

UCOM's Homework House™ Celebrates 25 Years of Service

Twenty-five years ago Homework House™ was born, having gestated for some time in the hearts and minds of several leaders within the United Church of Christ. Among those forward-thinking people was Betsy Dole, a highly respected community leader, who became the founding president of United Church Outreach Ministry (UCOM). Betsy longed to see relationships develop between the people of the Roosevelt Park neighborhood in southwest Grand Rapids, her neighbors in East Grand Rapids and around the city.

In Betsy's words, "It was twenty-five years ago that UCOM started Homework House, an after school tutoring program for children at Hall Elementary School. While the old Hall School no longer exists, a beautiful new Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School has been built on the same site; and while the Homework House program has expanded to include Southwest Community Campus, the need for Homework House remains just as great as ever."

Homework House™ has certainly morphed over the past twenty-five years, seeking to be sensitive to the changing needs of the children and the schools with which it works. The core of the program which centers on improving reading and language skills has remained the same, an indicator that the program is just as important to students today as it was at its inception. According to Steffanie Rosalez, Recreation Reaps Rewards Site Manager at Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School, "Homework House is an amazing program that is so necessary for the kids at our school. Many of them speak English as a second language and their parents are unable to help them with their reading and literacy. Kids crave one-on-one attention and they also need it academically and that is exactly what they get during Homework House. Kids love building relationships with their tutors and I think it also benefits the college students, giving them experience in their field in a real life setting."

"Dr. Jessica Cruz...has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?", says the one time fourth grader from Hall Elementary School. It doesn't seem possible that it was only a few years ago that Jessica cried all day her first day in second grade. Jessica had just moved to this country and she spoke no English. Still, she was responsible for doing homework and participating in class at Hall Elementary School (now Cesar E. Chavez Elementary). Fortunately, on her second day of school, Jessica met her Homework House™ tutor, a college student who spoke a little Spanish. The two became friendly and Jessica learned fast. She participated in Homework House™ at every opportunity through sixth grade and then she volunteered to tutor younger students. Jessica went on to complete a master's degree in public administration from Grand Valley State University and is now in a program that will culminate in a Doctor of Education degree from Columbia University.

The key ingredient in twenty-five years of successful experience between children and tutors is also the secret of UCOM's quality service to the community. The key is in building relationships and utilizing those human connections to the advantage of everyone involved. Triple R is appreciative for the services that UCOM's Homework House™ provides and for the dedicated volunteers who improve the lives of our program participants everyday.



Charity sees the need, not the cause.

—German Proverb