



# ALMOST HOME, INC. *THE ADVOCATE*

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SERVING THE GREATER ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY SINCE 1993

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[www.almosthomestl.org](http://www.almosthomestl.org)

## *ALMOST HOME MEMBER: ONE YEAR, MANY LESSONS*

*by Annie Furey, volunteer*

“Come on, Adrian! You can do it!” I encouraged him as he took his first steps, and was there to catch him the moment he fell. Adrian, only a year old, has become the light of my world. Marisse, Adrian’s sixteen-year-old mother, and he live at Almost Home. I have volunteered my Thursday nights at Almost Home for over a year. I have seen mothers and their children come and go, but I have seen Adrian grow up before my eyes.

What could I possibly learn from a little boy who cannot even form a whole sentence? He has shown me the true meaning of the phrase “actions speak louder than words.” Nowhere else would I rather be than in that little boy’s arms as he hugs me at 7:00pm when I walk through the front door. He does not know my name, and cannot say that he loves me. Still, the smile made of only a few teeth and a hug from his little arms tells me exactly what he feels. I think of the hundreds of times that I cannot find words to tell someone how I feel about them. Adrian has shown me that showing love means more than the words we express of love.

For an hour and a half, I, along with fifteen toddlers and babies, head down to the play room while the mothers attend classes. I play the handmaiden of several three-year-old girls who each believes they are the “queen-bee,” while refereeing the boys who horse around on the couch. Just as I feel I cannot change one more dirty diaper, I see Adrian in the corner. He sits there smiling, while making sounds for his fire truck. While the other children fight for toys with shiny buttons and loud noises, Adrian has no desire to find anything better. This little boy – taking pride in what he has, rather than worrying about how he can get the best or whatever everyone else wants – speaks loudly to me. I always try to strategize to stand above the rest. While Adrian takes pride in where he stands, I see that trying to get ahead just moves you past what you need to see.

Adrian spends most of his time in day care while his mom attends class. She hopes to one day work in a hospital as a nurse. She wants to help new mothers just as the nurses helped her. At the end of the day, Marisse and Adrian hardly separate for more than a minute before Adrian falls asleep. Neither of the two takes any relationship for granted. One completes the other. Together, they make a team. I have come to find that as part of a team, doing anything is made all the more worthwhile.

Adrian will always live in my heart, even after he and his mother move out of the house. In my mind, Adrian will always live as one of the greatest influences of my life. Every day, I strive to treat my world as Adrian treats his – with love and compassion. Alone, I may not have the power to accomplish everything; but as part of a great team, I can go the distance. I have worked hard to get where I am today and I cannot take anything for granted; that includes the people in my life. I have to take time to thank them all and tell them how much they mean to me. Adrian may only have one year’s experience on this earth, but he has taught me so many lessons. I am forever grateful for his presence in my life.

As he waves goodbye, I walk out the double doors to the dark street. The clock reads 8:30pm. I will return to my hectic world of school, work and a seemingly uneventful social life. The countdown begins again, only seven days left until I return to my haven and play with the drooling little boy that I call the greatest influence of my life.

NOTE: THE NAMES OF MEMBERS THROUGHOUT THIS NEWSLETTER HAVE BEEN CHANGED, TO PROTECT THEIR PRIVACY.

## *ALMOST HOME, INC.*

*Transitional Housing  
for Homeless Teenage Mothers  
and their Children*

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*Case Manager*

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Pam Williams  
*Lead House Parent*

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*Mission and Volunteer Coordinator*

Kate Booth  
*Director of Development and PR*

Doug Elden  
*Accountant*

Shelley Higginbottom  
*Administrative Assistant*



#### *PHOTOS:*

*(above) Mothers and children at the Annual Halloween party.*

*(below) Members receive special commendations for achievement at the Holiday Party.*



### *PRAYER*

Father, Mother, God,  
Thank you for your presence  
during the hard and mean days.  
For then we have you to lean upon.

Thank you for your presence  
during the bright and sunny days,  
for then we can share that which we have  
with those who have less.

And thank you for your presence  
during the Holy Days, for then we are able  
to celebrate you and our families  
and our friends.

For those who have no voice,  
we ask you to speak.

For those who feel unworthy,  
we ask you to pour your love out  
in waterfalls of tenderness.

For those who live in pain,  
we ask you to bathe them  
in the river of your healing.

For those who are lonely, we ask  
you to keep them company.

For those who are depressed,  
we ask you to shower upon them  
the light of hope.

Dear Creator, You, the borderless  
sea of substance, we ask you to give to all the  
world that which we need most – Peace.

*~ Maya Angelou, December 25, 2005*

## *“INTRODUCING...”*

### *SPOTLIGHT ON ALMOST HOME STAFF*

Pam Williams is one of Almost Home’s House Parents, who provide around-the-clock care for our resident teenage mothers and their children. Pam is our evening Lead House Parent, supervising our Members after school, during dinner and life skills classes and at bedtime. She began at Almost Home as a weekend House Parent in 1998, and she was promoted to full-time Lead House Parent in 2001. Before beginning this new position, she worked for seven years at Catholic Charities as a Case Worker.

As the single mother of three daughters and the grandmother of four, Pam has first-hand experience with babies and teenage girls. She says that while she had family support when raising her children, the Members at Almost Home inspire and teach her through their achievements. “It’s good to see former Members out in the world, when I’m with my family. They come over and smile at my kids or grandkids, saying ‘Miss Pam is alright with us’ and talk a long time.”

Bubbling with energy, Pam is our unofficial “Mistress of Ceremonies” for holiday parties. She keeps the celebrations flowing and the mothers and children involved. According to Program Manager Olabisi Solar, “Pam is outgoing and works hard to organize special celebrations for our Members, including Black History Month and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. She comes up with ideas to make our festivities more enjoyable!”

Pam tries to go karaoke-singing at least every other week and enjoys sitting in with her cousin, jazz pianist Ptah Williams, on Wednesdays at Riddle’s Penultimate in the Delmar Loop. She was also a ballet and modern dance teacher in Detroit for 14 years. In her free time, Pam loves to spend time with her family and to travel, especially to her vacation home in rural Missouri. She also shares her home with her beloved pets, Chubby the German Shepherd dog and Champagne the parakeet. She says, “Every time I leave for the day, I feel I’ve done something to help someone and done something I can put my heart into. Not everyone can do this kind of job – you have to come here and put your all into it!” Staff members like Pam make Almost Home into a caring home for our young families.



*Pam Williams, Lead House Parent  
(in her Halloween cat costume)*

*Annie Furey, Almost Home volunteer*



### *ALMOST HOME’S VALUABLE VOLUNTEER*

Volunteers play a big role at Almost Home, as they assist the staff in carrying on our mission. Some volunteers serve as Board members, on various fundraising event committees, as life skills teachers, child caregivers or organizing supplies.

Annie Furey, a senior at Cor Jesu Academy, has volunteered over 50 hours as an evening babysitter at Almost Home since November 2004. She credits her friend and co-volunteer, Emily Griffard, as well as Sr. Sara Schnurbusch with her involvement: “Sr. Sara came to my school and talked about Almost Home. Something set me off about the program right away and I knew this was where I had to be!”

Annie helps our program in other ways, too. This past Christmas, she organized her youth group at Mary Queen of Peace church to sponsor a gift drive for our mothers and children.

The middle of five children, Annie is familiar with a big crowd of kids. She says, “Some of the moms I’ve known since I started. The hardest part is when they leave. I’ve seen some of the kids go from crawling to walking and saying their first words. I tell stories about the kids who’ve come and gone. I even have their birthdays written down in my planner!”

She will start her freshman year at Mizzou in the fall and wants to major in social work, with a dream of one day opening a facility similar to Almost Home. She looks forward to volunteering here during her college breaks. “All week, all I think about is Thursday nights. It’s so much a part of my life!”

If you may be interested in becoming a volunteer, please contact Sr. Sara Schnurbusch at (314) 771-4663, ext. 7. We are always looking for caring people to become involved with our mission and ministry.

## *EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER*

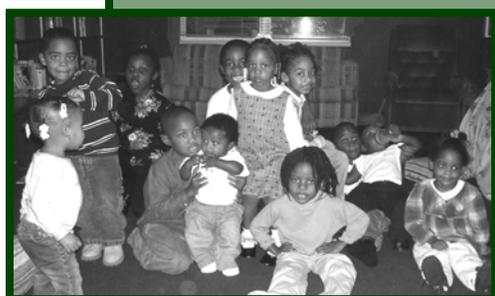
Greetings from everyone at Almost Home! I am always thrilled by the love people have for our Members, but this Christmastime it was especially abundant. The outpouring from the community of presents, everyday items and financial support has been truly touching. We work to give our Members a home, educational assistance and counseling; underpinning all that is their need to feel hope and self-respect, to believe that they can make a better life because they are worthy of it.

The community's involvement underscores our teaching and motivation – our Members see, not just the staff who they know, but that hundreds of people believe in them and are cheering them along as they learn to become independent and responsible.

All of us are excited by the possibilities in this new year. New relationships, new plans and new lives to touch and help – there is so much to look forward to! I'm proud to be a part of Almost Home, and I hope you'll be with us in 2006!

Bless you and your family.

Sheroo Mukhtiar, MSW  
Executive Director



### **PHOTOS:**

#### ***ROW 1 (L to R):***

- Marisse and her son Adrian with a new fringed fleece blanket.
- Born December 29, 2005, Shenetta Joti is the newest addition to the Almost Home family.
- Executive Director Sheroo Mukhtiar with her daughter Zohra and Members DeShawn and Shandi at the Holiday Party.

#### ***ROW 2 (L to R):***

- Children from both the Almost Home transitional housing and apartments, after the annual Thanksgiving dinner.
- Volunteers from the Beta Sigma Phi sorority brought in small Christmas trees and helped our Members decorate them.
- Volunteers from the Wholly Dividends Investment Club taught Members to make fringed fleece blankets and painted picture frames.

#### ***ROW 3 (L to R):***

- Mothers and children enjoyed a daytrip to the Magic House.
- Quito, dressed up as a giraffe for the Halloween party.

## *SPECIAL EVENTS AT ALMOST HOME*

### *Trivia Night*

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Trivia Night was held at the Kirkwood Community Center on Saturday, October 22, 2005. The combination Trivia Night/Costume Party was a big hit, as the pictures below show. Chairpersons Dave Freese and Steve Eckert again had some amazing trivia questions and kept the large crowd lively. We had hundreds of Silent Auction items, which ranged from toys and games, to Elvis memorabilia, to a Wagon of Wine, to a weekend stay at the Doubletree hotel.

We raised almost \$10,000 through tickets, auction sales, mulligans and sponsorships. Thanks to our great Committee and to everyone who came!

### *Upcoming Golf Tournament*

Our 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Tournament will be held on Monday, May 22 at the Westborough Country Club. Chairperson Bob Curran has the Committee off to a strong start. Sponsorship packets and invitations will be going out soon. Lunch will be provided before the golfing starts; dinner, a Silent Auction and awards will follow. Be sure to save the date!

*Check in for details on upcoming events at our website, [www.almosthomestl.org](http://www.almosthomestl.org).*



## HOLIDAY IN-KIND GIVING

### WISH LIST

*Minivan or larger passenger van to transport Members and supplies*

*Vacuum cleaner  
Irons*

*Small plastic barrettes  
Baby shampoo  
Baby bath soap  
Baby lotion  
Infant and Toddler Clothing  
Infant and Toddler Pajamas  
Crib sheets  
Baby bath tubs  
Toddler bath tubs  
Diapers, Pull-Ups and Wipes  
Cloth diapers ("burp rags")  
Potty chairs*

*Women's pajamas (S-XXLarge)  
Slippers for moms and children  
Fitted twin bed sheets  
Pillow cases  
Bath towels  
Wash cloths*

*Shampoo for African Americans  
Vaseline  
Bar soap (Dove or Ivory)  
Neosporin  
Women's deodorant  
Tissues (Kleenex and bathroom)*

*Laundry detergent  
Batteries (AA and AAA)  
Single-use disposable cameras  
Birthday wrapping paper  
Back Packs  
School Supplies  
Alarm clocks*

*Gift certificates/cards:*

*Payless Shoes  
Schnucks  
Target  
Walgreens  
Walmart/Sam's Club  
The Magic House  
Chuck E. Cheese  
Zoo Parking  
Ted Drewes  
McDonald's  
Science Center special events*

### SUSTAINING DONORS

Please consider becoming an **Almost Home Sustaining Donor**. When you give by credit card, just make an extra note on the return envelope if you want us to charge the indicated amount for three, six or twelve months.

**Sustaining Donors will be recognized in future newsletters.**

Almost Home was wonderfully blessed this holiday season with many caring and kind-hearted friends, who collected gifts and other items for our young families. These gifts helped to ensure that our teenage mothers and their children enjoyed an abundant holiday, whereas they might otherwise have gone without. All the mothers and children were excited by the generosity of our community.

The Wholly Dividends Investment Club helped our mothers make fringed fleece blankets and picture frames, and Beta Sigma Phi (laureate Delta Iota chapter) brought in tabletop Christmas trees and ornaments for each family to decorate.

Mike, Ed and Phil Treacy brought in SUV-loads' worth of presents for each Member. Employees at SBC (Scroogebusters), Dial Corporation, Riverfront Environmental, Mother Earth Designs, Cardinal Glennon Hospital-PICU Unit and SSM St. Mary's Hospital contributed wonderful presents or gently-used items. Catherine Unseth organized a collection from the Compton Hill Reservoir Square Neighborhood, as she does each year.

Alderman Michael McMillan collected toys, books, bedding, personal items and clothing from the community. Ald. McMillan frequently brings in items like these throughout the year.

We also benefited from St. Gabriel's Christmas Giving Tree, St. Mary Magdalen's Pro-Life Committee, Mary Queen of Peace Youth Group, Westminster Christian Academy, Ridge Meadow Elementary School, Serving Our Community Kids Corporation, Linus Blankets of Southwest Illinois and Daughters of Isis-Medinah Court #15.

Individuals who collected holiday in-kind gifts for Almost Home include: Angie Burtelow, Richard Clark, Michaela Cockrum, Col. Dennis Goldsmith, Joe Hatleli, Jan Johnson, Blake Jones, Andy & Valerie Kern, Beth Mehlich, Mr. & Mrs. Don Mundschenk, Elizabeth O'Hare, Mike & Erin Richter, Jamie & Dave Sentnor, Anina Townsend, Blaine Wright, and the residents of the Park Forest Apartments.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who gives and supports the Almost Home mission. Please consider giving to Almost Home throughout the year. We value all the gifts we receive of financial support, items and volunteer time!



**Photos, clockwise from upper left:**

- Employees from St. Mary's Hospital deliver gifts for our families.
- Kelly and baby Jonquil with Mrs. Claus.
- Shaquana, Alyssa and House Parent Pam Williams lead the Christmas carols singing.
- Alyssa and her children DeShawn and Brandice with Mrs. Claus.

### GIFTS IN MEMORIAM / IN HONORARIUM

When recognizing the special people in your life, please consider making a special gift to Almost Home. We will send an additional notice to them or their family of your gift.

**Keep us in mind for upcoming graduations, birthdays, weddings, promotions and holidays.**

# THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS!

Listed here are those who gave between October 11, 2005 and January 11, 2006.

## INDIVIDUALS

Bill & Mary Appleby  
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Gateway Arch Riverfront  
Janie Brent Enterprises  
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Laughs on The Landing  
Maloney's Lawn Service  
Midwest Systems  
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Old Spaghetti Factory  
Park Forest Apartments  
Philibert Security Systems  
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SSM Healthcare-St. Louis  
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Fischer-Bauer-Knirps Foundation  
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Missouri Housing Development  
Commission  
Saigh Foundation  
ScroogeBusters  
St. Louis Community Foundation  
St. Louis Variety - The Children's  
Charity  
Trio Foundation of St. Louis

## RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Basilica of St. Louis -  
The Old Cathedral  
Franciscan Sisters of Mary  
Immaculate Heart of Mary  
Mary Queen of Peace Youth  
Group  
St. Clare of Assisi Parish  
St. Gabriel's Christmas Giving Tree  
St. Mary Magdalen Parish

## CHARITABLE GROUPS

Daughters of Isis,  
Medinah Court # 15  
Linus Blankets of Southwestern IL  
St. Louis Italian Invitational

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Affordable Housing Commission  
Citizens for Alderman  
Michael McMillan  
City Of St. Louis - FESG  
Missouri Botanical Garden

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

*In Memory of Herman Mueller*  
Doug & Linda Elden  
*In Memory of Edwin Elden*  
Doug & Linda Elden

**THANKS TO ALL OF OUR  
IN-KIND DONORS,  
WHO ARE TOO NUMEROUS  
TO LIST – YOU MAKE OUR  
MINISTRY WORK!**

*We apologize for all errors and omissions. Please contact the Development Department with corrections, (314) 771-4663 ext. 6.*



*ALMOST HOME, INC.*  
**THE ADVOCATE**

Almost Home, Inc.  
3200 St. Vincent Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63104

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U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Louis, MO  
Permit No. 3687

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**ALMOST HOME'S MISSION**

Through the ministry of transitional housing, education and support systems, Almost Home provides a safe and compassionate environment where young mothers who are living on the margins of society today are empowered to develop their emotional, social, economic, academic and family skills to become self-sufficient, responsible adults and caregiving parents to their children, positively affecting future generations.

**FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF MARY**  
**MISSION STATEMENT**

As Franciscan Sisters of Mary, we live the Gospel as sisters to all. We give our life by being present, hospitable and compassionate, choosing to stand with our sisters and brothers who are poor and on the margins of society.

*Almost Home is sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, who founded the organization in 1993.*

*"Almost Home: Making a Difference, One Family at a Time"*