

at Raphael House



Raphael House provides a safe and structured environment for the children we serve, helping them recover from the chaotic experience of homelessness.

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Raphael
House

1065 Sutter Street
San Francisco, CA 94109

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Dear Friends,

In the fall, Raphael House will celebrate 35 years in San Francisco helping families overcome temporary homelessness after the trauma of a personal crisis. Domestic violence, family break-up, loss of job, medical problems; whatever the cause, Raphael House has been ready to help. We have happily hosted more than 10,000 children and parents during these years.

Families come to Raphael House in a state of crisis. What makes our shelter work so well for these families is that Raphael House is not in a state of crisis. Everything here is safe, predictable, and we anticipate the normal needs of families. There are no scary surprises at Raphael House.

Elaine and I have raised our two children, Gregory and Victoria, right here in Raphael House. You could say that we take a homeowner's approach to everything we do here, keeping an eye on the place whether we are actually working or not. Even after the work day, we still do the dishes and make sure everything is put away and quiet when the evening comes to a close.

While Elaine and I are in our third decades at Raphael House, Terri DiMartini, our new Director of Children and Family Services, represents the next generation of leadership at Raphael House. If you want a dynamic speaker to tell you about what we do, we have community luncheons open to all interested friends. The luncheons are held at Raphael House beginning with a tour at 11:30 a.m., and we always end promptly at 1 p.m. If you'd like to know the dates of our upcoming luncheons, you may call 415-345-7264 and ask for Rommie Lucia. We'd love to show you around.

On behalf of the families and staff of Raphael house, thank you so much for your support!

Sincerely,

Father David Lowell
Executive Director

Mother and sons starting new life

Several weeks ago, we asked Anna, a mother staying at Raphael House, to be interviewed for the newsletter. Her story is similar to many others — she works long hours at a minimum-wage job where it is difficult to save money for a new apartment. Her family and friends are unable to assist her because they also live paycheck-to-paycheck and have enough only to take care of their own families.

However, unlike many other stories, Anna's is one of strength and resiliency because she refuses to settle or give up on improving her life and the lives of her children. She continues to press on with grace, dignity and a smile for those around her as she works harder than ever to secure a new life for her two sons, ages 6 and 11.

She has worked in the food industry for the past 15 years, but even with her job, she lost her housing, and was unable to find affordable housing. "I tried to find a place for me and my children, but the rent is too high," she said.

Not being able to find a home was a lonely experience. Anna took her family to Hamilton Family Emergency Center, a 24-hour shelter that provides short-term care. "I had no place, nowhere else."

Caseworkers at Hamilton helped connect Anna with the Raphael House Residential Shelter Program, where families have a stable place to live for a few months while they look for permanent housing.



Anna at Raphael House preparing to go out for her job interview.

When the Raphael House caseworker first showed Anna her room, she was surprised. "I didn't expect it to be so beautiful." Eating dinner at Raphael House for the first time brought her to tears. Everyone in the dining room sang a prayer before eating.

"I really could say thank God for bringing me here. The blessing, when everybody did it, I felt so good," she said.

Over the next few days, having a stable daily routine helped her and her sons realize that they were not alone. "I feel, in this place I'm a queen, because I have everything, I have a lot of things around me. I don't feel alone anymore."

Anna recently had a job interview to be a catering manager with a marketing corporation in San Francisco. Two women who volunteer in the evening program at Raphael House work for the marketing corporation and thought that Anna would be perfect for the position, which comes with a generous salary, full benefits, and a predictable work schedule. The day she left for the interview, other mothers living at Raphael House and staff members gathered around her, excited, taking pictures of her.

"Not even my family is like that," she said.

Her sons have also enjoyed the activities that they can participate in at Raphael House. "With Jen, they do things that I didn't do with them yet, like making pancakes or cupcakes. They like to be in an activity," she said, referring to the projects that Jen Schott, Evening Program Coordinator, directs for the children.

Anna said she plans to take several parts of the Raphael House daily life with her when she moves into her own home again. "I have to do a story with them every night, because it's a routine."

Also, she hopes that her sons take a sense of serving others when they leave. "When somebody needs help, they have to think, 'I have to do this.'"

The next several months hold exciting things for Anna. She awaits confirmation about the catering position, and she will be moving into a transitional housing program. Anna says that she plans to return to Raphael House — first as a volunteer and then as a donor.

"Anna's" name has been changed for this story.

Arts, crafts and games help children recover

Raphael House provides interesting, fun and educational activities for children. Many of them do not know that they are staying in a homeless shelter; rather, the experience is like summer camp or a visit to Grandma's house — full of structure and love.



Field trips are an important part of helping children develop a healthy connection to their world after the traumatic experience of homelessness. Terri DiMartini, far right, leads an outing.



More like a home than a shelter

Luke came to the After-School Program at Raphael House every day for help with his homework, and was a challenge for the tutors. He was a boy who could not sit still. He did not want to do homework, and spent all of his time in constant motion.

Terri DiMartini, who at the time was the After-School Coordinator, remembered that Luke taught her to appreciate the small steps that children make when they come to the Raphael House programs every day. "He was the type of kid where everything came out as anger because he had so much rage," she said. "His big accomplishment was being able to say that he was feeling sad when he was feeling sad."

Being with Luke every day and knowing his background helped Terri understand the significance of that seemingly small change. He had come from a situation of extreme sexual abuse.

During his time at Raphael House, Luke came to understand Terri better, too. He often asked her about her own children, and Terri kept answering that she did not have any of her own.

"You're like a fake Mom," Terri remembers Luke saying. "You do everything that Moms are supposed to do when we come home from school."

Terri spent three years running the After-School Program, and then left to attend graduate school, earning a Master's of Social Work degree at Columbia University, and a Master's degree in Early Childhood Special and General Education from Bank Street College. She returned last fall to be the new Director of Children and Family Services, taking charge of all aspects of the services that Raphael House provides to families who are at risk for homelessness.

In all, seven years have elapsed since Terri first came to Raphael House through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. The experience of her first visit when she was 22 left a lasting mark on her. Before coming to Raphael House for her first visit, she had fears that a homeless shelter for families would be an awful place.

"I envisioned a large gym with a little glass office overlooking it with fights going on inside, similar to what the people in Superdome experienced after Hurricane Katrina," she said. After her first visit, she called her parents, in tears, "This isn't what you would expect a homeless shelter to be. This is a home."

She said she appreciates the home-like atmosphere when she leaves Raphael House. After working late one evening, one of the mothers who lives at the house asked her how she was getting home. "You can feel that warmth," Terri said. "I can't imagine working anyplace else and having nurturing relationships with families, co-workers and donors, being a part of community like this."

"Luke's" name has been changed for this story.



Terri with watercolor paintings created by Raphael House children.

Raising children and serving poor families both in the same home

Father David Lowell marks 20 years living and working at Raphael House

During Father David Lowell's 20 years at Raphael House, one thing that has helped reduce the stress of working and living in a homeless shelter is the daily routines.

"By making Raphael House a livable, orderly and upbeat place with good food, it's very easy to put stress in its place and to process it. The rhythms of Raphael House reduce stress," he said. An example he gave is that if one family is having a bad day, the planned activities will keep the tension from spilling over into the overall mood of the house.

"If the police are here helping a woman with her restraining order against an abuser, you can have that happen in one part of the building and have children playing in another part, so it doesn't cause that much tension," he said.

Fr. David started work at Raphael House in 1986, and he spent five years working as a caseworker, welcoming families to the shelter and focusing them on a plan to emerge from homelessness. The causes and resolution of homelessness were different back then.

When he first came, some families viewed it as a major crisis, but others thought being homeless was a casual event. "In the 1980s, we had a lot of parents who didn't know that the hippie era was over. They were on drugs and homeless, and they were not serious about the effect it had on their children." Emerging from homelessness was much easier back then, too. If a family could save two welfare checks, they could get an apartment. The average stay of a family at that time was 21 days.



Father David Lowell is both the Executive Director at Raphael House and Associate Priest at Holy Trinity Cathedral, at Green Street and Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco. The live-in staff of Raphael House are members of the Orthodox Christian Church. There are no religious requirements placed on any of the families at Raphael House. For the live-in staff, the idealism of the Gospel is embodied in serving others. From right: Fr. David, his children Gregory and Victoria, and his wife, Elaine.

"By making it livable, orderly and upbeat with good food, it's very easy to put stress in its place and to process it. The rhythms of Raphael House reduce stress."

— Father David Lowell
Executive Director

In the 1990s, housing prices in San Francisco skyrocketed, and the parents who were coming to Raphael House saw homelessness as much more serious. During the height of the dot-com boom in 1998 and 1999, the average stay of a family was six months. Drug use, he said, is much less common among the parents today.

One of Fr. David's favorite parts of the job is keeping up with families who previously lived at Raphael House. In 1988, there were three single mothers staying at Raphael House, each with a 3-year-old daughter. All three of the mothers became volunteers, and all of the daughters have had jobs working at Raphael House. And all three of those girls are now in college.

There have been some sad stories. The

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Living and serving in Raphael House

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goal of Raphael House is to keep families together, but sometimes they fall apart. At times, the staff has had to deal with a severely depressed parent. Fr. David remembers one mother who was so depressed that he and longtime staff member Carmela Biggs had to take her to the Mt. Zion Psychiatric Emergency Room, and then they took the children to foster care in Oakland. As they drove across the Bay Bridge, the children were talking about what had happened.

"The 6-year-old was saying, 'I know how to make my bed and do laundry, but I don't know how to cook.' He thought he was going to have to take care of the 3-year-old and the baby," Fr. David said.

Raphael House has not only been Fr. David's place of work, but also his home for the past two decades. He and his wife, Elaine, were married in the chapel of Raphael House. They had home births for their two children, Gregory and Victoria, who have called Raphael House home for their entire lives.

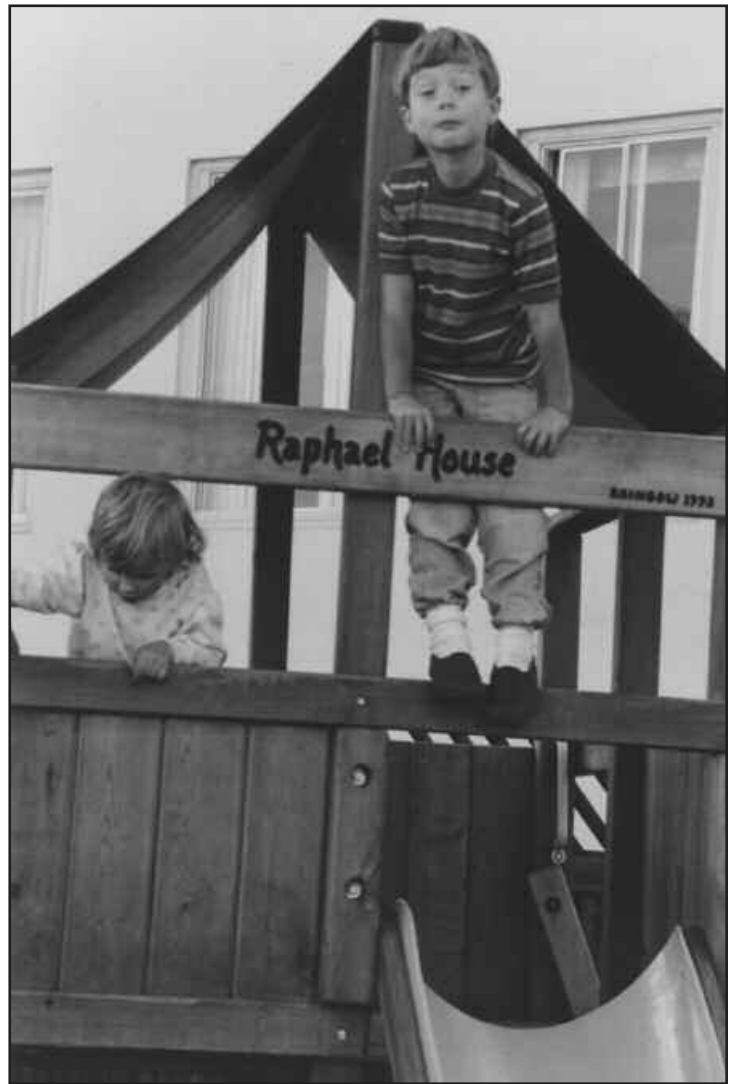
Father David said that the staff members who educate the parents about early childhood development also helped him by giving advice about bringing up his children. For example, rather than laying down an order about bedtime, a parent can say, "What do you want to do first, brush your teeth or put on your pajamas?"

Another aspect of the Raphael House program that helped in his family is the absence of television. Rather, the Lowell children engaged in the games and other activities that Children's Services staff members organized for the children who were experiencing homelessness.

"My children weren't deprived of electronic media," he said, "We just didn't have it as a daily staple. They naturally did art and reading when they had time."

Gregory, 18, will be starting at St. John's College in New Mexico this fall, and Victoria, who is turning 16 this summer, attends the Waldorf High School of San Francisco. Elaine works in the Development Office and is responsible for the signature fundraising event of Raphael House – the Gala, One Home, Many Hearts – and the many high-profile pre-events that surround and support it.

Father David, who is 57 years old, said he's planning to remain as Executive Director at least until Victoria graduates from high school. At that time he hopes Raphael House will be building permanent supportive housing for working poor families, and he would like to focus his attention on expanding housing and children's services for more families throughout the Bay Area.



The roof playground, where Raphael House children play, has been the Lowell children's backyard all of their lives. Gregory peers from the top of the play fort as Victoria looks down in this 1993 photograph.



Gregory and Victoria

Living a thrifty life to help the needy

George Monds lived a frugal life.

His niece, Nancy Kerns, remembers that he lived in a house with a sofa that he had re-upholstered more than once. He reused disposable bags, and saved most of his salary from his work as a rental-car agent at the Fairmont Hotel.

Nancy remembers visiting her uncle when she was 6 years old. George's mother was there, who apparently gave him his sense of thrift. His mother saw Nancy getting ready to brush her teeth, and she said, "Oh, my, George would've never been able to buy this house if he'd used that much toothpaste!"

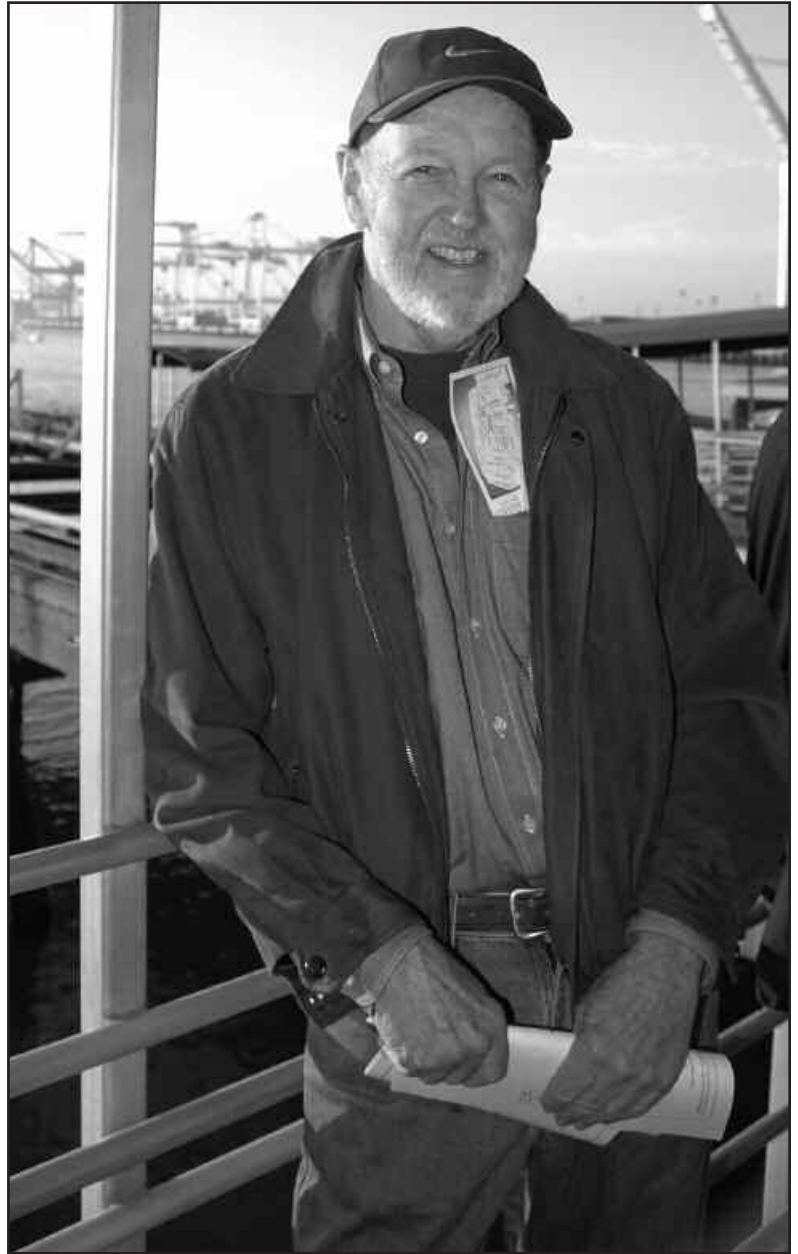
George was able to save enough money to buy several small apartment buildings in San Francisco in the 1960s, which he rented out. Property values increased, which enabled him to give to charitable organizations, including Raphael House, although he did not tell his family about the amounts he gave.

He passed away at 77 last September, and left \$139,741 to Raphael House. The money reached Raphael House without any delay or difficulty because George had set up a charitable remainder unitrust with his bank several years before he died.

A charitable remainder unitrust allows someone to set aside a sum of money and then receive a fixed income stream from the interest earned for the rest of his or her life. The donation can be tax deductible. After the trustee dies, the money goes directly to the charities that he or she designated.

Nancy visited Raphael House in March for a Community Luncheon, and heard Fr. David Lowell, Executive Director, speak about how the house is decorated with simple beauty and how staff members encourage families to move to Raphael House with a minimal number of belongings.

"When Fr. David spoke about the importance of having fewer possessions, but keeping those that are of good quality, I could see why Raphael House was so important to George," she said. "He also highly admired Raphael House's ability to give people the practical support and direction they needed to improve their lives as a family."



George Monds, 1927-2005

Wisdom from George

George Monds wrote this essay as a schoolboy

If I were growing up again I would cultivate modesty — not because the Bible preaches it as a virtue, but because conceited people are invariably the most crashing bores. I would learn to save money — not for the good it would do me, but for the fun of giving it to those who are in greater need. I would learn in telling a story to whittle it to its absolute minimum. There is no greater pest than the long storyteller.

Whatever my profession, I would learn, purely for

my own pleasure, to do something with my own hands — to bind books, carpenter, and so. I would study as seriously as possible, but as a side issue, one of the arts, whether painting, music, dancing, sculpture, writing, or singing. I would keep, always, one of the world's great books at hand.

I would commit twenty good English poems to memory. Finally, I would be fussy about my grammar, improve my speaking voice, dress neatly, and if Providence only gave me strength, learn to mind my own business.

Raphael House serves homeless and formerly homeless families

Our goal is to keep families together

Raphael House was the first shelter in San Francisco to serve the whole family – children with their parents or guardians in one place. Seventy-six percent of the families we serve are single-parent mothers with children. By the time a family comes to Raphael House, they have usually exhausted whatever hospitality may have been available through members of their own extended family.

While working with families in crisis may at times be stressful, mostly it is pleasantly routine, very normal, and a lot of fun. Approximately two-thirds of the population we serve are children, and this is what keeps the shelter vibrant. Instead of watching television, we provide art activities, outings, supervised play and special events for the children, as well as tutoring and educational support. These children have their whole lives ahead of them and the staff and families at Raphael House enjoy building for the future.

Raphael House is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Our Federal Tax I.D. number is 94-3141608.

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Announcing the Second-Hand Chic Sale

You can make a difference!

We are collecting items for the Raphael House Second Hand Chic Sale, which will be Oct. 21 and 22, 2006. Bring your items to donate to Raphael House. If you have large items, please contact Angela Alessandroni at rhangela@raphaelhouse.org

The Hot List – Items we can really use

Odd Lots of Wine

Have some random bottles? We'll take them for our wine boutique.

Jewelry and Baubles

We'll be repairing your treasures so they'll be ready for a new home.

Art & Antiques

Changed décor, outgrown some furniture? Let us find a home for it.

China, Crystal, Silver & Collectibles

Cupboards overflowing? We'll be happy to take your old treasures.

We also need

- Books
- Housewares
- Kitchen items
- Music (CDs, records)

- Toys in great condition
- Sports equipment in excellent condition
- Knick-knacks
- Men's and women's accessories (ties, belts, scarves, purses)
- Designer clothing (new or near to new)
- Vintage clothing (20 years and older)
- Small and large antique furniture



Sorry, but we can't accept the following:

- Beds, futons, mattresses, pillows
 - Magazines, Reader's Digest condensed books
 - Computers and computer accessories
 - Medical equipment
 - Exercise equipment
- (It costs us money to dispose of these.)*

Want to lend a hand?

We need volunteers both before and during the sale. Be an angel and lend a hand. Please contact Angela at 415-474-4621 or at rhangela@raphaelhouse.org