Individual stories on how the Community House has impacted people through the generations are as varied as the people themselves. But there is a common theme throughout – the West Haven Community House was there for them.

One unique story involves one newly inducted (June 2013) agency Board of Directors member, Heatherly Carlson, whose own history with the agency began as a child when she attended our Summer Camp program while attending elementary school in West Haven – Carlson remembers it as a very positive experience.

Fast-forward to 2004 when Carlson first became a Head Start pre-school program parent after her oldest child, Daria, enrolled in the full-day pre-school program in Classroom 1100-A of longtime Head Teacher Barbara Reynolds. “The Head Start experience was so overwhelmingly positive, heartwarming and rewarding,” Carlson said, “so much so that I took the time to create a custom, do-it-yourself 1100-A little ‘Golden Book’ that she called a “labor of love,” with illustrations by her husband. The couple presented it to teachers when Daria transitioned to Kindergarten.

In 2004, Carlson was elected to serve on the agency’s Head Start Policy Committee, which is an advisory board to the program. She worked on issues there including busing and transportation policy, a critical issue for families without access to personal vehicular transportation. Even after her first child left the program, Carlson stayed on the Policy Council as a community representative, and she played an active role in program accreditation, federal program auditing and the personnel committee, finally leaving the council in 2006 after two years service.

Fast-forward again, this time to 2011: “My family happily returned to the Community House” when Carlson’s then 3-year-old daughter, Maylanni, entered the Head Start program. This time around, Carlson served her third and final year on Policy Council as its chairperson.” At the time, I had been promoted at Yale as a managerial researcher in Yale-New Haven Hospital’s Emergency Room and despite the demands of motherhood and work, “I found myself working harder than ever to maintain my commitment to Head Start,” even encountering agency staff and fellow Policy Council members at the ER.

She noted, “It was very important to me to give back to the Community House, since we had experienced so many blessings from the wonderful staff there.” After her final year on the council ended, Carlson said, “I continued to stay in touch with Head Start personnel and expressed an interest in continuing a relationship with the agency.”

In 2013, Carlson was nominated and elected to the West Haven Community House’s Board of Directors, being inducted in June 2013. For the 2013-14 fiscal year, Carlson is chairing the Personnel Committee, and also serves on the Head Start committee.

Said Executive Director Patty Stevens, “Heatherly’s story is a tremendous example of how the Community House has served individuals and families over many generations in West Haven since 1941. “We are very pleased to have Heatherly on our Board of Directors, where her expertise and passion will serve the agency and our clients well for many years to come.”