Happy 100th Birthday Association House! 1899-1999

Cynthia L. Schmidt
MISSION STATEMENT

Association House is a resource of the Greater West Town Community, which promotes growth and development of individuals, families and neighborhoods.

We provide quality social services to a multicultural, predominantly Latino community.

We foster community development and leadership through education, advocacy and collaboration with other agencies.

We offer social, cultural and recreational activities for people of all ages.

Association House es un recurso de la Comunidad de West Town, que promueve el crecimiento y desarrollo de individuos, familias, y vecinos.

Proporcionamos servicios sociales de calidad, hacia una comunidad multicultural mayormente Latina.

Promovemos desarrollo y liderazgo comunitario a través de la educación, abogacía, y colaboración con otras agencias.

Ofrecemos actividades sociales culturales y recreacionales para todas las edades.
A century ago this year, the Association House was born out of a profound sense of responsibility to its neighbors and to the challenges being faced by a growing city. The history of Association House, from its humble childhood at the turn of the century to its position today as one of Chicago's premier community based social service organizations, is one of people helping people.

This year we celebrate the accomplishments and milestones of 100 years of service. An early publication from the Chicago Historical Society sets an interesting backdrop for the history of Association House. It states that the philosophy of the initial Chicago settlement house movement was intended to "provide for a center for a higher civic and social life; to institute and maintain education and philanthropic enterprises, and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of the city." In addition, the movement should address the need for "vocational training, childcare and kindergartens, youth clubs, immigration reform and health education and care. Slum conditions need to be addressed by the settlement and should offer extensive campaigning for better garbage collection. TB and influenza are two growing concerns and the need for public health programs is great. Also needed is the establishment of branch libraries and museums."

It was the turn of the century, the year was 1899. Thousands of immigrants were filtering into cities across America. Chicago was one of the fastest growing of these areas. Polish, Swedish and German families were the first immigrants to the North Avenue neighborhood, and they found small rooms to call home; conditions were crowded and dirty. Word that work was available in Chicago area factories and shops drew even more individuals. At times, families would send their young daughters ahead to work and find lodging. More than half of these young women were actually young girls of nine and ten years of age, attempting to find themselves. They worked long hours without fresh air in dreary conditions. Although the dream of obtaining an education had brought many to this country, the dream seemed far away. Sanitation was primitive, disease claimed lives of both the young and old. Indoor plumbing, electricity and telephones were new and rare; four years would pass before the first plane would fly to Kitty Hawk.

This was the year of a new venture. A group of women gathered under the direction of a young student from the historic Moody Bible Church, still located at Clark Street and North Avenue. Her name was Susan Poxen, and she began to hold Sunday School classes at the Cortland Street Church for the "factory girls." She took them one day to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Boarding House on Chicago's north side. They were impressed with the clean spaces, and the opportunity to learn. Susan gathered a list of names of young women who desperately needed help and made a plea to the YWCA for a chance to offer them a different kind of life. In the Spring of 1899 they were finally given assistance, and the group rented the only available space, located at 474 North Avenue, above a saloon. Mothers from the neighborhood formed a "scrub party" to clean the place. Named the YWCA Settlement House, it opened as a training school for secretaries. More classes were organized, and later that year, when the group separated from their founders to became their own independent organization, the name Association was retained in the new name as a tribute to the initial support and financial banking received from the Young Women's Christian Association. It was the summer of 1899. The Association House of Chicago was born.

Today the Association House serves more than 20,000 predominately Latino families each year. Always striving to meet the changing community needs of our families, Association House invites you to come celebrate our 100 years of service to the West Town and Humboldt Park communities.

For information about the Association House of Chicago call Cynthia Schmidt, Development and Public Relations Director at 773.772.7170 extension 2507.