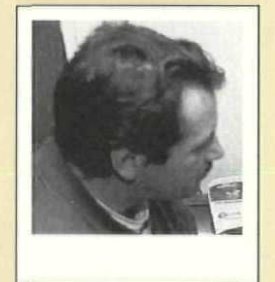




A Commitment to Community



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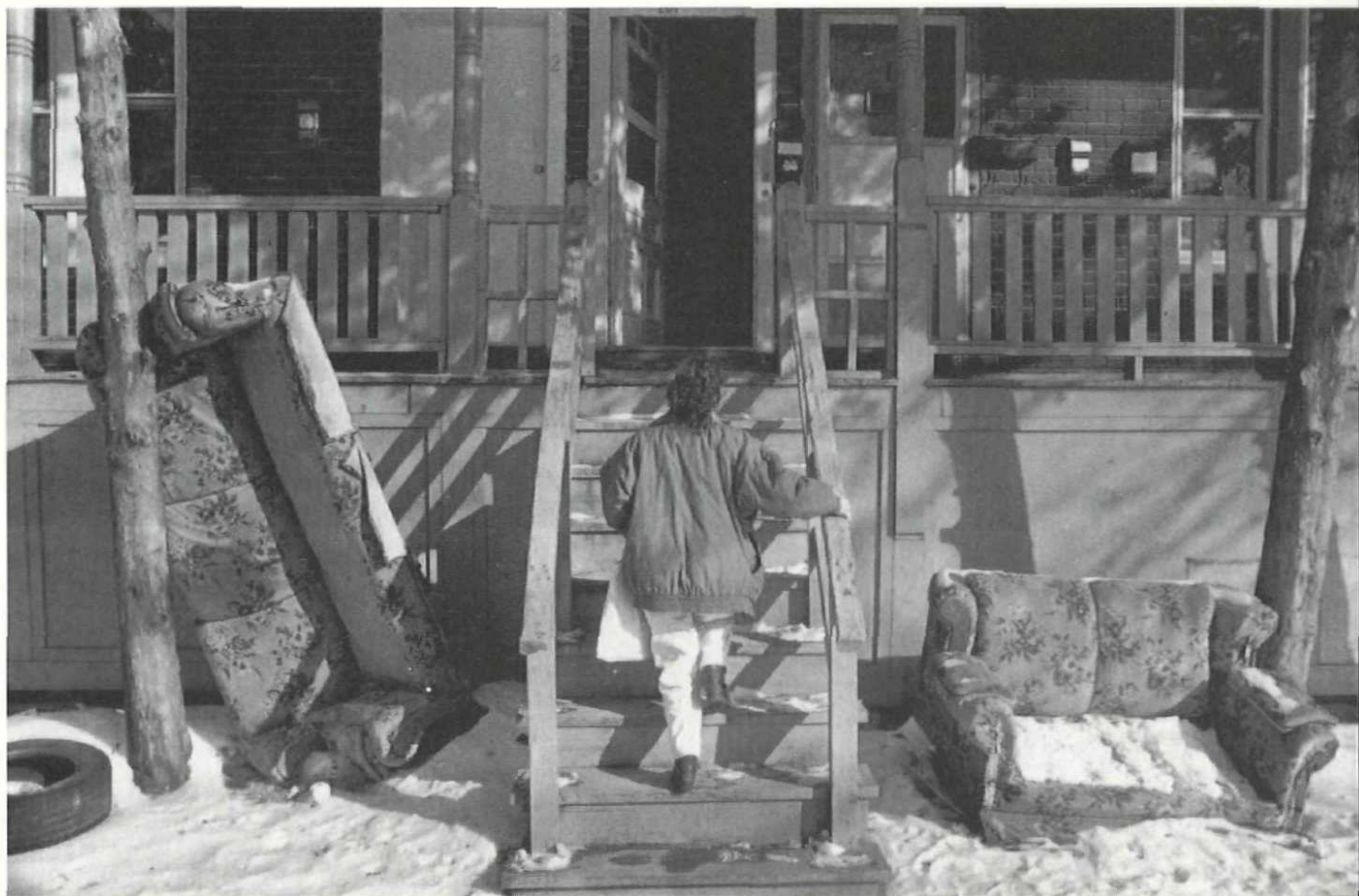


A Home-based Program Teaches Positive Parenting Skills

Some parents have not had the training or positive role models to help them raise their children in a nurturing manner. Many single parents especially lack the support they need to feel confident about child rearing. These parents' children are at risk for neglect and even abuse.



Milly Velez



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN MURRAY

Marisol, a single mother of six, is one such parent being helped by the Parent Aide Project, a free service offered by Waterbury, CT-based St. Mary's Hospital's Pediatric Ambulatory Care Center and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. As Parent Aide Milly Velez steps up to Marisol's home (above), the crisp, clear March weather presents a stark contrast to the neglected, crime-ridden neighborhood, a place where

even neighbors can be adversaries. Marisol is unsure how to meet the special needs of her seven-year-old daughter, who has a learning disability. She is also disturbed by her neighbors calling the girl retarded. Milly's role is to help Marisol come to terms with her daughter's problem by explaining what the disability is and by teaching Marisol how to respond to her neighbors' taunts about the girl.

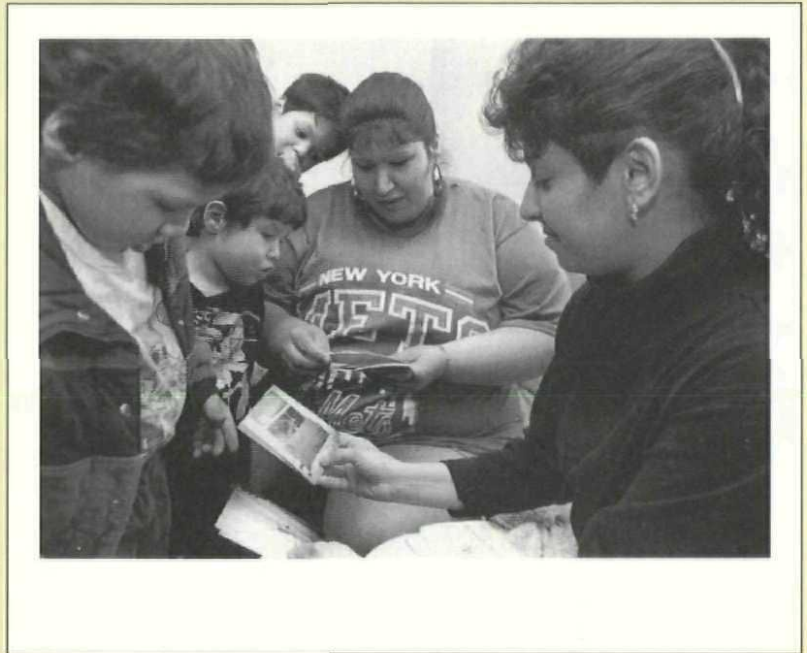
Since the Parent Aide Project was launched



Parent Aide Milly Velez helps six-year-old Miguel with his homework because his mother, Marisol, speaks no English. Milly is encouraging Marisol to take an English-as-a-second-language course and to establish morning and evening routines so that the family's environment is less chaotic.



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For them to feel comfortable working with parent aides, clients must first learn to trust the aides. Such feelings are evident as four-year-old Alvaro (left); three-year-

old Xavier; six-year-old Miguel; and their mother, Marisol, share family photographs with Parent Aide Milly Velez (right).

in 1977, parent aides have visited homes to help parents learn positive parenting skills and improve their children's quality of life. The program also helps parents by raising their self-esteem, according to Project Coordinator Kathy LeBlanc. She said parents frequently tell her that the Parent Aide Project "makes me feel important, like someone cares."

When parents are unsure of appropriate responses to their children's behavior, parent

aides discuss the positive options with them instead of telling them what to do. Many parents tell LeBlanc, "Everyone tells me not to hit my child, but only the parent aides suggest positive things I *can* do."

In addition to home visits, the Parent Aide Project presents educational sessions at the hospital on topics such as budgeting, communication, and discipline. But, as this photo essay shows, the heart of the program is in the home.



Marti Child

After a treatment with a nebulizer, three-month-old LaShauna, who has asthma, is comforted by Parent Aide Marti Child (right). LaShauna lives with her mother, Ruth (center); her father; and her two-year-old brother, Devon (left). Marti discusses child-care issues with Ruth, such as how to protect her family in their drug-infested neighborhood. With Marti's guidance and reinforcement, Ruth is practicing more appropriate child-rearing skills. As a result, Devon, who also attends an Easter Seals educational program, is showing an improvement in his behavior.



Ten-year-old Kim discusses her day at school with her mother, Lynn (left), and Parent Aide Barbara Belval. Kim needs special attention because of a seizure disorder. Barbara helps Kim feel good about herself and encourages her to be open with her mother. Barbara also encourages Lynn to give Kim positive attention and to get involved in her church, counseling, and a support group to help her cope with the stresses she faces.





Barbara Belval



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Janice (right) reviews the homework of her six-year-old niece, Patricia, as Parent Aide Barbara Belval looks on. Janice, who has legal custody of Patricia and her older brother and sister, asked the Parent Aide Project for help in adjusting to having three young children in her

home. She needed to learn about age-appropriate behaviors, how to establish a schedule, and how to help the children adjust to their new living arrangement. Barbara is helping Janice learn to take care of herself, as well as her family members.

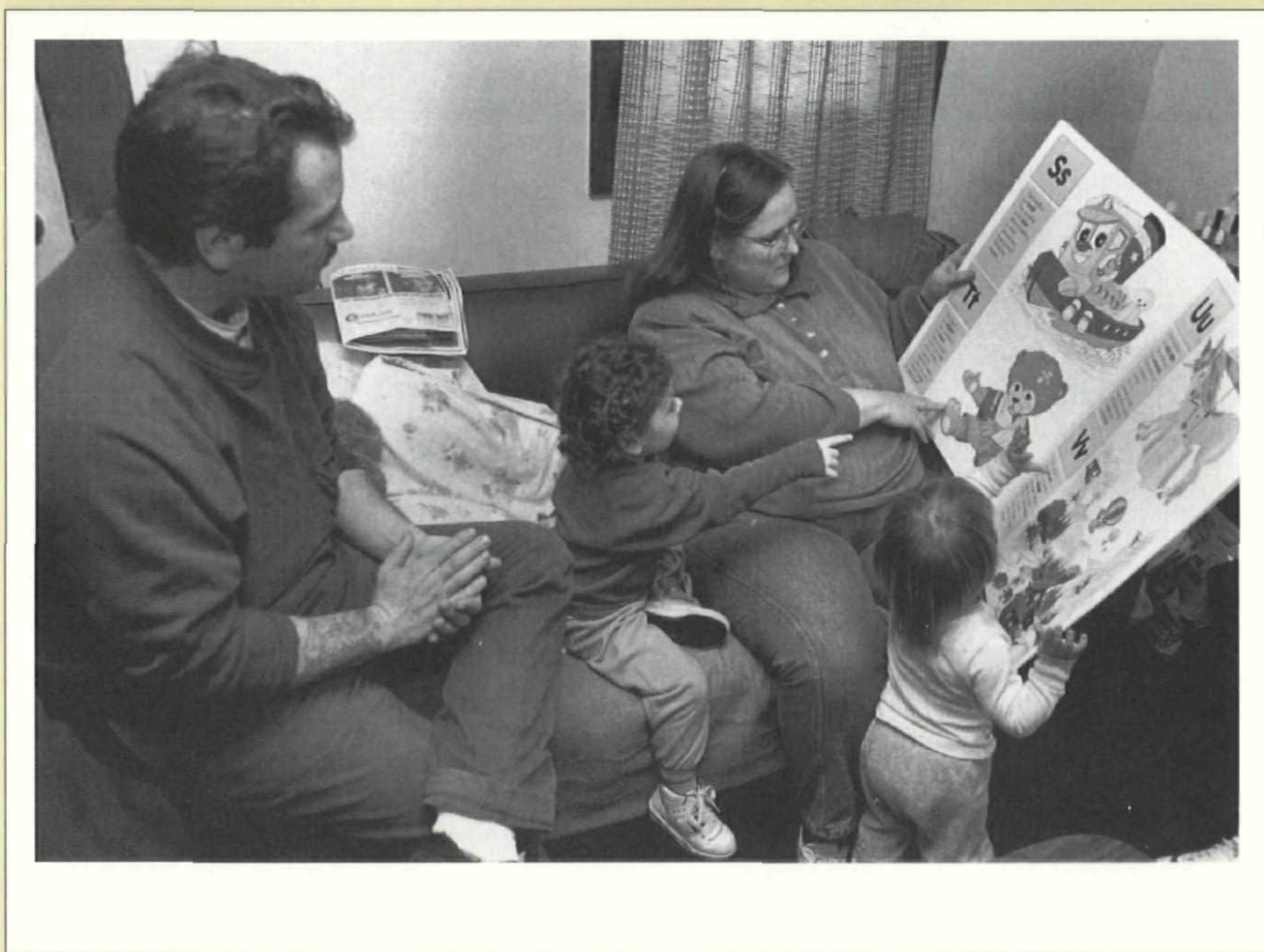




Marti Child

Tom, who recently reunited with his family, is learning appropriate methods of discipline and how to relate to his daughters, three-year-old Sarah and two-year-old Cheri. Parent Aide Marti Child (right) helps Tom focus on his role in the household. Marti helped Carla, the girls' mother, prepare physi-

cally and emotionally for their return home after a year in foster care. Marti worked with Carla on establishing a child-care schedule, getting to know her daughters again, and setting realistic expectations for herself and her children. Marti says Carla has improved in all these areas.





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Parent aides meet for an hour each morning to complete paperwork, discuss cases, and provide emotional support. An important aspect of the job is helping one another through difficult situations. Each parent aide keeps a daily journal and meets individually with Project Coordinator Kathy LeBlanc a half-hour each week.

St. Mary's Hospital launched Connecticut's first Parent Aide Project in 1977. The state now has 22 such programs. The Parent Aide Project staff (left to right): Intake Parent Aide Kathy Cannavaro; Coordinator Kathy LeBlanc; and Parent Aides Marti Child, Sally Ward, Milly Velez, Debbie Nabozny, and Barbara Belval.

