

# Success Story- Short: Covenant House, New York 2012

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## Building connections among young mothers

The 2012 World Day commemoration at Covenant House in New York City exemplifies how an intimate and simple program to mark the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (World Day) can be used to foster a sense of community among young mothers facing adversity. For more than three decades, Covenant House New York has been providing emergency shelter and other services for homeless, runaway and at-risk youth. Christian values underpin the organization's programs, which include: outreach, a drop-in center, health services, vocational and educational training, pastoral care and a mother/child program.

The emergency shelter for young mothers and children offers a safe and stable environment for young single mothers and their toddlers and infants. All of the young mothers in the program are under the age of 21, and many have experienced child abuse and parental neglect. The program provides residents with the necessary support to find work and a secure place to during their 30-day stay at the shelter. Young mothers benefit from the steady support of program staff and build important skills through workshops in healthy parenting.

### Celebrating motherhood together

On 20 November 2012, twenty-four young women from the Covenant House emergency shelter for young mothers in New York gathered to mark the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children by engaging in discussion and reflection on the joys and challenges of motherhood. The program, which was organized by the World Day Secretariat in collaboration with the Director of the Covenant House mother/child program, was designed to introduce World Day, build meaningful connections among the participants, and create a space for a shared spiritual experience. Ms. Meg Gardinier, Director of the World Day Secretariat, opened the session with welcoming remarks and gave a brief background on the World Day. The welcome was followed by a short meditation.

Two exercises, facilitated by Masue Suzuki from the World Day Secretariat, initiated the conversation about motherhood. During the first exercise the young mothers broke into groups of three or four and each identified a single word to describe motherhood. Some of the words they chose were love, happiness, and responsibility. The second activity called *Reach for the Stars*, came from the

*Learning to Live Together* manual which can be accessed via the [World Day website](#). The activity encouraged participants to uncover unexpected connections and similarities, know more about their neighbors, and create an environment of mutual support. Both exercises built respect and a feeling of community within the group.

The guest speaker for the evening was Mrs. Ana Mabel Prado Alipui, a mother, and the wife of Mr. Nicholas Alipui, a member of the World Day leadership Council. She spoke to the group about

her own experiences growing up in Angola during a decades-long civil war, working for UNICEF around the world, and raising her two sons. She noted that she shared openly with her sons about

*Every day is a different day and every day we learn from them. We don't believe in violence at home, there are many ways to help a child understand. The most important for us is what we help a child to love can be more important than what we help him to learn.*

- Ana Mabel Prado Alipui

the personal hardships that accompany civil war, and the senseless violence and destruction of war. As a result, they are strong advocates for peace and nonviolence. She emphasized that respect for her children guides her approach to parenting.

At the conclusion of the program, Ms. Alipui shared an African proverb with the group: "the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago; the second best time is now." The proverb was presented as an

affirmation to focus the end of the session. Ms. Alipui noted that we are all empowered to create change for ourselves and for our children. A final collective moment of silence ended the program.



**Stars were put on the wall for the "Reach for the Star" activity.**

**Tips:**

- Engage participants with group exercises; use the [Learning to Live Together manual](#) as a resource.
- Create a spiritual experience by opening the program with a meditation and closing with an affirmation or a moment of silent reflection.