

# Pushing Higher News from the Carole Robertson Center for Learning

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, the Carole Robertson Center for Learning has been engaged in an executive succession planning process for much of the past two years. This process is now complete. We are pleased to share with you that we will complete our leadership transition this month, with our current Chief Executive Officer, Gail Nelson, taking a new position at the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. Please join us and everyone at the Carole Robertson Center in congratulating Gail as she moves forward to this new phase in her career. We are thrilled to know that Gail will continue her work strengthening families in Illinois.

Gail served the Center for 32 years, and as our executive leader for nearly 25 of those years. During her tenure, she led the agency in expanding program scope, improving quality standards, and strengthening partnerships in the community – all during periods of enormous change. She led the agency as it grew from one site to three, and from a budget of \$400,000 to more than \$10 million. During this expansion, Gail led the way for rising standards of quality and professionalism. While always keeping her feet on the ground in the community, Gail took leadership in citywide, statewide and national efforts, always with the goal of better serving children and families. Her shoes are hard to fill. She leaves a legacy of leaders with a variety of skills and experience who are committed to filling those shoes.

Volunteerism and the spirit of giving is stronger than ever at the Carole Robertson Center. This summer a variety of organizations have donated their time and resources providing a helping hand in classrooms, assisting with events and providing families opportunities to enjoy the city's cultural offerings. You can read about these and other volunteer undertakings in our 14 Programs, 1 Mission section devoted to volunteerism. With change in the air, the Carole Robertson Center is meditating on the past. This year is a Rededication year marking the 50th Anniversary of the tragic church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama that took the lives of four little girls, one of whom was our namesake, Carole Robertson. Every five years we rededicate ourselves to our mission in their memory. This year, we are pausing to reflect on the many changes the nation and our community has undergone in the last 50 years. Who knows what the next 50 years may bring?

From many hearts, many thanks!



Cerathel Burnett  
Executive Director



Dave Robertson  
President, Board of Directors

## WHAT'S INSIDE



Volunteers visit (pg. 3)

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The Carole Robertson Center for Learning is dedicated to nurturing, supporting, and strengthening family life through quality child, youth, and family development programs.

For more information, go to [www.crcl.net](http://www.crcl.net)

# Pushing Higher Still

## From Many Hearts, Many Thanks

Gail Nelson first came to the Carole Robertson Center for Learning 32 years ago, back when the agency served 75 school age children with a mostly part-time staff of 11. She fell in love with the agency's mission, its parent governance structure, its inclusiveness, its culture of teaching itself and learning together, and its vision set forth as follows: We see ourselves as a community of children and adults who foster our differences, cultural as well as personal, and work together. Gail began work at the Center as Assistant Director, becoming Executive Director in 1988, a role she filled for 25 years.

With a focus on community development, the Carole Robertson Center changed over time to meet the needs of the communities it serves, growing in depth as well as scope. Gail is able to look back on example upon example of this continued self-improvement and growth in the service of families. "Building and professionalizing a culturally competent, homegrown workforce. Maintaining a vibrant and real constituent-led agency. Promoting workforce development from within. Growing from the level of community need up."

Leading the development of two new family resource centers was one of Gail's largest accomplishments. The Center first expanded from its

original site at Roosevelt Road in 1989 with the addition of preschool programming at a new site on 19th Street. That site continued to add programs and services. With the addition of two new family resource centers in 2000 and 2001, the agency grew into a multi-service one-stop shop. The Center was able to serve children as young as six weeks old and introduce adult education. "It's a life cycle kind of place," Gail explained. As she has done throughout her career at the Carole Robertson Center, Gail continues to share her success. "The accomplishments of the past 32 years are not mine to claim. They were the work of everyone who believes in our little engine that could. We did it together."

Successes were accompanied by challenges. There never seemed to be enough money to do all the work that is needed. Building a professional administrative infrastructure was necessary to support complex and sustainable program models that meet the needs of real families. Life became more difficult for families served by the Center. "The nature of work and opportunities are so different today," said Gail. "Families are working so much harder to accomplish what they need to accomplish." With families facing more challenges every day, it is of note that the Center is at the

forefront of best practices while remaining deeply entrenched in the community.

What about the next 32 years? Gail sees the Carole Robertson Center as a place where everyone, from children to board members, is always learning, always ready to meet the next challenge, and a place where people can re-engineer themselves and continue to grow. She can't foresee the Carole Robertson Center's next 32 years. As she points out, 32 years ago no one could have foreseen where the Center is today. Her hope is that the Carole Robertson Center will, "continue to innovate, continue to be an active collaborator and advocate, continue to listen, and continue to inform the present with a strong sense of history and a moral obligation to conduct its work in ways that honor the legacy of Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair." Gail hopes that the Carole Robertson Center for Learning will "continue to work to make the world our children inherit a more just and peaceful place." All of us at the Carole Robertson Center know that Gail will be doing the same as she transitions to her new position with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. We thank Gail for her many years of service and wish her only the very best!

**32 Years Ago...** **1984:** The Family Support Program is established. **1985:** The Youth Alternatives Program is established. **1989:** The Center expands to 2929 West 19th Street and opens an Early Childhood Education Program. **1991:** Head Start is first offered. **1998:** Family Child Care Home Network begins offering 0-5 home-based care. **1998:** Workforce program Project HOPE introduced for parents transitioning from welfare to work. **2000:** Infant Toddler Development Program opens. **2001:** Site at 3701 West Ogden Avenue opens with 0-5 and school age programs. **2002:** Community Partners Program established. **2003:** The Center is named one of 21 exemplary early care and education programs in the nation. **2004:** 2020 West Roosevelt site earns NAEYC accreditation. **2005:** 2929 West 19th Street site earns NAEYC accreditation. **2006:** The Center celebrates the 30th anniversary of its founding. **2007:** The Center launches the Parent-Child Home Program. **2009:** The Center enters the pilot phase of the Bilingual Immersion Project. **2009:** 3701 West Ogden Avenue site earns NAEYC accreditation. **2010:** The Home-Based Early Head Start Program is launched. **2010:** Parent-Child Home Program earns certification as a national replication site. **2013:** Bilingual Immersion Project reaches full implementation.

# 14 programs

# 1 mission

## Volunteerism & Community Outreach

*14 Programs, 1 Mission is an ongoing feature that will showcase the Carole Robertson Center's many programs and services – from family literacy development to bilingual immersion and social services. Every facet of the Center provides a different way through which the agency nurtures, supports, and strengthens family life.*

The Carole Robertson Center for

Learning has a robust and multi-faceted formalized volunteer program, serving everyone from individual volunteers who donate their time on a regular, often weekly, basis to groups of corporate volunteers who donate a portion of their day to carry out major projects at the Center. For more information on volunteer opportunities, please contact Linda Macias at [maciaslin@crcl.net](mailto:maciaslin@crcl.net).



### Nurture...

In late June, 18 choral apprentices and a string quartet, with conductor Christopher Bell from the **Grant Park Musical Festival**, performed in an hour-long concert for children and parents at the Carole Robertson Center's 19th Street site. The program consisted of classical music from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and was educational as well as

entertaining, with Mr. Bell and the performers explaining each piece to the children and setting the stage for what they were about to hear. Volunteers share their skills and interests with Carole Robertson Center families on a regular basis, exposing children to new ideas, as well as nurturing the interests they may already have. **Ravinia Festival** donated tickets and families attended a

concert by Los Lobos and Los Lonely Boys. **The Chicago Sky** invited parents to attend a basketball game, and provided buses: not only an opportunity for an evening of fun, but also a chance to take part in a new experience. Repeat donations carry these nascent interests forward and support children as they embark on a new phase of learning.

### Support...

Two organizations with a focus on healthy eating visited the Carole Robertson Center this summer. **Plum Organics** takes aim at food insecurity and food deserts by providing nutritional "Super Smoothies," a blend of organic fruit, veggies, and grains and designed in collaboration with non-

profit anti-hunger organizations. Plum Organics came to the Center with a donation of 3,000 Super Smoothie pouches, and representatives went on a tour of the agency. **Fresh Moves**, an organization operating a mobile produce store serving communities with food deserts, also visited the

Center. Staff, children, and parents toured the mobile store and took part in a range of educational health activities with Fresh Moves staff. Many thanks to Plum Organics and Fresh Moves for sharing their resources and expertise with the Carole Robertson Center for Learning.

### Strengthen...

**Meeting Professionals International** (MPI) is a group that has been sharing their expertise and working behind the scenes with Center staff to develop new special events and marketing strategies. Members of MPI first came to the Carole Robertson Center as volunteers; their interest in strengthening the work of the Center began with one-on-one

interactions with children. Since their first exposure to the Center, MPI has volunteered countless hours, working with the Resource Development team to strengthen the the Center's fundraising strategy. Even as a group works behind the scenes, volunteers from MPI will continue to take part in direct service activities, assisting with

the infant and toddler carnival and organizing a mentorship program for older school age children and youth. MPI is committed to strengthening the work of the Carole Robertson Center, and the Center is incredibly grateful to have such dedicated partners on board. We look forward to working with MPI over the next year.

## 50 Years Ago...



50 years ago on September 15th, four girls – **Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair** – were killed when a bomb exploded at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Every five years, to commemorate the anniversary of the bombing, the Carole Robertson Center for Learning holds a **Rededication** ceremony. Using a Litany written by Mrs. Alpha Robertson, Carole's mother, the Center's community rededicates its mission and services in honor of the girls.

Save the date! This year's special 50th Year Anniversary Rededication ceremony will take place on

**Thursday, September 19th, at 6:30 at St. Ignatius College Prep.**

Please contact Wendy Mitchell Gill at [mitchellw@crcl.net](mailto:mitchellw@crcl.net) for more information.



Community Partner

Todos las publicaciones del Centro para el Aprendizaje Carole Robertson están disponibles en Español. Si a usted quisiera recibir una copia de este boletín en Español, por favor lláme (312) 243-7300.

All publications of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning are available in Spanish. If you would like to receive a copy of this newsletter in Spanish please call Linda at (312) 243-7300.

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