

## SAGE Friends Just Keep on Keeping on

- In February, Miss California USA 2006, Tamiko Nash, stopped by to visit the children at SAGE. Thanks Miss California (now Miss USA first runner-up) for showing your support.
- Long-time SAGE partner, Loyola Marymount Center for Service, bussed SAGE children to LMU's Easter Eggstravaganza. The children enjoyed an afternoon of hunting for eggs and touring the campus. Thanks Brendan Busse from LMU's Center for Service.
- Mo'Nique, famed actress and comedienne, longtime Crystal Stairs supporter and parent advocate has donated male baby clothes. Thank you. Mo'Nique is the proud mother of twin boys.
- LA Shares hosted a Shopping Day for SAGE parents and children. The company donated office & classroom supplies to benefit SAGE children. Thank you LA Shares for your generosity.

## CS Welcomes Donors

Welcome New Friends to Crystal Stairs: Ann Post, Anthony N. Singletary, Catherine W. Tennican, David Walk, Edison International, Eileen A. Brown, Irene J. Howard, Irma R. Norris, John Power, Mario Vera, Michael A. Goins, Orange County's United Way/Theresa Chicked, Pfizer United Way Campaign, Susan Zsigmond, Vera Sims, Eleby R. Washington III, Angela Sanchez, Renee D. Martinez Albertson's, Just Give/Ari Kahan, Touchstone Television Prod., Mary Hruby, Asha Joshi, NKP McDonald's, TSP Associates, Inc., Michael Cohen, Charitable Trust, Vanessa Bell Calloway, Saunder C. Lang, Ping H. Bloh, Mildred H. Reid, Melinda A. Binder and our anonymous donors. Your recent support means greater opportunities for our families and community.



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## Leaders Connect at Poverty Conference

CEO Holly J. Mitchell (*below, left*) attended and spoke at the Conference on Poverty convened by the Daughters of Charity Health System on February 2-3, 2006 at USC. The Conference brought together prominent leaders on poverty to identify innovative, practical and achievable solutions to address systemic poverty in California. The Conference was convened by Senator Dianne Feinstein and California First Lady Maria Shriver (*below, right*) and featured a keynote by former U.S. Senator John Edwards.



## Dance the Night Away Under the Stars for SAGE

Are you ready to dance? The night away, under the stars, for a good cause? If so, then you need to save the date of Saturday, September 30. SAGE's bi-annual fundraiser



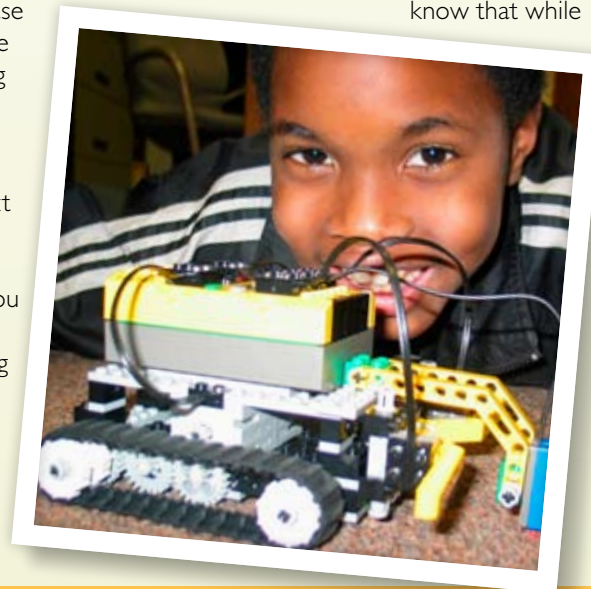
event will be held Saturday evening, September 30, from 6-10pm at the Wallis Annenberg Science Center in Exposition Park. The theme for this year's event is "Dancing Under the Stars", and the hope is that you will come out, learn some new dance moves or brush up on some of your tried-and-true-ones and shimmy on down to the tunes of raising money to support SAGE.

As you know from the last issue, Crystal Stairs has embarked on an ambitious ANGEL Campaign for SAGE. The agency is looking for people and businesses that are willing and able to serve as angels to the child care center. SAGE is located in the heart of the Nickerson Gardens Public Housing Project in Watts and serves children from families who earn less than \$800 a month. Staff and neighbors call it the "Little Hawaii of Watts" because the center is well maintained, there are huge trees for shade, green grass, shrubbery, and adequate play equipment for the children to enjoy. And yet, the services of SAGE continue to be excellent and responsive to the needs of the children and families—like serving hot meals when they are not required to because that may be the only hot meal that child receives; or offering structured play outside under the attentive gaze of teachers so that children can play and feel safe; or learning about different food groups, cultures, ethnicities, parts of the world, so that a child's background and family income do not become or remain deterrents to his/her success; or helping a parent find a job or placement in a training program.

Having said all of that heavy stuff, this event will be fun. Not just rubber chicken. Have you ever wanted to learn a new dance move, like the tango or the cha-cha-cha or the swing? Do you ever wish for just a small amount of time to dress up and dance the night away with your friends or partner? And wouldn't it be icing on the cake to win the chance (via an auction) to dance with the certain someone you read about in the news or see on the screen? If so, this is going to be the night for you. An evening full of fun, good music and exciting auction items, all for a worthy cause.

SAGE opened in 1994 serving only children aged 5-12 years, and now it serves children aged 3-12 years—very important for parents of young children who still need to work. Each classroom is specially designed to meet the needs and interest levels of the children. SAGE recently received their National School Age Care Alliance Accreditation in 2004. This accomplishment symbolizes high honors in the child care world. It validates the work that is done and more importantly how it is done. It says that SAGE's teachers provide excellent care for the children, the environment is safe and stimulates healthy growth and development, and SAGE's staff has an ongoing positive empowering relationship with their parents and the community. Not too mention that 8 of the 11 staff have either an A.A. or B.A. degree.

SAGE is good. It serves the community with the best care children can receive. So, when you save the date for September 30th, please you will be shimmying on down to some fantastic music next to some fantastic people, you will also be dancing to change a child's future for the better.



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**Mission Statement: Improving the lives of families through child care services, research and advocacy since 1980.**

**PROGRAMS AND SERVICES** ■ What does Crystal Stairs do? ■ Child Care Assistance Program: Helps low-income parents work or attend school by paying for the child care of their choice. ■ CalWORKS Child Care Programs: Supports parents moving from welfare to work by paying for their child care. ■ Child Care Resource and Referral Service: Helps families find and choose child care that meets their needs; offers training and resources to child care providers; and provides child care information to the community. ■ SAGE Center: Provides quality child care services to preschool & school-age children and families in the Nickerson Gardens Housing Development. ■ Children's Health and Wellness Program: Helps improve the quality of child care and the health of children and adults by connecting health and safety services to child care. ■ Advocacy: We work to keep child care on the public agenda by: providing expert testimony; serving on commissions and advisory committees; creating coalitions with allied agencies; and conducting public information campaigns. ■ Research: We gather and analyze a wide range of data and share this information with other agencies, advocates, researchers and policy makers.

## CCAP Board Keeps Families Connected

Tonya Burns, CCAP Manager at Crystal Stairs, started her CCAP Bulletin Board about three months ago in an attempt to stay connected to the families and providers that her team touches every day. It was around that time that she was reading the stack of letters and/or emails that she receives from families praising the customer service they received from CCAP staff (pictured below).

"I felt very proud as I read the letters and decided to share this pride by exhibiting these letters on a board for CCAP staff and anyone else who passed through the department," says Tonya.

In these letters, families described how the services provided by Crystal Stairs and CCAP staff specifically helped them. One parent stated that her children can now attend a "quality" child care program, where they are learning because of Crystal Stairs. Another parent expressed sincere thankfulness for the child care service because she has been able to achieve her educational goals. Another parent shared that she just recently received her master's degree and is "now on her way to financial freedom" because of Crystal Stairs. Others found their case managers very helpful and they just wanted others to know.

Of course, everyone loves a compliment and having a bulletin board of thanks is an easy way to get a needed pat on the back. But, what is most interesting about this board (and Crystal Stairs' work) is that every person has a different story, and you have to treat people differently based on their individual story. Crystal Stairs is about more than just "writing checks." It is about helping people to help themselves—a basic philosophy in social work.



## Child Care Is Sound Public Policy

California voters were recently asked to weigh in on the issue of universal preschool. The 2006 primary election included a couple of initiatives, one of which would have made publicly-financed preschool available to all four-year-old children. The initiative, Proposition 82, failed to pass.

Accessible preschool is not a new thing. In 1965, the federal government started Head Start, a preschool program for poor children across the country. This program along with Early Head Start has provided free preschool to children whose families meet federal low-income criteria. California's state preschool program was created by the California state legislature in 1965. However, studies have found that many two- to five-year-olds are not eligible for the program and consequently, many children do not attend preschool. Currently, the state ranks 37th among the 50 states when it comes to total preschool enrollment.

In 1998, a California Department of Education task force issued the "Universal Preschool Task Force report" which declared that preschool is a necessity for California's children. Subsequently, Los Angeles took the initiative (no pun intended) and passed Proposition 10—a cigarette tax that would fund Universal Preschool in Los Angeles. Workgroups throughout the city, under structured guidance from child development experts, gave shape and reality to a concept that would ensure that children are not denied access to quality preschool solely because of low parent income and/or membership in a disenfranchised community. "By making preschool universal, no matter where a child is, no matter what income they have, they have the constitutional right to have access to a preschool education and we know it will happen when it's universal," says Dr. Karen Hill-Scott, co-founder of Crystal Stairs and a framer of the initiative.

## STAFF PROFILE Saroan Miller Stage I Department

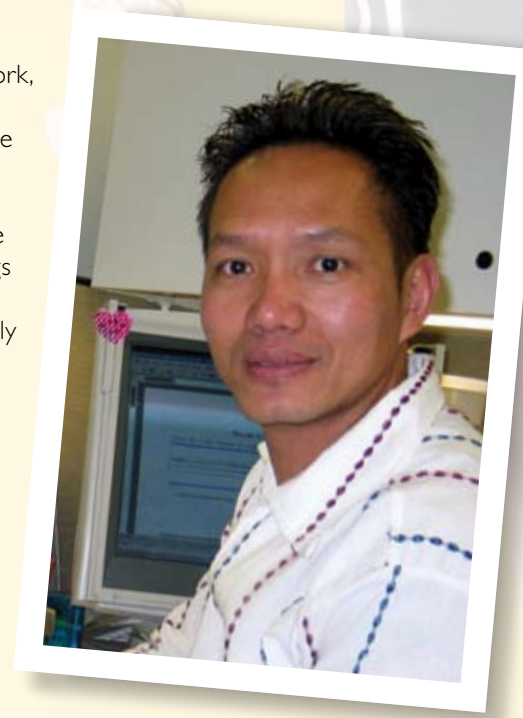
Saroan Miller is one of the more unassuming employees at Crystal Stairs. He has worked at Crystal Stairs for close to five years in our Stage I department, which is the starting point for families transitioning off welfare. He helped write a book, has two children, a degree in computer programming, with a double minor in math and management, and he is a Cambodian refugee who escaped the violent rule of the Khmer Rouge and was orphaned as a result of his country's political drama.

Saroan came to work at Crystal Stairs by happenstance, like many employees. He began volunteering at the United Cambodian Community, in Long Beach. While working at the Asian American Drug Abuse Prevention Program, he was contacted out of the blue by an agency hired by Crystal Stairs to find candidates who could speak, write and read in Cambodian. Saroan fit the bill and has been working at Crystal Stairs ever since.

If ever there was someone who is defined by their experiences, it is Saroan. He came to the United States without a penny to his name – literally – but through his strength he was able to learn English, put himself through school, attend and complete college, and start a family. For him, the American dream has been the ability to go to college. Of course, one of the ironies of being a parent is that he has to force his older son to do his homework.

Saroan's life, work, and legacy are dedicated to the memory of all Cambodians who died in the genocidal killings by the Khmer Rouge, especially his father.

If ever there was a story to tell or an inspirational message to come from someone, it is Saroan Miller's.



## California Child Care Makes Top 10 List

In its February 2006 report of a study of child care, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies noted that California is one of the 10 least affordable states for families who need care for children from infancy up to four years of age.

So, what do families do when the price for an essential is too high? Shop around until you find what you can afford. The study found that most families give up quality to get affordability. But research shows that high-quality programs produce the best developmental and school-readiness outcomes for children.

Low-income families face additional challenges. The study found that families below the poverty line spend a larger share of their income on child care (25%) than do families above the poverty line (7%). Many families in the communities Crystal Stairs serves are doubly doomed ... unaffordable, lower-quality child care.

And, there's another side. Providing child care presents challenges. Many in the child care industry are not raking in huge profits. Their prices have to be sensitive to the economics of working families. Owners are hard-pressed find the means to maintain the staff, curriculum, resources, and facilities required to offer a high-quality program. And, ironically, many of their staff have incomes low enough to qualify for subsidized child care.

This is why the work we do is so vital. Crystal Stairs provides training, technical assistance and resources to improve the quality of child care offered in our community. We advocate to increase the subsidy dollars that make child care affordable for low-income families. And, by assessing parents' and providers' needs, we can strategically guide our efforts to secure funding and establish collaborative partnerships to meet those needs.

## Community Voices Helps Make Advocates

Community Voices is a new project, funded by The James Irvine Foundation, which helps parents become better advocates for their children.

Community Voices participated in the recent Stand for Children rally in Sacramento on May 3, 2006 where our group of 19 parents, children and staff from each of our partner agencies spoke out for child care. The project is planning an advocacy training forum on September 16 at 5761 Buckingham Pkwy. in Culver City. For more information, contact Sydney Kamlager at 323-421-2631.