

# Precious Lamb Preschool expanding its efforts to help homeless kids, families



Precious Lamb Preschool graduation day in 2024 (Photo courtesy of Precious Lamb Preschool)

By [RICH ARCHBOLD](#) | [rarchbold@scng.com](mailto:rarchbold@scng.com) | Press-Telegram  
July 21, 2024

Every day in Long Beach, there are preschool children facing uncertainty because of homelessness.

Homelessness is devastating enough if you're an adult – but what if you're a child with no home to go to?

“Homelessness creates an unstable environment for young children, making their ability to thrive very challenging,” said Matt Cullen, board chair and president of Precious Lamb Preschool, which has served more than 700 children ages 18 months to 5 years old and their families since the school opened in 2002.

But now, the Long Beach nonprofit is entering a new era in its mission to break the cycle of homelessness one child at a time.

“There are great things going on at Precious Lamb,” Cullen told me last week. “It’s an exciting time for us.”

I went on a tour with Cullen of Precious Lamb’s new facility, 1250 Pacific Ave., which is undergoing remodeling and will open in January. It aims to triple the number of children and families the nonprofit serves. It will also establish a new infant care center, serving children ages 6 weeks to 18 months.

With us on the tour was Cheri Bazley, Precious Lamb’s new executive director and a leader in the philanthropic community. She was formerly the longtime executive director at Long Beach’s Ronald

McDonald House and, more recently, served as chief development officer at the Boys & Girls Clubs of LA Harbor in San Pedro.

“This is a critical time in our history,” Cullen said. “As we embark on our growth journey at our new campus, I can’t think of anyone more qualified to lead the charge than Cheri. She will bring strong leadership and expertise to our growing organization.”

Bazley said she was excited by the opportunity to help youngsters in their earliest years.

“I feel that what we do is so meaningful in breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness for future generations,” she said as we looked at the new classrooms and other facilities being built at the new facility, which is less than a mile from the current preschool location.

The housing crisis in the greater Long Beach area, Bazley said, exacerbates the emotional well-being of children and their overall development.

“Homelessness and housing instability expose children to adverse childhood experiences, including trauma, abuse and neglect,” she said. “These experiences can have long-term consequences on students’ academic performance and behavior.”

According to the latest citywide homeless count, there were an estimated 3,376 people without permanent in Long Beach, according to the city’s 2024 point-in-time homeless count, conducted earlier this year. Families comprise 27.7% of the homeless population, the city’s data showed.

Precious Lamb, meanwhile, delivers three core programs, Bazley said:

- Education readiness with children participating in the school’s programs demonstrating improved school readiness skills, including cognitive development and social-emotional improvement.
- Food security promoting overall well-being.
- Household stability improving access to support services.
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“By broadening our services, we aim to provide essential resources and childcare options to more families in need,” Bazley said. “This initiative will empower parents facing homelessness to pursue employment opportunities without worrying about their children.”

Precious Lamb, she said, will also partner with other organizations, such as the nearby Long Beach Rescue Mission and its Lydia House, which serves women.

For this report, I also called Sharalyn Croft, who founded Precious Lamb in 2002. Croft left Long Beach when her husband was transferred by the Coast Guard to other stations in the United States. She and her family now live in the Houston area.

“I love what is being planned at Precious Lamb,” Croft said. “This expansion is carrying out our original vision when we started.”

Croft said she was especially proud of one of the first children Precious Lamb served when it opened in 2002. That child, then a 4-year-old girl, recently graduated from college in Colorado, she said.

Croft, a Long Beach native who was born at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center, said she returns on a regular basis to the city to visit her mother. She said she is planning to visit Long Beach when Precious Lamb Preschool moves into its new facility next year.

Bazley told me of another success story involving a mother who was battling drug addiction when she sought refuge at Precious Lamb with her daughters.

With the help and support of the staff at the nonprofit, the woman graduated from Long Beach City College and has relocated to Arizona, where she has purchased her first home, Bazley said.

“This is what we do,” she said. “Helping children and their families. And we want to do more of it.”



From left, Teacher Miss Malissa, Board President Matt Cullen and Executive Director Cheri Bazley lunch with students at Precious Lamb Preschool in July 2024 (Photo by Rich Archbold, The Press-Telegram/SCNG)



Cheri Bazley, Executive Director of Precious Lamb Preschool (Photo courtesy of the Precious Lamb Preschool)



Students enjoying bubble fun at Precious Lamb Preschool (Photo courtesy of the Precious Lamb Preschool)



Students playing outdoors at Precious Lamb Preschool (Photo courtesy of the Precious Lamb Preschool)



Indoor play at Precious Lamb Preschool (Photo courtesy of Precious Lamb Preschool)



Singing and movement at Precious Lamb Preschool (Photo courtesy of Precious Lamb Preschool)

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## HOMELESSNESS

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**Rich Archbold**  
Columnist

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## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

### ERNEST HEMINGWAY, AMERICAN NOVELIST AND JOURNALIST

"Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today. It's been that way all this year. It's been that way so many times. All of war is that way." (From "For Whom the Bell Tolls," 1940)

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*Preschool expanding efforts to help homeless kids, families*

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*Buttigieg applauds new pedestrian crossing*

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# Archbold

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