

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

MOMMAS HOUSE

Every month, Newsday presents another Community Champions organization.

How To Reach Us:

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Nominate a Community Champion on:

Newsday.com

Call Joan Imhof at 631-843-2165

Newsday's Community Champions are selected by the following committee of distinguished Long Islanders: **Lance W. Elder**, President & Chief Executive Officer, EAC, Inc.;

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Newsday; **Andrew Rothstein**, Director of Operations, Town of Oyster Bay; **Theresa Sanders**, President, CEO, Urban League LL.

Where Pregnant Teens Become Independent Parents

Narousse Remy was three months pregnant when her mother died. Where does a 16-year-old teen mom-to-be go for support?

Remy bounced between her sister's home and living with friends for a few years. With a three-year-old son in tow, she ended up in Covenant House in New York City. They pointed her to the place that has been home to the young family since September 2005: MOMMAS House.

Since its founding in 1986, MOMMAS House has provided support, structure and vocational guidance to some 300 young mothers and their children, not only giving them a safe place to live, but teaching them the skills that will enable them to independently support their families for the rest of their lives.

The organization, which operates three group residences and one transitional home, was founded by Patricia Shea, who had been taking pregnant girls and young mothers into her home.

"A girl came to me for help, but my house was full," explains Shea. "I tried to find a home for her, but there was nothing available. She ended up in a filthy rooming house." Such dangerous situations are far too common for young mothers who lack family support.

Eventually, the young mother left her baby at Shea's home and never returned. "It's a tragedy for a mother and child to be separated because they cannot find a place to live," she says. "I had to do something about it."

MOMMAS House gave Remy



Residents Amaya and Stephanie watch staff member Deirdre Shea help young Parris enjoy some fun.

and her son a safe and stable place to live, as well as offering support as she earned her high school diploma and computer certification. She works today at North Shore Gastroenterology, and is about to move into the transitional facility at MOMMAS House. "I had never really been comfortable living anywhere," says Remy. "At MOMMAS House, I became my own woman, the one God intended me to be."

Everyday life for the residents is more like a real home than many had ever experienced. "We're a family," says Deirdre Shea, Pat's daughter and a social worker at MOMMAS House. "We celebrate birthdays, graduations, new jobs and accomplishments, and we also struggle through the difficult times together."

The need for more places like

MOMMAS House is a great, say Shea, adding that it makes enormous sense to invest in these types of homes: "If you give these women the support, encouragement and education they need now, you won't be supporting them and their children for years to come."

Remy has full faith that she'll be a successful, independent woman. She's planning to go to college to study psychology so she can help others. And her future plans for son Matthew? "He'll be President of the United States ... or at least a senator or governor. That would be OK too."

—Jenna Kern-Rugile

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