

CLARA'S WAY



Clara Ward

Born in Waycross Georgia, the second of eight children, **Clara Ward** has always had a strong faith and quiet strength. This has always been "**Clara's Way.**" Whether she was cooking and cleaning for her extended family (over 30 people) at the tender age of eight -- or working as a nanny and housekeeper for a well-to-do family at age twelve -- serving others has always been second nature to her. Clara's **strength of character, perseverance and unshakable faith** have guided her through many trials in her life -- including various forms of abuse, poverty and a serious physical illness (myasthenia gravis) that has weakened her legs, but not her resolve to help others in need.

Experiencing first-hand the heartache of abuse and neglect, Clara has always **made it her mission to help the less fortunate** in her community. When better job opportunities temporarily took Clara and her family to Buffalo, NY in the 1960's, they soon began collecting and distributing toys for needy children each Christmas. This family tradition began in Buffalo over 30 years ago, and has changed and grown over the past few decades into what is now **The Youth Development Center** located in Erie, PA.

Founded over 20 years ago in 1987, the YDC has taken various forms throughout the years, including **The Youth Development Restaurant** at 848 East 5th St. in the mid 80's, a freestanding **Youth Development Center** on 19th & Thompson Streets in the early 90's to **Clara's current residence** at 650 East 21st St. in Erie, PA. The Ward's current residence recently underwent an **Extreme Home Makeover** with the help of thousands of volunteers from the **Erie Community, Maleno Development** and **ABC's Extreme Makeover Home Edition Design Team** in July 2009.

For over two decades, the YDC has helped inner-city children stay off the streets, and giving them a safe place to spend time, learn useful skills and have fun. **Clara and her family** consistently encourage these children to **stay in school, stay out of trouble**, and always strive to **reach their full potential in life.**

The Youth Development Center regularly takes under privileged children to various **museums, parks, sporting events, camping, fishing, picnicking, skiing**, etc. free of charge. They also run a summer and after-school program for neighborhood children. For over 22 years, the YDC has planned an annual Christmas Party that still provides over **300 children** with toys for Christmas, serves over **400 meals** and distributes over **200 food baskets** for the needy.

CLARA'S WAY

Clara's is a front porch/kitchen table ministry. She is always there to lend a listening ear and give guidance to children in need without judgment, but not without expectations. **Love, Respect, Caring, Kindness, and Responsibility** are cornerstones of the YDC's mission and vision.

Along with being an inspiration to many, Clara Ward's proudest accomplishment is being the mother of four wonderful children **Donald, Cynthia, Claritha** and **Bennie**. She is also the loving grandmother of six grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.



Clara is eternally grateful to her family and extended family members for supporting her throughout the years -- including her brother, **Joseph Young**, sisters **Betty Smith** and **Johnnie McCloud**, and cousins **Diane Gamble** and **Bridget Young** among many, many others too numerous to mention.

This website has been created to help Clara cast her nets even farther to reach out and touch countless others with her **incredible life story**. If you've been inspired by Clara Ward and would like to **help her carry out her mission** to help others live "**Clara's Way**" -- a life paved with selflessness, compassion, generosity and hope -- click the "donate" button on this site to support **Youth Development Center programs**.

CLARA'S WAY

Clara's Way (Youth Development Center)

650 East 21st Street
Erie, Pa. 16503
(814) 456-7199

Clara@ClarasWay.com

WEB: ClarasWay.com