Reflections from the Director’s Desk: “What Would Sara Say?”
Leisa Pollander, Executive Director

Every morning when I walk down the hall to my office, I am greeted by an arresting photo of Sara M. Holbrook, the founder of what used to be titled “the Burlington Community Center”. I then look across the hall into the classroom and see the multitude of faces gathered to begin mastering the intricacies of the English language. Each of those folks has a unique, indeed sometimes chilling, story to tell about the circumstances that brought them to this country.

During the depression, Ms. Holbrook, a clinical psychologist at the University of Vermont, went to New York City to study and work in the settlement houses in lower Manhattan. She worked with newly-arrived folks who had just come through Ellis Island, helping them to adjust and acclimate to life in America. Settlement houses taught key survival skills such as the English language, the U.S. monetary system, and how to find employment. Sara brought that model back to Burlington.

When the Center was founded sixty-eight years ago, Sara and her staff primarily served Irish, Italian and French-Canadian families. These families worked in the mills, quarries, lumber industry, on the railroads, and in the shipping yards on the waterfront. I feel a sense of connection to the work that Ms. Holbrook did, because my own family arrived in Vermont during that era from Ireland and Quebec; they came looking for better opportunities than were available in their native lands. Now the Center works with families from Vietnam, Bosnia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi and Central Africa. All are connected by a common goal, to create a better situation for themselves and their children. What would Sara say to Barbara Snelling every Tuesday morning when she arrives to provide individualized tutoring to adults who cannot read or write in their native language, yet who are committed to learning English?

This building bulges during the month of July, when the Center’s New Arrivals program for children with limited English proficiency commences. What would Sara say to Mary Ann Blaisdell, who has given up the month of July every year for the past 16 years to serve as an unpaid teacher, designing curriculum, staffing a classroom and conducting program evaluations?

Our pre-school class serves 15 very active 3 and 4-year-olds. Seven of these children speak English as a second (even third!) language – five of them came to Vermont fresh out of refugee camps. What would Sara say to Lyn Leavitt as she reads to a child who had never seen a book before arriving in Burlington? What would she say to Lucy Samara when she is fundraising – and then shopping - for new tricycles for the pre-school?

Acquiring financial support for operating expenses is always a challenge for small non-profits. Sara worked with the city of Burlington to acquire WPA funding for Center programs. Under her leadership, the Center was one of the first agencies to become funded by the United Way (known then as the Community Chest). What would Sara say to Liz Swim, Dick MacKenzie, Ducky Donath, Doug Boardman and Debbie LaRosa as they work incessantly to bring in monies to support the programs?

I would like to think that Ms. Holbrook looks down at this building and smiles, seeing her work continue and her vision carried forward by the hundreds of individuals, businesses and communities of faith that believe in the Center’s mission. Thank you all!
Warming Up the Winter Blues

They won! Ann and Violet were pleasantly surprised when their names were pulled out of the hat.

All of Brian Mahoney’s students entered their names to win one of two beautiful, hand-crafted quilts. The First Baptist Sewing Group kindly donated the quilts to the Center.

Four days a week, Vermont Adult Learning uses space at the Center for English classes. From 8:30am - 12:30pm, immigrants and refugees from around the globe come to practice and learn English language skills.

Thank you to our friends at the First Baptist Church for the warm, winter surprise.

Holiday Outreach

A big thank you to all the Holiday Outreach Sponsors! Businesses, families, friends, and individuals generously gave to families in need this holiday season. In all, 365 children received clothing and gifts for the December holidays!

This year, hearts grew even bigger when the Center was notified that many Vermont National Guard families needed some holiday help. Community members, school groups, and businesses were eager to sponsor the 40 children of Vermont Guard families.

Again, thank you for being a Sara Holbrook Holiday Helper! Your spirit of giving is extraordinary. For over 25 years, the Center has served as a conduit between the fortunate and less fortunate; this could not happen without our community’s strong tradition of giving. Thank you!
Pre-School

Sara Holbrook’s Pre-schoolers are certainly busy; story-time, circle, calendar, outdoor play, writing tables, art projects, dramatic play, colors, painting, music, numbers, the alphabet, playdough, beading, puzzles, group games, and much more! Here are some classroom pictures of the busy bodies!

The pre-schoolers give their teacher, Kelley, a make-over during free play. The little artists chose kitchen utensils to create a hair piece!

Rida takes a break from working with a hole puncher to smile for the camera. The hole-punch is a great tool to practice fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination.

Cheese! During dramatic play, Nelson enjoys sporting his shades.

After reading a story about snow, the class used playdough to make their own snow creations. Kendra sculpted her dog.
Spotlight on the New North End Youth Center

For 10 years, the New North End Youth Center (NNEYC) has provided drop-in and structured programs for youth after-school. After school, middle-schoolers have a place to shoot hoops, play foosball and air hockey, use computers, and just hang-out with friends. A supportive, positive staff are there to interact and supervise as well. The NNEYC is located in the Gosse Court Armory, next to Lyman Hunt Middle School; hence, the Center is easily accessible. On average, 30 youth attend the drop-in program daily.

Interestingly, last year the NNEYC served more 11-18 year old youth than any other youth center in Burlington. Clearly, youth like it so we asked a NNEYC fan to explain why.

“Hello, my name is Stephanie Dixon. I am fourteen year old, who is currently in 8th grade at Lyman C. Hunt Middle School. After school my days are usually spent at the NNEYC from 3:00pm to 5:30pm, with the exception of Wednesday’s when the center is closed and used for an after school program called Girls Group.

In my opinion, the NNEYC is a fantastic place for young teenagers to go and just hang out with friends. It gives young kids, such as myself, a great opportunity to be enrolled in fun activities with other peers, rather than just going home and watching television. The center is a safe environment that keeps kids off the streets and instead gives them something to do. There are many games and fun activities that you are able to be involved in. I personally like to go to the NNEYC to just talk, listen to music and hang out. The center is a great place that gives me a chance to get away, and interact with others rather than the people I live with at home. There are a lot of kids that visit the youth center, of whom I all know have a blast when ever they go.

From experience, I can definitely say the NNEYC is a positive environment where kids are safe and under no circumstances are treated unequally or better than others. I have been going to the NNEYC for three years now and next year when I am finally off to Burlington High School, I hope to visit the center as often as possible.”
You’re Invited to the Sara Holbrook Community Center’s Spring Fundraiser, the **No-Show Ball!** The event’s theme is “save a date and stay home”. Relax, watch movies, spend time with family and friends; do anything you want to do!

Just RSVP with your $25 contribution, by April 5th and you could win a great door prize!

- Brunch for two at Leunig’s Bistro
- A gift certificate to pamper yourself at Indigo Salon
- Keep your car looking good with car wash booklets from Seaway Car Wash
- A gift certificate to Lovely Nails—get your feet in sandal shape
- Brunch for two at Smokejacks

Your $25 contribution will support all the Center’s critically needed programs for children and families: pre-school, after-school and teen programs, English classes for adults and children, summer camps, and basic need assistance.

The Center is also working to initiate a new program, Youth Adventure Camp. Young teens will have the opportunity to explore the natural wonders of our Green Mountain State; hiking Mount Mansfield, camping in Vermont State Parks, and kayaking on Lake Champlain are just a few possibilities. This escape from the urban routine will certainly make it a summer to remember. Your contribution can help Youth Adventure Camp get started!

Tap dance classes were a hit—for over 25 years—at the Center. Pictured here are some teen performers from 1966.

Golly! I just love the No-Show Ball, because

Your gift, combined with the others, will make a small donation really big and truly great. *Thank you and hope you have an evening to remember!*
Pizza Party

The Sara Holbrook Community Center has teamed up with Pizzeria Uno Chicago Grill for an easy, yummy fundraiser! Eat at Uno’s and they will donate a portion of your check to us!

How It Works:
• Bring the provided ticket to Uno’s on either April 28th or May 26th (both are Thursdays)
• Present the ticket at the time of payment
• Uno’s then donates up 20% of your bill to us!

So gather up your friends and family, go to Uno’s, order some pizza, have some fun, and support the Sara Holbrook Community Center!
Then & Now

Thanks to the success of the Challenge Grant the Sara Holbrook Community Center was able to completely overhaul the playground. The original playground was installed in the 1980’s and twenty years later a upgrade was long overdo. The new playground has two slides, tic-tac toe, puppet play-stations, swings, and climbing structures that together create a fun, safe, and creative play-space; the kids love it! Thank you at all the Center’s supporters who helped make this dream come true!