

Any Baby Can

Any Baby Can provides families and children the opportunity to achieve a better life by assisting with education, therapy and family support services and programs like the holiday adoption program

Story by Kristin Elmore / Photo provided by Any Baby Can

Perhaps Abraham Maslow said it best in his assertion that we are a people driven solely by the acquisition of our most intrinsic human needs. While the desire to feel safe, be loved, and achieve a healthy level of self-esteem are critical, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states we are only able to achieve these often taken for granted goals after we have satisfied basic necessities such as shelter, sleep, and hunger. Sadly, members of the homeless community are not guaranteed these fundamental human requirements, and their struggle on the streets impedes their ability to maintain the biologically requisite balance of homeostasis. Unfortunately, this struggle is further compounded when children are involved. Any Baby Can Child and Family Resource Center, a family services powerhouse in central Texas, works ardently to satisfy these basic needs for children in crisis and their families. Any Baby Can's Executive Director, Lila Carl, spoke with me briefly to discuss the agency's objectives, challenges, and achievements.



Originally founded in San Antonio twenty-one years ago, Any Baby Can opened its doors to Austin families in 1991. Striving to achieve their mission “to ensure that children reach their potential through education, therapy, and family support services”, Any Baby Can works tirelessly to empower families through prevention. Be it illness, developmental delays, special needs, or a lack of resources, Any Baby Can focuses their efforts on the family as a whole. Often times, children are at-risk due to an impoverished family environment as a result of illiteracy, lack of United States citizenship, or an inability to speak English. As anticipated, families in these situations are often troubled to find steady work, may be evicted from their residences, and are challenged to support a family. A family’s failure to pay for utilities and maintain a hospitable home environment leaves many children without opportunity, and it is the hope of Any Baby Can to help break this cycle by providing these families with essential needs. According to Lila Carl, the most basic needs for these families are food, rent, and utilities. Additionally, Any Baby Can offers a host of programs from which children will ultimately benefit. A prenatal education program works with pregnant teens and high-risk first time mothers to ensure the birth of a healthy child. The agency also offers a Healthy and Fair Start Program which offers families parenting skills courses, nutrition and home safety information, English as a second language classes, tutoring, and family counseling.

As is the case with most of the agencies CTOSH has spoken with this year, funding is an issue for Any Baby Can. According to Carl, funding from private foundations used for utilities, rent, and food for families in need has been easier to come by in the past. Recently, annual funding has been slashed. Beyond the typical funding issues, however, Carl discussed logistical challenges faced by many of Any Baby Can’s clients. For example, a single working mother may incur expenses for requisite car maintenance. Since she cannot support her children without a job, and since she cannot get to work without a car, she has little choice but to spend money to repair her car. This unavoidable situation may leave her without enough money to make a rent payment, and she is forced to seek supplemental funds to stabilize her family. Bouncing from one agency to another with little luck cuts into her work schedule and may result in termination. This endless cycle is exactly what Carl hopes to prevent. Recently, with the help of Caritas and ARC, The Basic Needs Council was founded. This council works to bypass bureaucracy by providing a more efficient system. This way, according to Carl, “Families are not wasting time. There is no wrong door, just an entry and an exit.”

Earlier this year, Any Baby Can welcomed a successful merger with Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation, a central Texas agency providing services to families of children with cancer. Any Baby Can also works with Safe Place in an effort to alleviate domestic violence issues, as well as Lifeworks who

assists with the prenatal education program. Furthermore, Any Baby Can, in connection with The Austin American Statesman Season for Caring, is sponsoring their annual holiday adoption program this holiday season. For more information, please contact Any Baby Can at 512-454-3743.

“There are always families you can’t save, no matter what you do”, stated Carl. Though there is a disappointing truth to this statement, it has been my experience throughout this semester that Austin CTOSH agencies are working selflessly to reach every family and individual possible. The effort put forth to help those experiencing homelessness attain their most basic needs does not go unnoticed and is nothing less than inspirational.