Celebrating 80 Years in Sacramento

The Beginning
In 1936, Bishop Robert Armstrong invited the Sisters of Social Service to Sacramento to develop “innovative programs” for children at the Leland Stanford Mansion. Formerly called the Stanford and Lathrop Memorial Home for Friendless Children, it had been an orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy since 1900. After the Sisters of Social Service restored the physical space to welcome new youth, it was established as a residence for girls who were wards of the court and needed ongoing support.

As the years went by, the Sisters developed and improved upon this residential program for girls, and later boys, who were unable to live in their own homes, even overseeing several group homes off-site. Sisters not only provided a home with educational, psychological and spiritual support, but also all of the necessary social services for at-risk youth and youth from troubled homes. Youth were encouraged to learn, grow, change, and become adults with a strong sense of identity, equipped for success in the world.

Besides housing the young girls at Stanford Home (as it was now called), the Sisters started having programs in the afternoons and evenings for neighborhood families and the residents’ families. There were supervised activities for toddlers and young children, the library was open for reading, the yard for playing, and groups such as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts began meeting. Gradually the Stanford Mansion became a hub in Sacramento, where social and civic groups convened, dances and events were held, and both Stanford Home residents and neighbors felt welcome.

Initially on the property of Stanford Home, a full-scale settlement house with social services for the neighborhood emerged from these early offerings— Stanford Settlement. After Sisters conducted a formal survey of needs and interests, they created groups and programs for young people and adults from the surrounding area. Activities included afterschool care, cooking and folk dance classes, family counseling, catechism, and summer day camp.

As Sacramento’s Needs Changed
In 1963, since the residential neighborhoods in downtown Sacramento had dwindled, another pocket of greater need was identified for services: the community of Gardenland. Stanford Settlement formally separated from the Stanford Home for Children, moving to

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Gardenland, where it has provided critical social services housed within a neighborhood center to this day.

After the move, the Diocese of Sacramento, United Way and the Gardenland Community Council helped support Stanford Settlement’s initial work in a variety of ways. As the Center’s Sisters and other staff built relationships with local families and began creating programs to meet their current needs, the agencies worked together to foster safer neighborhoods by installing street lights and sidewalks, and expanding city parks. Sisters, staff and volunteers at Stanford Settlement also helped create and strengthen the network of local agencies and individuals working to help struggling residents in the greater Sacramento area.

For more than 50 years, Stanford Home continued to serve many of the most vulnerable youth of Sacramento and transformed their young lives from serious struggles into days filled with support from caring adults, laughter and play, healthy structure and independence, and academic and social successes. The sense of family they experienced formed a foundation for caring relationships that continued throughout their young lives. Years later, many shared that their experiences and friendships at Stanford Home broke the cycle of abuse and helped them develop healthy relationships.

At reunions, former residents talked about the impact that the sisters who ran Stanford Home had on their lives. They believed in the youth, treated them with love and respect—like a “real family”—and encouraged them to be of service to others in need in the greater community. At the 50th Anniversary, one woman even said, “The second time I was born was at Stanford Home.” She went on to describe her beautiful children and grandchildren, and her ability to love which had been made possible because of the love and caring she received as a teen within the walls of Stanford Home.

Other Ministries Emerged

Along with the established ministries of Stanford Home and Stanford Settlement, many Sisters of Social Service provided social work services and served the local community in countless parishes in Sacramento, Catholic Youth Organization, Camp Pendola, Catholic Welfare Bureau, California Conference of Bishops, and the Department of Public Health. These first ministries, and the welcome and support we received in Sacramento, planted the seeds for more than 80 years of services in concert with the people, neighborhoods, and public entities with whom we collaborated.

In 1986, the SSS established a social justice committee comprised of Sisters Paulita Bernuy, Grace Boys, Diane Donoghue, Natalia Duran, Constance Gregory, Deborah Lorentz, Michele Walsh and Sheila Walsh. Sr. Sheila brought their vision of an interfaith group that would work towards systemic change at the state level to the SSS Chapter of Affairs, and was given full support by the SSS Community.

In 1987, JERICHO was established in order to provide people of faith with a way to monitor California state legislation using Judeo-Christian principles as a measure. JERICHO consists of two entities: one for education and research, and another for legislative advocacy. Sr. Sheila Walsh, the country’s first registered lobbyist Sister, directed the legislative advocacy and represented JERICHO in Sacramento and Northern California while Sr. Deborah Lorentz served as co-director and was responsible for the educational arm of JERICHO, as well as managing membership and outreach for the organization. In addition to the initial co-directors Sisters Sheila and Deborah, several Sisters including Sisters Simone Campbell, Jennifer Gaeta, Ellen Hunter, Marti McCarthy, Charlene Tschirhart and Michele Walsh have contributed to JERICHO’s work in various capacities.

Also in 1987, Sisters Claire Graham and Catherine Connell, moved by the plight of a homeless woman, Jean, began Wellspring Women’s Center. They had met Jean on the street a few years before, and had accompanied her to a local restaurant for dinner. As they parted that night, the Sisters shared with each other how much they wished they could do more than offer her a good meal and send her off into the night again with a “goodbye.” Out of this wish Wellspring was born, and staff and volunteers welcomed women and children from the street, providing services and programs, as well as helping Mien women and other recent immigrants who had been displaced by the war in Vietnam establish within their new country and start the path towards citizenship.

This year Wellspring celebrates their 30th Anniversary of providing a safe place and gracious hospitality for women in the Oak Park area.
Offering a myriad of social services, guests who have experienced trauma, illness and other issues made more severe by chronic poverty, are surrounded by kindness and compassion, and leave with more hope and ongoing support to bolster their own resilience.

In 1994, Sisters Mary Anne Bonpane and Stephana O’Leary began the **WIND Youth Center** as an outreach and service center for homeless youth who had left their homes for many different reasons. From their decades of service at Stanford Home they knew that more could be done to develop the potential in these young people. When the call came asking for their help—since they knew the gifts and needs of homeless youth so well—they were inspired to come out of retirement for the privilege of working with these youth again and sharing their compassion and love.

**Looking Back Today**

Our presence and work in Sacramento has blessed us with 25 Associates and Sisters Dilecta Pierini, Claire Graham, and Jeanne Felion who grew up in Sacramento and met us there. For the past eight decades, these committed Associates and nearly 70 Sisters of Social Service have helped to build the foundations for critical services and social service networks that still continue today.

Recently celebrating its 80th Anniversary, Stanford Settlement has continued to serve the most pressing needs of the local community in a myriad of ways with programs and services that have dynamically shifted with the times. Now called Stanford Settlement Neighborhood Center, the center remains a vibrant and vital hub for the Northern Sacramento community, providing critical services tailored to children, teens, families, adults and senior adults who live nearby. Local residents enjoy afterschool programs and summer camps for children, a modern teen center with comprehensive programs, and a senior center bustling with activities and advocacy services.

The center’s support for Sacramento residents has always been rooted in a growing understanding of the poverty, unemployment, and other challenges which disenfranchised individuals and families face. Along with specific services that are offered (lunches for seniors, legal advocacy, academic support), Stanford Settlement also encourages resiliency, growth and community-building with the neighborhood residents it serves.

Our work has been guided by the Holy Spirit and inspired by the youth and adults of Sacramento. Over the years, we have been an intrinsic part of diaconate formation, spiritual direction, mental health services, and social services that support children, adults and families throughout Sacramento. Sisters have been agents of change in the political system and through community organizing on behalf of, and together with, those often left outside. For some ministries, Sisters still lead as directors of agencies or other non-profits or serve on their boards and committees. At other times, their ministries were given directly by the SSS into the local people’s hands to continue as Sisters moved on to fill other needs.

Along with the larger SSS created and lead ministries, many SSS have also been called as individuals to serve a specific need in Sacramento that they have identified. Some of these services have included psychiatric counseling, spiritual guidance, addiction and recovery programs, services for at-risk seniors, bilingual services (starting in the 1930s), and advocacy and networking for recent immigrants. Currently, many Sisters and Associates in the Sacramento area are still working individually and collaboratively to meet these pressing needs for the vulnerable communities they serve.

As a Community, we celebrate this 80th year in gratitude for all those who partnered with us in our mission—co-workers, volunteers, donors, Associates, the Diocese of Sacramento, public officials, and other service providers. We are proud of those Sisters who saw a need and reached out to meet it—always engaging the gifts and the strengths of those whom we serve. We continue to hold the people of Sacramento in our hearts and prayers. May our current and future works together help change the landscape that those who are struggling face in Sacramento (and elsewhere), including the many children and adults who walk through our doors each day, filling us with hope and resolve.

— **By Jamey Fitzpatrick, Sr. Marti McCarthy, SSS, Sr. Rochelle Mitchell, SSS.**
Love always finds ways, and love always finds time.
— Sr. Frederica Horvath, SSS Foundress, January 1944

80 years in Sacramento

Picture A: Stanford Settlement Neighborhood Center teens and Julie Rhoten; Picture B: Stanford Home, 1979; Pictures C and D: JERICHO: Sr. Sheila Walsh, SSS and Sr. Marti McCarthy, SSS at Sacramento’s Capital; Picture E: Sr. Jeanne Felion, SSS during a press conference on collaborations to help homeless people; Picture F: SSS Sisters Stephana O’Leary, Mary Anne Bonpane and Carol Pack serving in Sacramento; Picture G: Sr. Mary Anne advocating for youth; Picture H: Early days at Wellspring; Picture I: Sr. Stephana with a teen at WIND; Picture J: Sr. Claire Graham, SSS, and Sr. Catherine Connell, SSS at Wellspring; Picture K: Sr. Catherine with a Mien child at Wellspring; Picture L: Sr. Jeanne Felion, Julie Rhoten and Pat Pennisi serving Stanford Settlement Neighborhood Center.