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## EHP's Angel, Lesia Preston

On October 28, 2021, Lesia Preston, Executive Director of EHP was honored by the Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto as a 2021 Angel Award recipient. This Award is given to an individual in the Palo Alto area who has had a significant, positive impact on children and youth in our community and beyond. We at EHP are thrilled that Lesia has been recognized by the community for her many years of service dedicated to improving the lives of those most vulnerable. Following is the introduction given by Lanie Wheeler, EHP's bookkeeper, at the 2021 Kiwanis Angel Award presentation.

EHP has been in the safety net business since 1975 when founder, Miriam Nixon Hope and a group from Church Women United channeled surplus and donated food to neighborhood pantries where it was distributed to families in need. In 1978, when the organization was formally incorporated as a nonprofit, Lesia Preston was 13 years old and one of its first volunteers. She helped in the food pantry and was hired as the food coordinator in 1982. As Lesia grew, so did the organization. From its humble beginnings in a church basement, EHP now operates on a 1-acre campus comprised of 5 buildings. From distributing food, its services have expanded to providing clothing, household goods, furnishings and appliances, counseling and a variety of programming and special services directed at the children of the families EHP serves.

Lesia was named Executive Director of EHP in 2011. During her tenure, she continued to grow the community collaborations that resulted in many of the children's programs instituted prior to the pandemic: tutoring and mentoring, teen health, nutrition and cooking classes, birthday celebrations, Pack the Bag, a weekend lunch program for children during the school year and the Summer hot lunch program, to name a few.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, Lesia quickly pivoted the programming of the entire agency to fit the new realities of the Covid-19 world. The emphasis of the agency shifted back to its origins as a food distribution center. The number of clients served doubled seemingly overnight, with lines of cars waiting to get into the parking lot, backing up to the intersection of Bay Road and University Avenue. But that didn't stop Lesia from continuing to the extent possible the programs for her special children. Programs like Pack the Bag and Cake4Kids birthday cakes continued and others like Back to School and Christmas gift pro-

grams were modified to reflect the new challenges and new needs. Today, EHP provides services to over 27,000 individuals, of which over 6500 are children living in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and neighboring communities.

EHP's impact on youth extends beyond those children in need. Pre-pandemic, 450 youth volunteers, some as young as 6 years, provided direct service on EHP's campus, allowing them to see the impact of their kindness and generosity. This does not count the children and teen service and school groups who held off-site food, gift card and clothing drives.

To this latter point, EHP received the following letter from a former volunteer:

*I vividly remember my afternoon at EHP 25 years ago. Even as a rambunctious 5<sup>th</sup> grader, I was captivated by the staff and their earnest commitment to their work. Together, we sorted food and discussed the importance of supporting those in need. I was inspired by the immediate application and positive benefit of our work. Little did I know how impactful that moment would be.*

*As I navigated my own life, I never forgot the lessons from that day of volunteering. Since then, I have done service projects in many countries and formats often reflecting back to what it felt like as a young kid to roll my sleeves up and think of and work to provide for the needs of another.*

*As the Rabbi of Barrack Hebrew Academy outside Philadelphia, it is my job to coordinate service projects for our 350 students. Last month, during our school wide day of service, as I drove around to our 15 different service projects, I flashed back to my first opportunity to volunteer and was overwhelmed with gratitude.*

*Thank you for your work, both that which fills our bellies when we need and that which nourishes and inspires our soul.*

"EHP's mission is to provide compassionate, dignified, and practical assistance to families and individuals experiencing economic and personal hardship. We offer material help, support services and advocacy for our neighbors in need, in a challenging and rapidly changing environment. Our Angel, Lesia, is the human embodiment of this mission with the vision and creativity to make the words into reality and a smile and a heart as big and radiant as the sun." Lanie Wheeler, Kiwanis Member



## Finally Reunited! Mavis' Story Continued ...

In the summer of 2014, we told the story of Mavis, her struggles and how she persevered against great odds. The only thing missing in her life was her firstborn child. Today we are able to finish Mavis' story. To recap, Mavis left Nicaragua 42 years ago, leaving her 18-month daughter, Lillian, in the care of her grandmother. With tears in her eyes, she crooned sweet promises that she would be coming back for her soon. Her journey took Mavis to Mexico, then the deserts of Baja before she finally arrived in San Francisco. She remembers sleepless December nights in the desert, cold and hungry, and fearful of immigration officers, but hopeful that this journey would lead to better lives for herself and her child.

Eventually Mavis settled in East Palo Alto. Working as a house cleaner and now with six children (sans Lillian), she found that no matter how much she worked, it was not enough to support her family. By 1992, Mavis began coming to EHP for food, clothing, furniture and other resources. She developed a lasting friendship with Nevada Butler, who faced similar challenges when she moved to California. In 1994, Mavis married Klaus Peter Boegner and together Peter and Mavis volunteered in the community, fed the homeless and inspired others through her prison ministry and prayer line. Mavis said, "Peter made me feel so wonderful", and while her life was full, not a day went by that Mavis didn't think about the little girl she left behind. Through the years, Mavis continued to send money to her mother for Lillian's care and went to Nicaragua on three separate occasions, determined to bring her daughter home. Each time, Mavis' request was denied. As time passed, Mavis watched her firstborn become an adult and have her own children via Messenger.

Mavis' other children also wanted to bring Lillian home and encouraged their mom to ask the government for help. One daughter even wrote a letter to President Reagan, asking for \$200, money the family didn't have, to pay for Lillian's visa.

That letter was never sent, but it inspired Mavis to write to Senator Feinstein and Representative Zoey Lofgren, who reached out to the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua. Former Rep. Mike Honda then brought Mavis' plight to the public, hoping the government would act on her behalf, but their efforts were fruitless. When all seemed lost, the



*Mavis & Family*

Obama Administration passed new immigration programs and Mavis jumped on the opportunity. Unfortunately, the cost of visa applications and exit exams was astronomical. Determined, Mavis scrimped and saved, coming to EHP for food and other necessities so she could pay those fees. Timing and the pandemic proved to be major deterrents. Visa applications were good for only a short period and expired before the mandatory exit medical exams and interviews could be conducted. All of these costs were non-refundable, forcing Mavis to save again and again as she refiled the applications and rescheduled exams. Finally on her fourth filing, Lillian and three of her children had their exit papers and visas.

On September 13, 2021, Mavis waited anxiously at SFO. She was going to meet her grandchildren, Ian and Lian for the first time and see Lillian and granddaughter Liana again after 15 years. Within a few days, Mavis and Lillian paid a surprise visit to EHP so Lillian could meet Nevada, the friend who helped and encouraged her mother throughout the years.

EHP was able to supply Lillian with a bed, linens, clothing, and kitchenware to help get her family settled.

Today, Lillian, Ian, Lian and Liana live with Mavis in her south bay home. Lillian was a schoolteacher in Nicaragua and has already applied for teaching jobs. Lian and Liana are adjusting to life in San Jose, and are attending middle school and high school, respectively. Ian, 4 years old, will be in kindergarten next year. Lillian's adult sons, Nerrick and Nelton, were unable to come earlier but have their visas and will be arriving soon. Once Lillian has a steady income, she would like to move into an apartment. The hardest adjustment for Lillian has been the weather. She is surprised by how cold it is here. We'll have to make sure she gets some warm coats this winter! For Christmas, Lillian hopes to have a job as a teacher, laptops for her two girls who are currently doing their schoolwork on a cell phone and Ian would love some toys and maybe a mini trampoline.

For Mavis, this Christmas will be very special, and she wishes her late husband, Klaus Peter, could be here with them. She misses his presence at the family table especially at Christmastime and wishes he could have met Lillian. She is saddened that he is not here to see her wish finally granted: for "me and all my children celebrating our first Christmas together."

Mavis would like to thank EHP and the Asian Alliance for their support and help in reuniting her family. She would also like to thank her friends and family who wrote letters of support to the U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua. EHP wishes Mavis and her family the very best and will always be here for them, offering friendship and support. EHP joins Mavis in thanking our donors who, through their generosity, have made it possible for her and many others to achieve their happy ending.



**Food for Thought ... From July 2020—June 2021, we served:**

5,644 households, 18,024 individuals and 24,956 food boxes  
And, we anticipate that we will have over 7,500 households signed up for  
EHP's 2021 Thanksgiving & Christmas distributions alone



# Wish List

Our families desperately need your help. Families already struggling have been blindsided by COVID-19, threatening not only their health but also their livelihood. These families are food insecure and struggling to survive. Your generosity can make all the difference and you can become a safety-net for a neighbor-in-need this holiday season.

In order to have a socially distanced distribution that will protect our staff, clients and donors, we are asking for monetary and gift card donations to ensure a safe and simple holiday distribution, and to allow our families the ability to shop safely online. But new in-kind donations of food and gifts are also welcome.

## EHP's Holiday Hope & Happiness Program for Youth

Every holiday season we encounter the same problem – our older youth, ages 10-18, are often overlooked by traditional giving programs. And in addition, many of our teens are overstressed and overworked. They are often taking care of younger siblings, filling in for working parents who cannot afford childcare. They are children given adult responsibilities and they especially deserve happiness during the holidays. You can make a difference

by providing gifts for one or more EHP teens this year! Donate a gift card from one of the stores listed and let the teens shop for themselves or if you would like to purchase the gifts personally, ask the store for suggestions. Thank you so much for helping to make the holidays a little brighter for our youth. Your generosity changes lives!

We also desperately need Family Sharing Donors! Formerly called “Adopt-a-Family” this program allows donors to

participate in a truly life changing giving experience!

We have hundreds of families experiencing extreme hardship on a waiting list but only a handful of donors. Please call or email LaKesha at EHP (650) 323-7781 / LaKesha@ehpcare.org for more information on how you can participate in this rewarding program. You can also simply shop from the above wish list and drop off your gift at the EHP campus.

## Made with Love

Homemade toys for tots and knitted caps were delivered to EHP in November by Eileen Wall. These toys and hats are welcome additions to our “Welcome Baby” gift baskets. Eileen also made adult size caps to keep our adult clients warm this winter. Her husband, Jim Wall from Repair Café, is a regular volunteer at EHP, fixing and giving new life to appliances for our families in need and taking care of our “honey-do” list of minor repairs.

We are grateful for the giving spirit of the Wall family and appreciate all that they do for our local neighbors in need.



### Gift Cards

- Amazon, Costco, Nordstrom Rack, Safeway, Walmart, Target, Visa & Mastercard (for bill payments)

### Gift Donations (youth Christmas gifts)

- Action figure sets
- Bluetooth speakers, headphones, earbuds
- Board games (popular)
- Ethnic dolls
- Amazon Firestick
- Hot wheels sets
- Remote control toys (ground & air)
- Make-up/nail polish sets
- Men's & women's scents & bath sets
- Official NBA & NFL gear (local teams)
- Purses & fanny packs
- Men's and women's sterling silver jewelry



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***Our Mission:***

to provide compassionate, dignified  
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of charities, and add us to your charities!



EHP is a Platinum-level [GuideStar Exchange](#) participant, demon-  
strating its commitment to transparency. Write a review about us!

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