

How the Light Comes

A Blessing for Christmas Day

—Jan Richardson

I cannot tell you
how the light comes.

What I know
is that it is more ancient
than imagining.

That it travels
across an astounding expanse
to reach us.

That it loves
searching out
what is hidden
what is lost
what is forgotten
or in peril
or in pain.

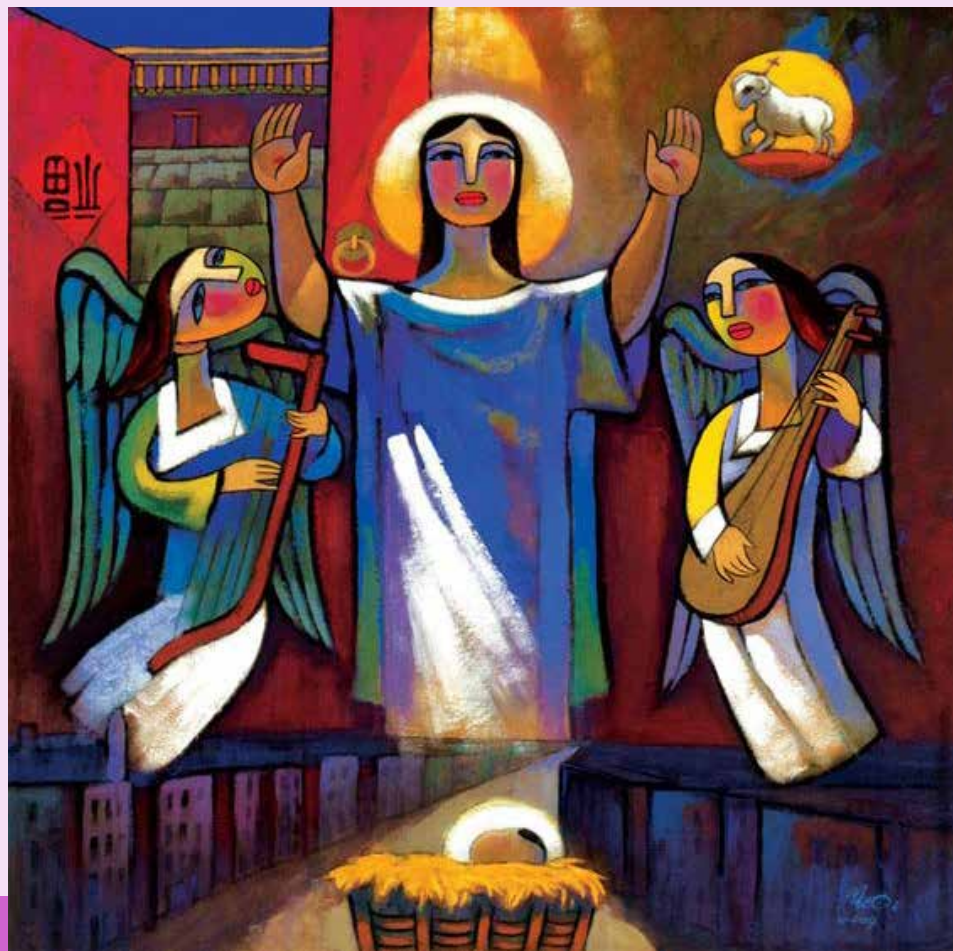
That it has a fondness
for the body
for finding its way
toward flesh
for tracing the edges
of form
for shining forth
through the eye,
the hand,
the heart.

I cannot tell you
how the light comes,
but that it does.
That it will.

That it works its way
into the deepest dark
that enfolds you,
though it may seem
long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape
you did not foresee.

And so
may we this day
turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces
to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies
to follow the arc it makes.

May we open
and open more
and open still
to the blessed light
that comes.





HOUSE NOTES: JUNE – DECEMBER 2021

by Mary Ellen Mitchell, Lydia's House co-director

When we left off on house notes for the summer newsletter, our crew had just returned from Procter Episcopal Family camp. We had a great time petting chickens, singing kids church songs, and swimming in the lake. Along for the trip were the Mitchell-Eilerman family of 5, a board member and her family, three staff members, and three guest families. It was a big endeavor but we've decided again and again that camp is worth it! Thanks Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio for hosting us. Shortly

covered porch, and welcoming Samantha Mossing, a Xavier summer intern, to live in house.



after Procter we sent a crew of mostly guest kids + Jacob Eilerman to Camp Joy, a 3 day sleep away intro to camp. Every kid stayed the whole time and had a great time. Other summer highlights included bringing The Cincinnati Shakespeare Company to our back yard for "Bard in the Yard: Romeo and Juliet," starting a regular rotation of outdoor meals in our



Summer also included a lot of maintenance. With the purchase of the lot next door came yard work. We were pleased to host Bellarmine Chapel for several faith-in-action days, where volunteers of all ages cut down trees, cleaned out brush and removed a chain link fence. Once all of the lot got cleared we realized our porch was looking shabby, and Dennis and Georgia Bishop came to the rescue with a porch repaint. The addition of Ebony Pratt to our staff meant that we had a volunteer coordinator, and coordinate volunteers she did! By summer's end she had re-built our weekly meal and house duty roster in addition to overseeing many one-time volunteers for outdoor projects. To celebrate the return of volunteers we had a meet and greet dinner, and awarded a few of our celebratory rocks to be placed in the prayer labyrinth. Ebony also helped coordinate Lydia's House first soiree with the Norwood Day Parade. Ebony, Samantha and Mary Ellen worked tirelessly to blow up balloons and former volunteers/ artists Bethany and Taylor came to help paint and decorate. A number of guests and former guests walked





in the parade, handing out candy and pinwheels to Norwood neighbors.

In late July we celebrated Ebony's birthday and continued to appreciate our volunteers with a trip to Boomtown Biscuits and The Freedom Center's quilt exhibit, featuring quilts produced during quarantine to remember the lives of Black people lost due to police violence in recent years. In early August we said a sad goodbye to Samantha, as she returned to college. We were thrilled that she committed to come back one Tuesday a month for dinner, and became the Bellarmine middle school



her assisting with intake, case management and appointments and she's doing top notch work.



In September Meridith, Anne, and the Mitchell-Eilerman crew went together to the Wild Goose Festival, a progressive Christian campout and reunion of sorts. Meridith also took a weekend to go to Chicago and visit the Jesus People and others that we've met at Catholic Worker gatherings. September's biggest event was our revamped "Women for Women", which we hosted in the neighborhood for the first time. Around this time, we instituted a vaccine mandate in the house for all guests, volunteers and staff, which created some challenges and one family's exit, but resulted in the entire community being vaccinated by early October. We established a new landlord partner relationship with former volunteers, The Binger-Beijner family, and moved a family from Virginia Coffey Place to a stand-alone house a few blocks away, much to their delight. Their 3 bedroom apartment then opened up, allowing a family from shelter to move in. In late September our preschool partner, Azalea Montessori announced their planned expansion, adding a 1st-6th grade classroom for the fall of 2022, giving all of our families an opportunity to enroll thanks to the Ed Choice voucher program.



youth minister, meaning that Annie Eilerman sees her weekly at church. August also included the joyful celebration of Laura Menze's marriage to Brendan Green, the completion of the demolition on 1801 Mills, and a series of tenant listening sessions at Virginia Coffey Place, resulting in rule revamps. Finally, late August brought the arrival of Macey McAtee, our Mercy volunteer. We're over the moon to have

October brought guest room turnovers, and an empty attic opened the possibility for a minor renovation of that space. Dennis and Georgia

HOUSE NOTES (CONTINUED)



came back to paint, and volunteers Jaime, Carol and Joan helped as well. Mid October we welcomed our new maternal care fellow and doula, Savannah, giving us a complete

guest care staff for this season! We started back preschool atrium, now as a partnership with Vineyard Central Church, and moved the classroom from the Lydia's House living room to the church. We began a partnership with Food For Life, a ministry of the Community of the Transfiguration, providing meals for the preschool program's families every Thursday night. Meredith, Mary Ellen, Annie, and Macey as well as volunteers Jill, Karis and Jessica all joined forces for a 10K trail run, representing Lydia's House, while Ebony and Bethany ran the Queen Bee 5K. Apparently October was the month to get fit! Macey, Savannah and Ebony also planned and implemented a trip for Lydia's House families to a local pumpkin patch and the whole house celebrated Meredith's 41st birthday with soft-serve from "The Cone."

November brought the planning and implementation of a Thanksgiving dinner and winter clothes giveaway. Thanks Smith family for

doing all of the cooking! We also held a robust family All Saints service, celebrating the saints that Lydia's House rooms and properties are named for. During November (thanks to Macey's hard intake work) we enjoyed a full house of guest families, including a few preschoolers and school aged kids. We celebrated several birthdays, and Anne showed up (as usual) with some fun cakes including a police themed treat for our budding police officer, and a set of Marvel Superhero cupcakes. Dinners were particularly lively.



December brought many holiday events, including a Bellarmine youth group St. Nick's Day party for our families, St. Nick themed pajamas and slippers provided by the Cornish-Scott Families, a secret Santa breakfast and shopping day with the Norwood Moose Lodge, and a Christmas give away to all our guest and former guest families, with the support of Bellarmine's giving tree and Thrivent Financial.

1801 MILLS AVE

Our 1801 Mills Avenue affordable housing project continues to move forward, albeit slowly. After a series of pandemic related delays, we've now completed demolition and hired a general contractor, Bob Lally. Architectural drawings have been approved by the Norwood Building Department and permitting is complete. Construction of the new first floor space began early November 2021. We're in the process of choosing flooring and finishes in hope that the building will be complete March 2022. We're grateful for many volunteers who've helped us clear out belongings from the building and clean up the exterior. Special thanks to Carol and Jim Carlin and our young adult volunteer Bella for cleaning up the yard, pressure washing and getting everything ready before our Women for Women event!



Thank you to the following donors who are making this renovation possible:

Women for Women Event Donors 2020 and 2021
Bellarmine Chapel
Ohio Finance Fund
Sue and Randy Freking
Marcia and Daniel Pardekooper
Province of St. John the Baptist, order of Friars Minor
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
The Kohnen Family Fund
The Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Foundation
Christ Church Cathedral
The Wright Patterson Credit Union Sunshine Fund
Mary Ellen and Jim Millar
Anonymous



We continue raising funds for this project. Please email maryellen@stlydiashouse.org if you'd like to contribute.



WOMEN FOR WOMEN

This year's Women for Women event was a huge success! Due to Covid 19 concerns, we decided to move the event to a more open outdoor venue and, as we discerned the best way forward, our committee agreed that the west Norwood neighborhood and touring Lydia's House properties would be a special and celebratory change. **Maria and Robert Krzeski**, our traditional hosts, offered their blessing and support. They helped with planning, invitations and supplied the wine! **Anne Housholder** supplemented their work with a custom cocktail menu, and we enjoyed a fun happy hour on the patio of our newest building as the event began, with **Anne and Ben Eilerman** bartending. With a lot of work by our team, and led by **Meridith**, we created a prayer walk that included stops at 1801 Mills Ave (our new apartment building), Azalea Montessori, Virginia Coffey Place and the nature play space.

The theme of the tour was from Psalm 116, "How can I repay the Lord for all God's goodness to me" and we did a call and response prayer at each tour stop. Board members served as tour guides and staff members led participants in reflections and activities. **Ebony**, our new nonprofit fellow, coordinated volunteers and many moving pieces. Neighborhood tweens and teens **Annie and Sam Eilerman, Riley Jo Hanauer, Lucinda Thompson, Kenna Scott, Junia and Delphine Allan, Evelyn Horner** and **Karis Stoxen** worked as servers with support from the **Mercy Volunteer House**.

After the tour we all convened on the plaza in front of Vineyard Central Church and shared a lovely meal with contributions from **Norwood's parish farmers, Deeper Roots Coffee** and **The Governor Diner** in Milford. Taylor Hand decorated our tables with lovely flower bouquets made from neighborhood flowers. We honored our departing board president **Calista Smith** with a special badge and napkin ring, both Lydia's House traditions. The weather was a perfect September 70 degrees and in between talks we were serenaded by a small group of the choir from **Cincinnati Conservatory of Music**. Clean up was quick, led by **Josh Stoxen**, the church pastor. Many hands made for a seamless and extravagant evening displaying God's goodness in so many ways. If you attended or donated, thank you so much!

To date we've raised \$75,000 against our original goal of \$50,000! All funds raised at Women for Women will be used to renovate 1801 Mills Avenue into four affordable apartments.





CHEYENNE'S STORY



My story begins with stress, anxiety, and panic attacks.

I was 19 years old, and my baby daughter and I were about to be homeless. My mom — she's not a very good mom — she decided she wanted a game room in the basement and told me I couldn't live there anymore. The first time she'd tried to kick me out was when she found out I was pregnant. The only reason I was able to stay then was because my grandmother told her she had to keep me in the house. But home had never been a place where I felt safe. So, I had been looking for places, but everything was so expensive. I've worked since I was 16. I'm a pharmacy tech now. But my income, it fluctuates, so much that some places wouldn't even accept my application.

Sometimes I would be working a full 40 hours, other times, I would go from like 40 to 12, to 20, back to 40. Even when I was working 40 hours a week, I make \$2,000 a month after taxes, and I still have to pay for food and childcare — childcare is \$1,200 a month. Most places, rent is around \$800 a month. There's no money left for food or

transportation or anything extra so we can have fun, no money for clothes or for shoes. Nothing.

My daughter's father is manipulative and abusive, spending all his money on drugs. His mom, she's nice and has money, but I didn't want him around me or my daughter. Friends offered couches, but how long would a baby and I be welcome in someone else's living room? How safe would that be for either of us? Trapped and panicking in my mom's basement, I realized a homeless shelter might be my only option. Only, the home visitor from Every Child Succeeds explained, it was possible my daughter might be taken away at a shelter. But she offered an alternative: Lydia's House. My daughter and I could stay there together.

I applied and cried and hoped there would be a place for us.

And, thankfully, there was. We came to Lydia's House at the end of February 2021, and it was great. We had a nice room. They had a whole bunch of food there, a whole bunch of cooking stuff, diapers and baby stuff. They helped me apply for food stamps and housing vouchers. That was very nice of them. Meridith is teaching me to drive. Driving is something I've always had a lot of anxiety about, and my mom would just laugh at me or get angry at me. At Lydia's House, no one laughed. They found ways to help.

This spring, we moved into an apartment at the Virginia Coffey Place, where my rent is based on my income. So right now, rent is \$426. This place is really nice. I love this place. This summer, they

partnered with a local farm and they just give us free vegetables. It's great. My daughter loves red peppers. I love making good food for her.

I've cut ties with my family, with my daughter's father. We're alone and that's hard sometimes. I get tired. But we're good. My daughter is a toddler now and whenever she gets challenging, I think how my mother would react and I do the opposite. I love seeing my daughter happy and laughing a lot and learning a lot. She said "bye!" the other day, and it was so clear, oh! It made me so happy. I love going places with her, reading with her. I just love doing everything with her.

I was diagnosed with autism when I was pregnant with my daughter. I wasn't really surprised. I've always had anxiety, depression, trouble dealing with things. But my mom refused to do anything for me growing up, refused to take me to a doctor. Anytime she saw anything wrong with me, she just made fun of me. But when I decided I was going to have my daughter, I said I'm going to raise her better than my mom raised me. I'm going to be there for her. I take my daughter to the doctor. I get all her shots. And I got all my shots. I've been going to therapy, which has been really helpful. And when the doctor said my daughter was a little behind on some developmental stuff, we got her in occupational therapy, too. She's gotten a lot better. She's catching up.

A year ago, I was isolated in an abusive home that didn't want me anymore. Had never really wanted me. My childhood was full of neglect and abuse, and

WELCOME SAVANNAH

Savannah Staten is the new maternal and child health fellow at Lydia's House. The following is her narrative on the decision to take this position and move from her home state of North Carolina to Cincinnati for the two year commitment:

From the outside, being a mother seems like being a superhero. When we think of a mother's love, we imagine a force that can move mountains and save the world. We see mothers go above and beyond for their children. However, we seldom hear about the hardships that accompany motherhood and pregnancy specifically. During my second semester at North Carolina State University, one of my classes allowed me to explore those hardships for black women since they have higher maternal mortality rates than other races. From that point on, I believed becoming an OBGYN was the path I was meant to take.

The saying "We plan, God laughs" truly encapsulates my reality of becoming a doula as a stepping stone to medical school. Before my birth work journey, I believed that the only way I could make impactful change was by being a black female OBGYN—the doula work was not an end but a means to the "real work" of fighting for black women as a physician. Doula work seemed like an obvious but temporary way to merge my passion for women's issues and get experience in a delivery room alongside obstetricians.



My thinking changed once I saw the power in connecting with pregnant people and their families as a trained companion. I was grateful that these families could be vulnerable with me by inviting me into their lives. They were able to share their fears, weaknesses, and questions. I knew that the work of providing a space of vulnerability was as impactful as the medical expertise a doctor could offer. I enjoyed learning about and practicing the benevolence of doula work more

than I enjoyed the biology and chemistry classes I was taking as a pre-med student.

I decided to refocus my career aspirations on how I could serve women in a meaningful way and use my strengths of humility and kindness. While completing my undergraduate degree, I worked as a doula and served low-income individuals by providing free doula services. I also worked as a substance abuse technician for mothers struggling with addiction during this time.

After graduating from NC State, I found this opportunity to become a maternal and child health fellow. It seemed like a match made in heaven. I loved that the team at Lydia's House addressed homelessness for women logistically while simultaneously focusing on hope and healing. I am excited to serve the community created here at Lydia's House and learn even more about serving and advocacy. I look forward to exploring the Cincinnati area and all of its exciting opportunities. I hope to go back to school to get my MPH in Maternal and Child Health following my time at Lydia's House.

even though I loved her from the start, I had to bring my daughter home to that same place. I knew we deserved more than that, but I didn't see a way out. Lydia's House, the Virginia Coffey Place — those were the first steps.

I just passed my driver's test and got my license. That's a measure of independence I never thought I'd have. No one in my family believed

I could pass the test. But Meridith believed I could and helped me do it. When you start to achieve things — leaving home, getting my license, helping my daughter grow and learn — it gets easier to imagine new things you might be able to do. A year from now, I hope to have a car of my own. I hope to have a better job, making more than \$15 an hour with steady hours. I hope my little family, my

daughter and me, will have more loving people around us.

My story began with anxiety and panic, and I don't know where it ends. But it's getting easier to see a path forward.

Special thanks to Hilary Copsey Canan for helping Cheyenne write her story.

A GOOD USE OF TIME?

by Mary Ellen Mitchell, Lydia's House co-director

The Jesuit Catholic Tradition teaches that the more we embrace our humanity with all its limitations, the more our divinity is revealed. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus, both fully God and fully human. This paradox sets the stage for the tyranny of time to be a gift. Perhaps there is nothing more human than the ticking clock; the knowledge that our time on earth will end. Our finite nature seemingly raises the stakes on the choices of each day. It's in these choices, both the mundane and the consequential, that we make a life.

Watching kids grow and change has perhaps been the most fully human and fully divine task of my life. Time is racing by, and this, my 40th year, brought the joyful/sorrowful realization that I don't have any babies at home and won't be having any more. Jacob started Kindergarten and fall brought new family commitments. Both Annie and Sam had nightly sports practices, we caught up on long delayed health and dental checkups, I trained for a 10K, Sam progressed in piano, I joined an Ignatian spirituality small group at church, Annie started youth group, Ben jumped fully into managing the Lower Price Hill affordable housing project, and our family took three big camping trips. At Lydia's House we on boarded new staff, introduced a new paradigm for mentoring two year staff members: "The Fellowship Program," reintroduced in house celebrations and mandatory meals, revamped our annual "Women for Women" fundraiser, continued our capital campaign and the search for contractors to renovate 1801 Mills Ave, and started back Montessori religious education for preschoolers. During the month of September, especially, I was busy and at times overwhelmed. When I collapsed into bed, I'd wonder, "What happened to my time today?"

Many days over the last three months Meridith (the other co-director) and I could be found in our shared office wringing hands, assessing changes that need to be made and programs that have had varied degrees of success. We make notes on giant poster board with headings like "success" or "we'd like to

stop doing." At the heart of these ruminations is "What is a good use of our time and energy?" It's clear to me, nine years into this experiment, that my time can always be filled. What do I do with the freedom that directing an organization allows, the mandates that specific grants put on our operations, and the ever pressing question, "What is best for the families we serve?" At a personal level I often ask what is best for all that I steward, for me, for my family, for the building of God's beloved kin-dom? Although I've asked it again and again, the question of how to use my time always seems new and challenging, even as I realize that my life and this organization and all that seems so pressing is just a tiny blink on a giant radar.

When I arrive at work on any given day the temptation is often to get pulled into the latest crisis or whatever my email or the ringing phone dictates. Our poster-size notes pull me in other directions: do we expand the car program or discontinue it; do we buy more buildings or call it a day on property acquisition; do we put more time into the formation of the fellows or more time into getting our current or former guests into counseling? When we decide to dive deeper, Meridith and I winnow down more. Do we enjoy being landlords? Do we want to do young adult formation? What achievements seem to last with the guests?

As the fall has unfolded more, our collective time is going increasingly in the direction of child enrichment, outings and celebrations. Each Thursday night I'm one of at least five adults facilitating our "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" religious education program for Lydia's House and neighborhood 3-7 year olds. It honestly takes one adult to bring them into the room, one adult to receive them, one adult to help with cutting and gluing, one adult to take out kids who are being disruptive, and one adult to lead the program. Thursday nights, including the meal and aftercare, are an all hands on deck event.

If we consider that the staff of Lydia's House field calls from women living in cars, respond to food insecurity requests, develop housing, accompany





child birth... this program seemingly shouldn't rise to the top to consume many, many hours of staff time. It has, however, because lengthy discernment revealed to us that we care deeply that the kids in our circle be exposed to the life and teaching of Jesus; because we see these very young children genuinely express interest in the divine; because Jesus angrily admonished the disciples when they thought children were a waste of his time (Mark 10:13-16); because we're committed to offering respite care to single moms; because one of our guiding values is beauty and the space and materials and experience are beautiful.

When Meridith and I were in college we were attracted to this quote: "To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." (Cardinal Suhard) As Lydia's House evolves, many of our programs do make sense absent the existence of God. People on both sides of the aisle politically and across the belief spectrum agree that families should have housing, children should not live in cars, and nutritious meals are good. Other pieces of our program, and thus our uses of time, are less compelling through a secular lens.

In the Bible, Jesus tells a story of two sisters: Mary and Martha. While Martha does housework, Mary enjoys the presence of Jesus, who is visiting. When Martha complains about Mary's absence in the kitchen, Jesus tells her Mary chose the better way. Is it important to celebrate every birthday, place rocks with volunteer names at the center of a prayer labyrinth, and take formerly homeless kids fishing? Should we extend staff meeting times by adding a time of lament? Should we gather each week to pray for our guests and share how the work is impacting us personally? Should we put fresh flowers on the table, weed said labyrinth, repaint the colorful chairs in the dining room annually, and change out the art in the bedrooms? Should we spend hours carefully making handmade dioramas of the life of Jesus so children can play with them and sometimes break them? The Martha in me says no. I'm grateful, however, for this scripture story to help us remember that God's

ways are not always efficient, easy to track or even valuable to much of the world.

I imagine if we ever stop asking how our time can be best used, it might mean that this Lydia's House dream is done. If the opportunity cost of time is no longer pressing, if considering what Jesus values (and whether or not we're seeking it) no longer causes us to pause, we might fail to see the Kingdom breaking in. It's not easy to frequently return to the drawing board, or giant butcher paper, but we keep at it. Please pray with us and for us that our time be used well, in collaboration with God and in the living out of our vocations.

Organizationally, we'll be doing more discernment on the bigger questions, but we're currently committed to the following work in addition to providing housing and support services (although some of these things take up a lot of time!):

- Continuing to offer spiritual programming, including family worship services and children's religious education
- Honoring the belovedness of our families, staff and volunteers through celebrating them and their milestones and lifting up their strengths
- Providing hospitality that is both lovely and vulnerable, including keeping our interior spaces and yards well-maintained, accepting hard-to-house families, providing delicious and nutritious meals that are eaten as a community
- Creating community for both current guests and aftercare families including offering parties, events and friendship for all active Lydia's House aftercare families, regardless of the date or duration of their stay
- Communicating honestly with our volunteers, donors and those in power about the needs of our families, the challenges they face, social change opportunities and the brokenness of the world

BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL WOMAN WITH KIDS IS ANOTHER WOMAN

by Meridith Owensby, Lydia's House co-director

Last year's Hulu series *Mrs. America* told the compelling story of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and its opposition. At the heart of this story was Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative mother of six, who organized her newsletter mailing list into a formidable advocacy outfit. Her efforts eventually served to block the passage of the ERA.

One of the less praised successes of the series, however, was the acknowledgement of the existence of help, both in the form of paid staff and family support. For Phyllis to do the necessary writing, meeting, and speaking, she needed to have someone to pick up, watch, and care for her children. She did employ a housekeeper for domestic affairs, but even an abundance of household staff wouldn't have met all of the necessary childcare demands. Enter her unmarried sister-in-law Eleanor, who did considerable unpaid labor to support the charismatic matriarch in her efforts.

These questions of "Who takes care of the kids?" aren't just historical footnotes, however. Take, for example, the effect of the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court in 2020. Mothers in my social circle asked questions about the logistics of her life, all of them centering around the biggest: "How can she and her husband have thriving legal careers while simultaneously parenting seven children?"

It wasn't until weeks after the nomination that a mention came in the press of how they did it: Coney Barrett had, in an older interview, credited her husband's aunt for providing sixteen years of

"consistent childcare in the home." Having another adult in the mix does not negate that Coney Barrett has worked hard and has incredible self-discipline. It does affirm, however, that women who reach great public heights often do so with the support of other women, women who are not the parents of their children.

In my work with mothers in poverty, there are many things that money can help with: Better cars, better housing, more reliable food and clothing, better day care centers. What is inevitably missing, however, is the support of other women. Within impoverished communities are few aunts who have enough leisure to step out of professional life. Grandmothers, often in their 40s, are still working to support themselves. Sisters are also looking to work their way out of poverty, and caring for their nieces and nephews is not high on the list of ways to get ahead financially.

So, what happens when a child becomes ill? The Covid 19 pandemic highlights the need for care beyond formal child care centers, so much so that outlets like the New York Times regularly pen exposes on the economic and emotional losses of mother's due to the childcare crisis of the last two years. The Columbia School of public health declared the inability to get childcare a "threat to our nation." Just search "child care crisis" and pages of recently written articles will appear on your screen! What's new here is that women across the class and marriage status spectrum are deeply impacted. They've learned what poor single mothers have always known: work doesn't work without a robust series of backup plans. Daycares and schools understandably won't take children who have a fever or other persistent symptoms, so it's the mom who likely ends up missing work. It's also the mom who will lose her job once this happens often enough (and the average child contracts ten childhood illnesses in his/her first year of daycare, so good luck with those odds, even in times that aren't a pandemic).

For single moms with no family or friend support, I fully expect them to lose as many jobs as they obtain. I've seen it as one of the most predictable trends in the nine years I've run a shelter for single mothers. As unemployment regulations relaxed



and stimulus payments flowed over the last year, we told many women, “don’t try to work, it’s just not worth trying.” For those with no spouse or permanent help, this is typically true until their kids are old enough to stay home independently while sick, regardless of what’s happening with global public health. Perhaps a woman will get lucky and her sister/neighbor can watch her child once or twice, but this volunteer also cannot step away from work until the illness has run its course, to say nothing of the next illness in the lineup, quarantines, testing, and the like.

Notable in this discussion is the fact that no men are mentioned. I’m sure there are men in the larger society who would voluntarily watch children they did not father or grandfather, but I don’t know any of them. If there were more uncles and brothers and male neighbors and friends in the mix doing childcare for free, I’d rejoice.

But until that day, women who come from families in poverty, lack a reliable partner or robust social network, and are parenting will not thrive professionally. They will be considered unreliable employees, and they will be. Their biggest job is caring for their children, the job they must do 24/7 in some capacity. If their child is ill there is no easy way to obtain emergency childcare, whatever the amount of money they can pay (and for our guests that’s very little).

Eight years ago Sheryl Sandberg famously pinned “Lean In,” encouraging women to be fully present to work. Backlash ensued. I think it’s fair to say the language has changed from “Lean In” to “Just try to show up” as 1.6 million women left the labor force between March and September of 2020. Op-eds across the media spectrum are demanding cheaper and more available childcare centers, and President Biden is attempting to send money that way. What I want to communicate, however, is that **money alone won’t fix this**. We have to support each other, in informal networks of friends and



family, if we want to see the bright, young mothers among us succeed. Women are more than capable with the right support. If you want to see women flourish professionally, or single moms work at all, tell your favorite mother that you will babysit in times of crisis or childcare failure, no strings attached. Do a great job at it. You’ll be amazed at what heights she’s able to achieve when she’s got your unfailing support at her back.

If you’d like to help Lydia’s House moms with respite care and emergency childcare, please contact our respite care partner, Safe Families for Children. Their website is <https://cincinnati.safe-families.org/>. We’ve relied on Safe Families to support single moms in our circle for many years and they’re a great resource.

THANK YOU

Through the Lydia’s House journey Ben and Mary Ellen have spent many nights and weekends running events, renovating properties and responding to crises. Thank you so much to the many childcare providers who’ve helped with Annie, Sam and Jacob, especially Ben’s parents Tony and Diane Eilerman and his sister Molly. Also involved have been a whole crew of Xavier students, the staff and interns of Lydia’s House, Mischell Woodson-Levy (pandemic babysitter extraordinaire), Eliza Bruner, Debbie Strickland, the staff of Azalea Montessori, Norwood’s Avenues for Success aftercare program and a whole slew of childcare swaps with other moms of young kids. Wow. It takes a village and we’ve had one!

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WE NEED A VEHICLE

Lydia's House is growing and we're in need of another vehicle. If you have a sedan or mini van in great condition that you'd be willing to donate we're anxious to accept. We need this vehicle to transport families to appointments primarily, so a four door is ideal. Contact maryellen@stlydiashouse.org if you have any questions or a vehicle to donate!