CHILD CENTER REACHES OUT TO AT-RISK CHILDREN

As it approaches its half-century mark, St. Mary's Child Center is not resting on its laurels. Instead, it strives daily to improve its programs to serve Indianapolis at-risk children. Proceeds from the *Legacy for Our Mission* campaign are helping the center achieve that goal.

A \$150,000 campaign grant has increased the center's operating funds, explained Connie Sherman, executive director. "We ask that the family pay \$2 a week toward expenses; no child has ever been denied services for financial reasons. The actual cost is over \$8,000 per year to help just one at-risk child, and the *Legacy for Our Mission* funding helps close that gap." The funds also have been used to expand the program to include 16 more children this year.

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St. Mary's Child Center raises \$1.1 million annually through private donations, grants, special events and program fees. The not-for-profit education center was formed in 1961 to serve the needs of young children who have "fallen through the cracks" of private or public social services. It is focused on helping young children at-risk for a wide range of social, emotional, economic and environmental problems. "Through our educational programs, we are able to change the trajectory of these children's futures," explained Sherman.

The program reaches out to thousands of Indianapolis area children aged three to five who are at great risk: too young to be helped by school systems and too old for most early-age programs. Nancy Needham, director of agency operations, explained, "It is important to reach these children by age six with a high-quality educational program in order to succeed. These are the very important formative years for



children. At risk is their ability to learn, socialize and grow into typical, happy children because of the severe stresses they are exposed to in daily life from neglect, abuse, drugs, violence... or worse."

The center's early childhood services include transportation, therapy, a high-quality curriculum, social services and a home-based program for family support and development. The center also has a diagnostic clinic that provides testing and evaluation of children experiencing problems in elementary and high school.

The teaching staff is well trained and well educated—people who put children first, Needham said. The 12 hours per week that children spend at St. Mary's is more than child-care; it is "intensive intervention," focusing on cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. The program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and has a 4:1 child-to-adult ratio.

There are 4,000 to 5,000 at-risk children in the metropolitan Indianapolis area with no other hope, but the center is only able to serve 5 percent of them. Currently, there are 100 at-risk children on its waiting list.

The directors of St. Mary's Center realize the need is so great that they cannot possibly respond to it without the help of others. "As a result, we believe the best way to reach these children is to teach the teachers. We make what we know readily available to early-childhood teachers in the community. We offer them tours of our facility, we invite them to our monthly staff training sessions, and we mentor them. Through this outreach effort, we hope to positively influence the futures of children at-risk beyond the scope of our program, Needham said." This outreach program will be expanded through *Legacy for Our Mission* campaign proceeds.

Legacy for Our Mission, the archdiocesan capital campaign, is guided by the principles of Christian stewardship and addresses the needs of archdiocesan ministries such as the Mission of Education. By contributing to Legacy for Our Mission through your local parish, a portion of your gift will be allocated to the Mission of Education and distributed to programs such as the St. Mary's Child Center.

Please visit the new online home of the *Legacy for Our Mission* campaign at www.archindy.org/legacy. It can also be accessed at www.LegacyforOurMission.org.

Twins Master Social and Educational Skills

Victoria Medina enrolled her four-year-old twins, Max and Kandys, at St. Mary's 18 months ago. She said the program has helped them developmentally in terms of socializing with the other children and talking more ... and in English. The program also has helped them educationally—the twins have already mastered their letters and numbers. Asked if she reinforces at home what is taught in the center, Medina nodded enthusiastically and said "Sure!" with a broad grin.