



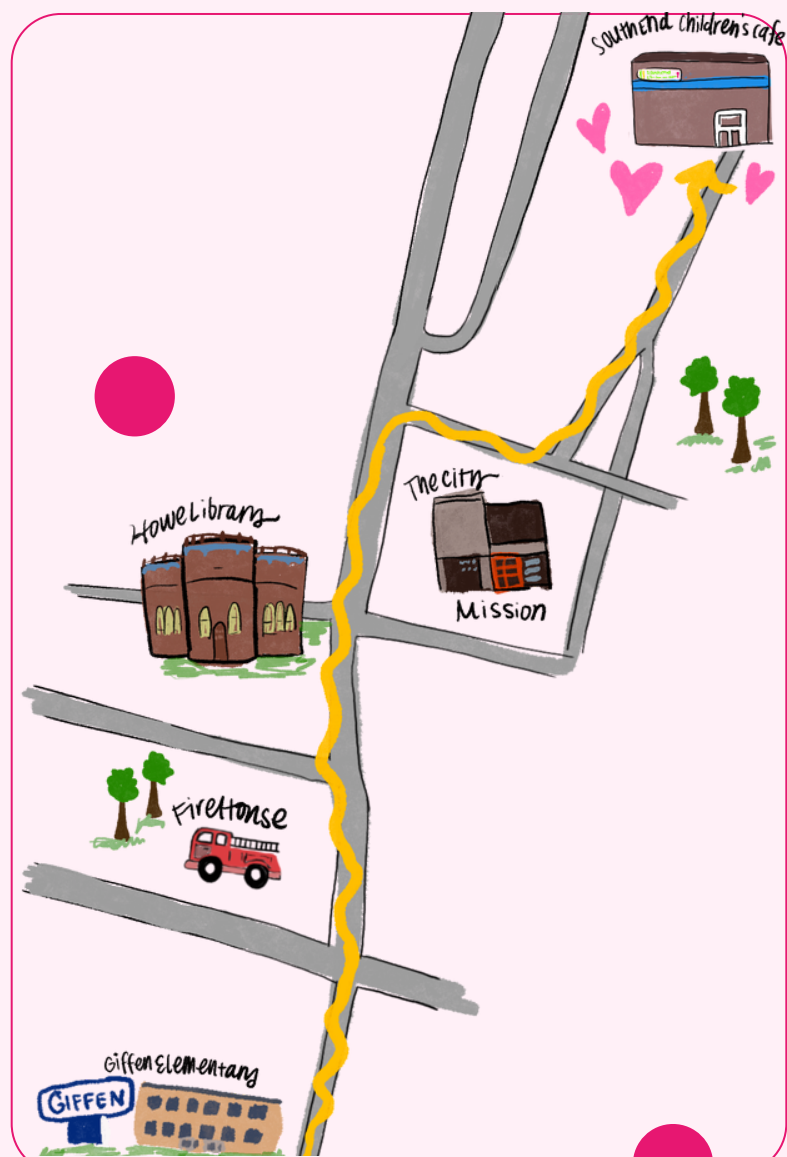
# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF GRANDMA DOT

*Enter the world of Grandma Dot, an individual at the heart of the South End Children's Cafe. Beyond being a proud grandmother to four children in the program, she's intricately woven into the fabric of the organization.*

*With a generous heart, Grandma Dot stands as a cornerstone volunteer, pouring her time and love into the South End Children's Cafe. As we follow her through a day in her life, you'll uncover the genuine connections, raw dedication, and unique energy that fuel our program.*

Grandma Dot grabs her grocery cart and leaves her house. She walks to Giffen Memorial Elementary School to pick up a few of her great-grandchildren and their friends.

She greets Miss Amanda, the Community School Site Coordinator and also the Board President at the South End Children's Cafe. She waves to Miss Brown, the school's Principal.



She picks up the children and the group continues along their way to the Children's Cafe. Grandma Dot and the children cross the street. They walk past the Fire Station where they wave to Albany Firefighters.

They turn the corner onto Arch street. Many people are friendly and familiar — Grandma Dot knows the community well. She shares homemade dinners from the Children's Cafe with many of these neighbors several times a week.



Grandma Dot and the children pass Albany Housing Authority's Lincoln Towers. From March 2021 until August 2022, the Children's Cafe rented a large space at 3 Lincoln Square and reopened for our afterschool program during the COVID-19 pandemic, safely serving 40 children and youth.

Grandma Dot and the children pass the Radix Center, where they wave to the chickens. Next they pass Youth FX and sometimes see young filmmakers learning and working outside. Grandma Dot and the children have shared many nights at YouthFX with the community - Thanksgiving meals, Kids Proms, and movies.



They arrive at the Children's Cafe doors. One child holds their hands up to the glass to peek inside. They see the kitchen bustling a couple hours ahead of dinner service. They see cups of fresh fruit salad, healthy snacks, and ice cold water lined up on the counter. They see friendly familiar faces.

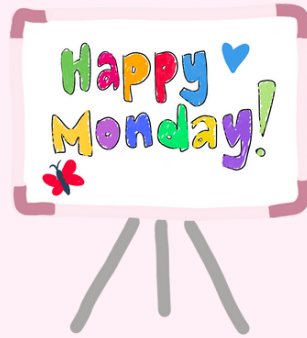


Grandma Dot knocks on the door. Miss Marie, the Front Desk Greeter, opens it. The AC pushes out into the June heat. The children rush in. They put their backpacks in their lockers. Grandma Dot walks in and greets the busy Kitchen Team.

She greets a couple of her grandchildren who are already settled at the Cafe tables playing board games, painting, or just chatting and snacking. Staff and volunteers are spread throughout the room (3:1 adult to child ratio). Volunteers include local high school and college students, retired teachers and school staff, neighbors, and groups of workers from local corporate partners.



Grandma Dot stops and reads the daily inspirational message on the dry erase board decorated by staff.



Grandma Dot leans into the kitchen: what's for dinner today?



"It's Taco Tuesday!" the cooks call back. A fan favorite — ground turkey tacos (choice of soft or hard shell) served with salad, corn, and rice.

As children arrive at the Children's Cafe from schools throughout Albany — Giffen, TOAST, Henry Johnson, Albany Leadership, and more — they ask:



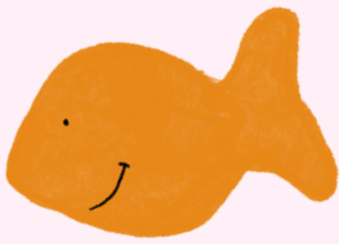
"What's for dinner?" some ask...

"It's Taco Tuesday!"

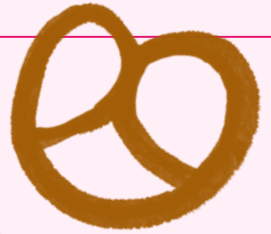
...Followed by the real question: "What's for dessert?"

"Ice cream!"





They grab a snack, and head to the homework room to make sure they are up to date on their school work. Around 4:15, all the children have arrived. Some are back in the Homework Room finishing worksheets with their Homework Helper, someone from our small group of local retired teachers and high school/college students who provide 1:1 tutoring and academic support to children.



Around 4:30, a group may go to the playground at Lincoln Park East. Some may go to a workshop at another community-based organization like ArtStreet at Albany Center Gallery or Story Time at the library. Some may go to the Radix Center. Some children may choose to stay behind and hang out at the Children's Cafe. They may finish a painting or puzzle they started during snack time. They may help set the tables for dinner.



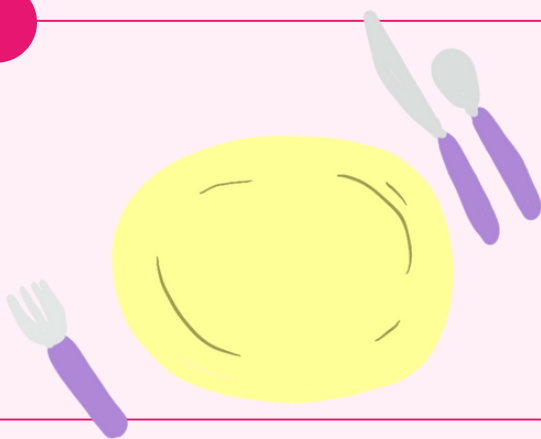
One group gets to take the van on an outing. The "Big Kids" love Hoffman Park. "The Littles" love visiting different playgrounds throughout the City of Albany.





Around 5:00, the Kitchen Team assembles into a line to pack takeout orders for our neighbors at the Radix Center, and sometimes other projects like South End ArtStreet at Albany Center Gallery, programs at Giffen Elementary, and more.

Grandma Dot checks the attendance list. She counts paper takeout bags. She counts hot sauce and taco sauce packets. She keeps dinner service on time — 70 take-out orders are packed, bagged, and on the takeout shelf by 5:15. Dinner is ready at 5:30. The taco bar is stocked and ready for service. The Kitchen Team is ready to start plating dinners.



Grandma Dot helps set the tables for dinner. The Children's Cafe van pulls into the parking lot. Grandma Dot's granddaughter greets our driver and the kids jump out of the van after their adventure.

"Oh, here they come!" Grandma Dot calls out. The cooks wash their hands, put on new gloves, and line up for dinner service. As Miss Marie opens the front door, Grandma Dot adjusts the taco bar at the counter. Volunteers pick up water pitchers ready to serve. Every night, about 40 youth and 10 staff and volunteers dine in at the Children's Cafe.

The children take their seats with their friends. The volume crescendos as everyone gets ready to enjoy the meal.



Salads are served tableside or plated and passed out ahead of dinner. Milk and water are offered. The Kitchen Team starts plating — a serving of rice then corn onto bright green, pink, and yellow plates. The last cook adds a taco and passes the plate over the counter to waiting hands.



Staff and older youth serve from taco bars to help everyone (especially "the littles") make their tacos. Two taco bars are stocked with lettuce, chopped tomatoes, shredded cheese, salsa, and black beans. Grandma Dot looks on from the kitchen counter. She helps keep track of meals served every day.



At the tables, children pass around hot sauce and sour cream (spooned out in reasonable portions by staff stationed at each table). Laughter, chatter, and stories about the school day fill the room. Founder/Executive Director Tracie Killar calls it "magical chaos" — the joyous chatter and laughter of children playing, singing, and smiling until their cheeks hurt.





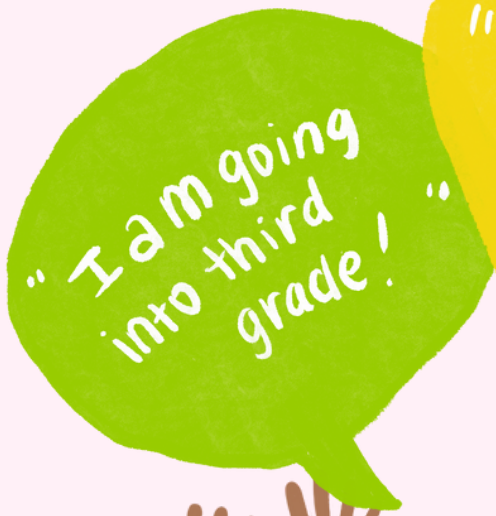
Around 5:40, everyone is served.. Miss Amani stands up from her dinner table and joyfully exclaims over the buzzing little voices: "If you hear my voice, clap twice!" "Clap twice!"

The room focuses on Miss Amani. She invites the children to come up to the front of the Cafe to "say their words" to the group during dinner.

"Did you share an act of kindness today?" she asks. Meanwhile, it is 5:45 — time for seconds. The cooks push a dinner cart through the kitchen's swinging door.

"Did you accomplish something at school?" Hushed voices ask for second helpings of tacos, rice, and corn.

"Tell us about something that made you feel happy." Children line up at the front of the room to say their words:





Dessert is served by 5:50. The children are picked up by parents and caregivers at 6:00 pm in a full-staff coordinated effort. The children mingle at their tables waiting to be called to sign out for the day. On their way out, Grandma Dot hands them their dinner bag she packed with all the condiments.



Grandma Dot helps pack the backpacks and carry car seats to the van. This past school year, Broadview donated a van to the Children's Cafe to support our response to increased transportation barriers. The United Way of the Greater Capital Region funded our first part-time drivers (also family members of child enrolled in our program) through the end of 2022. The van takes 10 children home (door to door) from the Children's Cafe after dinner. We all say goodbye and tell the children we cannot wait to see them tomorrow.



By 6:10 most of the children are on their way home. Staff and volunteers clean. Music, jokes, laughter, sometimes dancing, fill the room again. Everyone is happy from all of the love packed into the hours between school and dinner. The most important work of the day is done: the children are safe, happy, and enjoyed a delicious meal.



The Kitchen Team washes dishes. They pack leftovers into takeout containers. Grandma Dot fills her cart to the very top with homemade dinners, cups of fruit salad, side dishes made by the early prep shift.

On her way home she passes the Free Food Fridge and stocks it with tonight's dinner. Each night on her way home, she distributes even more meals to neighbors.

Another day in the life of Grandma Dot and the South End Children's Cafe is done. We can't wait for tomorrow!

