



# MSSSG

## Mountain Shadows Support Group

### Mountain Shadows Special Kids

SUMMER ♦ 2009

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## MSSK Launches New LVN Coordinator Program

Our nursing staff members at MSSK were recently asked to answer an odd question: "Which are you: a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

While at first the question may seem somewhat silly, we believe the answer may define the character that is the cornerstone to MSSK's success.

### The Story of the Carrot, Egg and Coffee Bean

*A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She didn't know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling just to survive. It seemed as soon as one problem was solved a new one arose.*

*After a time, the mother took the daughter into the kitchen and filled three pots with water. In the first, she placed carrots. In the second, she placed eggs. In the third, she placed ground coffee beans. She filled the three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the water came to a boil. After about twenty minutes, the mother turned off the burners.*

*Silently, she fished out the carrots and placed them in a bowl. Then she pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and put it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me, what do you see?"*

*"Carrots, eggs and coffee," the daughter replied.*

*The mother brought the daughter closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did, and noted they felt soft to the touch.*

*The mother then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg inside.*

*Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she sipped and smelled the coffee's rich aroma.*

*The daughter then asked, "So, what's the point, mother?"*

*The mother explained that each of the objects had faced the same challenge, the same adversity – boiling water – but each had reacted in a different way. The carrot went in strong, hard, unrelenting; however, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its outer shell had protected its liquid center, but after 20 minutes in boiling water, its insides had become hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique though. After boiling for 20 minutes ... they had changed the water.*

*The mother then asked the daughter, "Which are you? Are you the carrot that seems strong, but following adversity, do you wilt and become soft and lose your strength? Or, are you the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Do you have a fluid spirit, but after a difficult time, do you become hardened and stiff? Does your outer shell look the same, but on the inside are you bitter and tough with a hardened heart?"*

*Please see PROGRAM on page 2*

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*“Or are you like the coffee bean that changes the hot water – the very circumstances that bring adversity? When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor of the bean, enhancing the essence of its life and the lives of those who savor its taste.”*

Adversity, change, challenge – these are common elements in all of our lives. At MSSK, our residents face daily challenges most of us can barely imagine. As their primary care givers, our nursing staff strives to affect the change that will turn these challenges into life-enhancing opportunities for all.

To better facilitate this change, MSSK recently reorganized its nursing services. Says Ruth Hill, RN Consultant at MSSK since 1992, “Our mission at MSSK is to provide optimal care for all of our kids. We constantly evaluate and re-evaluate our systems and procedures to make sure we are meeting that goal. As part of a recent evaluation, we realized we could better utilize our LVN’s abilities, and by doing so, significantly improve the overall quality of our nursing program.”

“At MSSK, we have 23 Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVN’s) for our 13 Intermediate Care Nursing Facility Homes,” says Shelly Dawson, Placement/Development Coordinator, MSF/MSSK. “Each of these nurses has excellent nursing skills and is a great asset and blessing to us.”

“Our LVN’s provide on-site support to our children 24/7. As part of our reorganization and in order to more fully utilize our LVN’s skills, we created the position of LVN Coordinator (LVNC),” says Ruth. “The expanded responsibilities of the LVNC focus on three areas:

1. Assisting our Registered Nurses (RN’s) by ordering medical and feeding supplies, facilitating in-house physician visits, and completing paperwork.
2. Managing staffing activities, including scheduling.
3. Performing staff orientation and training functions.

The new LVN Coordinator program was launched in December 2008. “We are already seeing benefits,” says Ruth. “The RN’s are able to focus more on coordinating the care of the children. They’re not spending time on little details like supplies and equipment. It has also given the LVN’s the opportunity to do things they never expected. They’ve been able to be more creative and innova-

tive. They’ve really gone above and beyond.

“Staffing has also improved. There are fewer open shifts. There’s also been better monitoring of staff performance, which has allowed us to more quickly identify any issues and implement improved training procedures.”

While all of our MSSK nurses are exceptional, the four LVN’s selected for the new program displayed “a strong work ethic, outstanding LVN skills, a willingness to take on any task, and a commitment to go above and beyond the requirements of each and every task,” says Shelly. “They are all efficient and professional and we’re proud to have them as a part of our great team of nurses here at MSSK.” Please welcome our new LVN Coordinators:

### Melissa Yingst-Czerny



Melissa began her career as an LVN at MSSK seven years ago. “I love the kids,” says Melissa. “We are the children’s family. My goal is to make sure all the kids get their love.”

“Melissa started at MSSK as an LVN at Miramar House,” says Ruth. “She later was promoted to the Administrative

LVN position. She is super organized and able to see the big picture, then break everything down into parts to get things done.”

“I love working at MSSK,” adds Melissa. “The staff is great. Everyone helps each other and works together to give the children the best possible life.”

### Mahagandy Dennis

“I love interacting with the children and staff,” says Mahagandy. “All the kids have different personalities and I love them all. Working at MSSK has been such a growth experience – I learn something new everyday!”

“Mahagandy was our first LVN Coordinator,” says Ruth. “She has been instrumental in helping us define the responsibilities of the position. She’s also demonstrated exceptional teaching skills and she is in the process of training all of the other LVNC’s.” Adds Stacy Sullivan, Director of Operations at MSCH, “Mahagandy has shown herself to be very strong and very dedicated to the residents. She’s been a great help in supervising and training staff.”

*(Please see PROGRAM on page 4)*

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# Isabella Webb: A Special Kids Fairy Tale

*“Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in the land is fairest of them all?”*

—QUEEN FROM SNOW WHITE

One of the first things one notices upon entering Isabella Webb’s room in Darlene House is the picture of Snow White, the beautiful princess, with skin white as snow, lips red as blood and hair black as ebony, from the Brothers Grimm fairytale. One of the first things one notices upon meeting Isabella is the striking similarities she shares with the fairytale princess who was known throughout the land as the fairest of all.

“When the staff at Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes first met Isabella they said, ‘oh, she’s so beautiful!’” says Brittney Webb, Isabella’s mother. “She has very, very pale skin, dark hair and blue eyes. Everyone falls in love with her as soon as they see her.”

“Isabella came to Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes in December of 2008,” says Shelly Dawson, Placement/Development Coordinator, MSF/MSSK. “She was just a little over a month old when she moved into Darlene House. Isabella was born with occipital encephalocele with microcephaly.”

Occipital encephalocele is a type of neural tube defect that occurs very early in fetal life. The embryonic cells that form the skull do not come together to close over the brain. The result is a defect in the bones of the skull, which causes brain tissue to protrude from the skull. The protruding sac of brain matter is generally covered by skin. Microcephaly is a condition in which the circumference of the head is smaller than normal due to improper development of the brain.

“The staff at the hospital where Isabella was born misdiagnosed her condition and said that nothing could be done to help her,” says Brittney.

Adds Shelly, “Isabella is a beautiful baby girl and just as tiny as can be. Her parents and family were distraught over the poor prognosis given by the hospital’s medical staff. She wasn’t given much of a chance to live and the doctors at the hospital suggested a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order be placed

on her. The staff was simply providing for Isabella’s comfort and was not expecting her to live very long.

“It must have been a very uncomfortable first few weeks of life for Isabella with the weight of the brain matter attached to the outside top portion of her skull. It was difficult to hold her and feed her as it would cause her pain when the brain tissue sac was moved about in any way. She would cry whenever she was picked up or moved or when the area had to be cleaned.



Isabella Webb, Miracle Baby

“Once Isabella came to Darlene House, she was evaluated by Dr. Rao and Dr. Zourous at Loma Linda Children’s Hospital,” continues Brittney. “They diagnosed her with occipital encephalocele with microcephaly and after examining her, the doctors said they could perform surgery to remove the sac.

“The surgery was performed on January 13<sup>th</sup> and it was a huge success. Isabella used to scream in pain when we touched her. Now we can hold her and she smiles! She’s a happy little girl now. She can roll over and she’s learning to crawl. We’re not sure how far or how quickly she will progress, but she’s already achieved more than others like her.”

Only 20% of babies with occipital encephalocele are born alive and only ½ of those survive. “Isabella is truly a miracle of life!” says Shelly.

“I’m so glad we found Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes,” says Brittney. “I don’t think Isabella would be alive today if we hadn’t. The staff at Darlene House loves her. They fight over who will get to take care of her. They take care of her every need.”

*Once upon a time, a beautiful princess, with skin white as snow, lips red as blood, and hair black as ebony, was left in the forest for dead after swallowing a bite from a poisoned apple. Then one day, a handsome prince found her and, enchanted by her beauty, instantly fell in love with her. As the prince declared his love and kissed Snow White, she awakened from her sleeping death with love’s first kiss.*

*(Please see ISABELLA on page 4)*

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## ■ PROGRAM *(continued from page 2)*

“Family and friends are the most important thing to me,” adds Mahagandy. “That includes my friends and family here at MSSK. When I was growing up, I was taught to do the best I could all the time, no matter what. Now my goal is to continue doing my best as part of the MSSK family.”

### Nicole Gamble

Says Nicole, “I love everything about working at MSSK. I enjoy working with the residents and staff. I take a hands-on approach to caring for the residents and giving them the best possible life.”

“In the short time Nicole has been at MSSK, she has been thrown some daunting tasks,” says Ruth. “She’s never shown any hesitation and has always figured out a solution to whatever problem has arisen. She’s also an excellent teacher – very clear and articulate.” Adds Stacy, “Nicole has a great attitude and has shown herself to be very capable in whatever she does.”

“I love my job,” adds Nicole. “I enjoy coming to work and still go home happy everyday.”

### Heather Van Alstine

“Once you come to MSSK, you never want to leave,” says Heather. “I really like working with the kids and watching them develop – I couldn’t help falling in love with all of them!”

“Heather started at MSSK as a DCS, then she went to college and became a Licensed Vocational Nurse,” says Stacy. “As an LVN, she’s been an exemplary employee who shows an exceptional understanding of her role.” Adds Ruth, “Heather has proven to be a great teacher in the houses with staff. She’s very detail-oriented.”

Heather plans to continue her education and become a Register Nurse (RN).

“Caring for the developmentally disabled takes its own set of special skills,” says Ruth. “It requires



*Nicole Gamble training staff*

long and often crazy hours, there are numerous emergency situations at all hours of the day and night, and each child has individual challenges that require individualized care. Developmentally Disabled Nursing is a unique branch – and not everyone is willing, or able, to do it. Our four new LVNC’s have both the skills and the willingness to do it!”

*Are you the carrot? Are you the egg? Or are you like the coffee bean that changes when the water gets hot and releases the fragrance and flavor of the bean, enhancing the essence of its life and the lives of those who savor its taste.*

We don’t know how our nurses answered the question about the carrot, the egg or the coffee bean, but we do know that adversity, change, and challenge are common elements in all of our lives. At MSSK, our residents face daily challenges most of us can barely imagine. As their primary care givers, our nursing staff strives to affect the change that will turn these challenges into life-enhancing opportunities for all. ■

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## ■ ISABELLA *(continued from page 3)*

Blessed with an innocent’s indomitable spirit, Walt Disney’s Snow White never lost faith that one day the magic wishing well would grant her wish for a true love to come and take her away. Darlene House’s own Snow White, Izabella Webb, shares that same innocent’s indomitable spirit. Once nearly written off as dead by the medical community, she never gave up and now has been granted a chance

at a new life full of new possibilities.

And, while it’s fun to believe in fairytales, we, at Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes, are committed to making Izabella’s happy ending a reality.

*With skin white as snow, lips red as blood,  
and hair black as ebony,  
You, Izabella, are the fairest of them all. ■*

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# Cami House Hooked on Halloween

*Shadows of a thousand years rise again unseen,  
Voices whisper in the trees, "Tonight is  
Halloween!"*

—DEXTER KOZEN

The children of Cami House packed into the Mountain Shadows mini-van, ready for some Halloween fun and trick-or-treating in the neighborhood. Everyone was dressed in costume – there were ghosts and goblins and witches and monsters.

“All of our kids go trick-or-treating around the community,” says Shelly Dawson, Placement/Development Coordinator, MSF/MSSK. “It’s great fun for the children and the staff members have lots of fun dressing the kids in their costumes. Many of the children also spend part of the night handing out candy to the neighborhood children. Halloween parties are often held at the children’s schools and day programs too.”

Toward the end of the night, the driver made a wrong turn and ended up on a deserted, dead end street. The driver pulled over and turned on the radio so the children could sing along to the songs while he tried to figure out where they were and how to get back to MSSK. The children giggled and laughed as they sang along to “Monster Mash” – then suddenly the music on the radio was interrupted by a news bulletin: “A convicted murderer has escaped from a hospital for the criminally insane. The man was mutilated in a car wreck following a high-speed chase and is missing his right hand. A temporary **hook** has been attached to his right arm, which will make him easier to identify. The criminal’s name is ...”

The broadcast continued, but the driver quickly turned the radio off, not wanting the children to become frightened. Looking over his shoulder,

he saw them looking out nervously onto the dark, deserted street.

“I’m afraid,” said one of the children. “Let’s get out of here,” said another.

The driver tried to convince them that they were in no danger, but the children refused to listen. The driver reached over and locked the van doors, assuring everyone they were safe. As he started the van, the driver thought he heard something outside in the darkness ... was it ... like metal clanging against metal ... ?

The driver slammed the car into drive and spun out onto the road. On the way back to Cami

House, everyone calmed down a bit, thinking how silly they’d been to get scared. They pulled up in front of the house and the driver saw the children hesitating, looking out into the darkness, not wanting to get out of the van. He said, “I’ll make sure it’s safe first.” As he got out of the van, he stopped as



he was about to shut the door.

For a long time he just stood there, looking down at the door.

“What’s the matter?” asked one of the children.

The driver still just stood there, looking down at the door handle.

There, hanging from the door handle ... was a bloody stainless steel hook.

According to news reports, the ex-convict was captured late on Halloween night. The stainless steel hook was never found.

Some may think this is simply a Halloween tale. Believe what you will – but the children of Cami House know ...

*When witches go riding,  
and black cats are seen,  
and the moon laughs and whispers,  
anything can happen on Halloween. ■*

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# Laurel Park Residents Glam-up for Prom

High school prom is a magical night. Young women dress in beautiful gowns and young men don tuxedos. Decades later, most people still remember their prom – the high school gym decorated with crepe paper, the music, the dancing. In many ways, the prom has become an almost fairy tale-like rite of passage into adulthood.

Two Laurel Park House residents, Johanna Nungaray and Terence Brown, recently attended their prom – and made memories they will cherish for a lifetime.

“Johanna was dressed very elegantly,” says Shelly Dawson, Placement/Development Coordinator, MSF/MSSK. “Her dress was gorgeous – and with her touseled hair, painted nails and make-up – she looked beautiful!

“Rea Horn, mother of our resident, Nathan, painted Johanna’s nails. Staff members helped out by applying her make-up and curling and styling her hair. Everyone really had a good time getting her glammed-up for the big event!

“Terence wore a suit and top hat. He looked very



*Johanna has her hair done for the prom*

distinguished and handsome.

“Both Johanna and Terence had a night they’ll remember forever. They danced and listened to the music and enjoyed spending time with all of their friends.”

*Pleasure is the flower that passes; memories, the lasting perfume.*

—JEAN DE BOUFFLERS ■

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# Creativity Blooms into Life at Cami House

*“Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures.”*

—HENRY WARD BEECHER

Many virtues have been attributed to art and how it contributes to our lives. While the therapeutic value of art has been explored and legitimized, we at MSSK believe the benefits of art go far beyond traditional therapeutic goals of physical and emotional achievement. We believe art has the ability to not only heal, but to transcend and transform – and we have experienced this transformation first hand in the children of our very own Cami House.

“Cami House is home to six children ranging in age from one year to eleven years old,” says Lisa Sumrall, Direct Care Staff (DCS) member at Cami House. “All of our residents are very active and participate in many activities. One of the favorite activities for both staff and residents is working on art projects together.”

Since the 1970’s, art therapy has been used as a way to work with children who have disabilities toward the achievement of many types of goals. It has proven useful in improving hand-eye coordina-



*Caption?*

tion, fine motor skills, visual acuity, and color recognition skills. It has also been shown to have positive effects on children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), autism, and children with learning disabilities. Group art therapy has been found to build self-confidence and enhance the ability to express emotions in adolescents with mental retardation.

*(Please see CAMI HOUSE on page 10)*

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# Magic Abounds at MSSK Disney Themed Picnic in the Park

“To all who come to this happy place—welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America ... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world. Thank you.”

—WALTER E. DISNEY

With no disrespect to Walt Disney or Disneyland, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009, we believe the Veterans Memorial Park in Rubidoux, took the prize as the happiest place on earth. More than 70 MSSK children wheeled into the park dressed as their favorite Disney character.

“Each MSSK House had a Disney movie inspired theme,” says Shelly Dawson, Placement/Development Coordinator, MSF/MSSK. “There were characters from Cinderella, the Little Mermaid, Snow White and Seven Dwarfs, Mulan, Toy Story, Lady and the Tramp, and many others. There was a parade with about 30 children. The children had so much fun and they looked great! The children loved being cheered on by the crowd as they paraded through the park.”

“As Shelly mentioned, each house had a Disney movie theme,” says Debbi Dufloth, QMRP/Administrator. “Each house created a display based on their theme. The children and staff did an incredible job this year. We had a contest and Bain and Darlene Houses tied for First Place. Bain House’s theme was Cinderella and they built a beautiful carriage and castles. It was magnificent! Darlene House created a Monster’s Inc. design that was spectacular. Second Place went to Miramar House that featured skillful drawings of Peter Pan characters. Maverick House won third place with all of the children dressed in adorable Bambi costumes. Honorable Mention went to Cami House for their extraordinary Little Mermaid themed creation, which incorporated the use of real bubbles and fantastic props used simulate ocean waves. Everyone loved it!

“There was a costume contest for the children

too. All of the children really put their hearts into their costumes and they were so cute and creative! The contest winner was Izabella, from Darlene House, who dressed up as the little girl, Boo, from Monster’s Inc. Second Place went to Johanna, from Laurel Park, for her Lion King inspired costume of Zazu. Lili, from Bain House, as Cinderella, and Jaclynn, from Maverick House, as Bambi, tied for Third Place.”



“There was a bounty of delicious food, from churros, to cotton candy, to salad, to barbecued chicken,” added Shelly. “The children had a blast playing all sorts of games. They tossed Frisbees, fished, launched rockets, hit baseballs, and blew bubbles. Everyone had a fantastic time.”

“A favorite of the children was the Reptile Man, Jeff. Jeff has been a much loved entertainer at our annual picnic for the past three years! He brought turtles, lizards and snakes that they could touch and pet. The kids absolutely loved it!

“It was a beautiful day and fun was had by all. It was one of the best picnics we’ve ever had!”

“While the picnic was filled with fun and excitement, we decided to end the day with a silent tribute to three of our children who passed away during the year, Joseph Medina of Sheila Marie, Joseph Moncada of Juniper and Rosey Mateo of Juniper,” adds Debbi. “While these children couldn’t be with us in body, they were with us in spirit. After a moment of silent remembrance, all picnic guests released balloons in honor of these very Special Kids. It was a touching, moving moment.”

Many thanks to all friends, family, and staff

*(Please see PICNIC on page 8)*

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## ■ PICNIC *(continued from page 7)*

members for helping to create this memorable day for our children. The smiles and laughter we shared at our Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes Annual Picnic will be savored as a source of joy and inspiration to us all.

### Volunteers and Contributors

- ◆ Mountain View Services generously donated all sodas, water and paper products.
- ◆ The American Legion, Chapter 421, opened their hearts and donated \$100 to MSSK.
- ◆ Michael Martin, Director of Emergency Food Services at U.S. Food Service of Los Angeles, donated 200 tasty hot dogs.
- ◆ Cindy Patterson, RN, took amazing photos capturing the smiles, laughter and fun of the festivities.
- ◆ Mel Harris, Office Manager, acted as Grand Marshall and led in the Disney Parade that featured our Special Kids in their costumes.
- ◆ Yucaipa High School students helped with setup, served food, assisted with clean-up, and escorted our children on the parade route.
- ◆ April Myers and Heather Bua acted as Color Guards during the parade.
- ◆ Volunteers from the Rainbow Girls helped with anything and *everything* needed to make our Disney Picnic a success.
- ◆ Dina White, singer extraordinaire, sang Disney songs bringing smiles and squeals of delight

from our Kids.

- ◆ Eroll Penson, DJ, added to the Happiest Place on Earth ambiance with many well-known and loved Disney songs.
- ◆ Jason and Amanda Higgins drew fun and colorful tattoos on resident faces.
- ◆ Wayne Love, DCS, Ron Dufloth, husband of Debbi, and Chad Ackerman, husband of DCS Davina, made mouths water with their delicious barbequed goodies.

### Annual Picnic Committee Members

- ◆ Melissa Yingst-Czerny, LVN
- ◆ Janet Steen, Administrative Assistant
- ◆ Cecilia Barrios, Appointment Coordinator
- ◆ Shelly Dawson, Development Coordinator, QMRP/Administrator
- ◆ Julie Myers, RN
- ◆ Nicole Gambale, LVN
- ◆ Heather Van Alstine, LVN
- ◆ Debbi Dufloth, QMRP/Administrator

### Dessert Committee

- ◆ April Apodaca
- ◆ Josh Klapp

Many, many thanks to all who made this year's picnic an extraordinary success. See you all next year! ■



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# More Pictures from the Picnic



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## ■ CAMI HOUSE *(continued from page 6)*

“At Cami House, we work on art projects together, as a group, often – at least once a week,” says Lisa. “The children love to color and paint and work on special projects. Right now, we’re working on a special project for the annual MSSK picnic. This year’s theme is The Little Mermaid and each House creates a unique piece of art based on that theme. The children – and staff – are really excited about it and are working very hard to put together something very special. At last year’s picnic, there was a safari theme and Cami House created an amazing crocodile painting. It was so much fun!

“The children just love creating things and they really come up with some amazing artwork, but I think the biggest benefit – to the children and staff – is how happy it makes everyone to work together and just be with each other. It makes everyone extremely happy to just sit down together. It

reminds me of when families used to sit down for dinner together every evening. We share stories of the day, share ideas, and just laugh and play together. It’s an upbeat environment.

“I enjoy *everything* about working at MSSK, but I think the time we spend together on these shared art projects, watching the smiles on everyone’s faces as we interact with our Cami House family, makes it even more of a joy to come to work each day.”

*“The artist’s world is limitless. It can be found anywhere, far from where he lives or a few feet away. It is always on his doorstep.”*

—PAUL STRAND

Through the art we create together, we have brought the world to our Cami House doorstep. Its infinite potential waits, just a few feet away, to be discovered by our children living within. ■



Mountain Shadows Support Group, Inc.  
135 Vallecitos de Oro, Suite D  
San Marcos, CA 92069

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