

**The Junior League of Holyoke, Inc. Collection**  
**Head Start Program, 1964 – 1974**

**1 box (0.5 linear ft.)**

**Collection number HP2005.30**

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Abstract

Holyoke's Head Start Program was founded in 1965 by the Junior League of Holyoke, a young women's organization of community volunteers. The Head Start Program was a preschool program for three- and four-year-olds from low-income families. The Junior League of Holyoke researched the need for such a program before embarking on this project, and then successfully applied for federal funding to sustain it. The Head Start Program still exists in Holyoke today, although the Junior League of Holyoke disbanded in 1997, due to the fact that fewer women had time to volunteer. The Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc., however, continues to be a viable organization.

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Historical Note

The Junior League of Holyoke, Inc. was organized as the Junior Service Corps in 1932 and became affiliated with the Junior Leagues of America in 1945. The young women who founded the Junior League of Holyoke were volunteers who were interested in improving the social, economic, educational, and cultural conditions in their community. Through extensive research, they determined Holyoke's most pressing needs, and addressed these unmet needs with programs they helped found and fund. Once their fledgling ventures were up and running, they generally moved on to new projects.

On a national level, The Junior League for the Promotion of Settlement Movements was founded in 1901 by nineteen-year-old Mary Harriman, along with eighty other debutantes from her Barnard College freshman class. The aim of these young women was to raise funds and improve living conditions for immigrants living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. As time went on, the original members of New York's Junior League founded other affiliates of the Junior League around the country. During the Great Depression, the Junior League was instrumental in providing food at nutrition centers and milk stations throughout the nation.

In keeping with this tradition of anti-poverty work, the membership of the Junior League of Holyoke voted unanimously in January of 1965 to adopt as their new project a preschool program for children from Holyoke's low-income families. The League's purpose in helping these children, whom it called "culturally deprived," was to ensure that they would be socially and academically prepared for elementary school. The hope

expressed by the leaders of the Junior League of Holyoke was that their preschool program would enable low-income children to succeed academically and to thus “break the cycle” of poverty. Joan C. Steiger (Mrs. Robert K. Steiger) served as both the Chairman of the Project Finding Committee that researched the need for the Head Start Program and as the first Project Committee Chairman for the Head Start Program.

The Junior League of Holyoke worked in concert with local and federal agencies to make their preschool program a reality. In conjunction with the Holyoke Housing Authority as part of the Holyoke Community Action Committee, the League applied in early 1965 for federal funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity. The League also worked together with the Holyoke Mental Health Center (an agency that the Junior League of Holyoke had established in 1953) to organize a pilot summer program called “Operation Head Start.” Operation Head Start ran during July and August of 1965 in the newly refurbished recreation room of the Toepfert Apartments on 38 North Summer Street.

In September of 1965, Holyoke Mayor Daniel F. Dibble was notified by Congressman Silvio O. Conte’s office that the Holyoke Community Action Committee had received a \$64,986 War on Poverty grant, to be administered by the Junior League of Holyoke, Inc. for a year-round Head Start program for thirty preschool children.

The Head Start Program still exists in Holyoke today, although the Junior League of Holyoke disbanded in 1997, due to the fact that fewer women had time to volunteer. The Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc., however, continues to be a viable organization, as does one of its local affiliates, the Junior League of Greater Springfield.

### Scope and Contents of the Collection

The Junior League of Holyoke’s Head Start Program Collection contains material dating between 1964 and 1974. The collection consists of correspondence, grant applications, internal memos and notes, orientation materials for volunteers, publicity for the program from Holyoke’s South Congregational Church, and newspaper clippings.

Additional materials related to the Junior League of Holyoke’s Head Start Program can be viewed at the Holyoke History Room. These materials include printed booklets of the Junior League of Holyoke’s Annual Reports, as well as folders of typed notes, also called Annual Reports, which provide more detailed information than the printed booklets. Particularly informative are the folders for the Junior League of Holyoke’s Annual Reports for the years 1964-1965, 1965-1966, and 1966-1967. The Junior League’s monthly newsletter, *Banter*, also supplies background information on the Head Start Program.

This collection is organized into four series:

- Series 1 Correspondence (1965 -1972)
- Series 2 Grant Applications and Fact Sheets and Proposals (c. 1965 - c.1968)
- Series 3 Internal Notes, Memos; Orientations for Volunteers (c.1964 - c.1971)

- Series 4 Publicity and Newspaper Clippings (1965 -1974)

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## Information on Use

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### Terms of Access and Use

#### *Restrictions on access:*

The collection is open for research.

### Preferred Citation

Cite as: The Junior League of Holyoke Head Start Program Collection (HP2005.30).  
Holyoke Public Library History Room & Archives.

### Custodial History

The Junior League of Holyoke, Inc. Collection was donated by the Junior League of Holyoke after it dissolved in 1997. Joan Daly donated yearbooks from the Junior League in 2005. Joan C. Steiger donated annual reports from the Junior League in 2010.

### Processing Information

Processed by Lisa Liphires, 2010.

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## Additional Information

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## **Repository Information**

Holyoke Public Library  
History Room & Archives  
250 Chestnut Street  
Holyoke, MA 01040

Telephone: (413) 420-8107  
[www.holyokelibrary.org](http://www.holyokelibrary.org)

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## Series Descriptions

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### Series 1. Correspondence (1 folder)

1965 - 1972

Consists of correspondence between officers of the Junior League of Holyoke, Inc. and officials and agencies with whom the League collaborated and from whom the League received funding for the Head Start Program. This correspondence includes letters from Congressman Silvio O. Conte and a telegram from Senator Edward M. Kennedy, telling the Junior League and their colleagues that they had received funding for their program.

### Series 2. Grant Applications and Fact Sheets and Proposals (2 folders)

c. 1965 - c. 1968

Consists of copies of grant applications submitted by the Junior League of Holyoke for their "Head Start Child Development Program" to the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. Also included in this series are fact sheets and proposals that the Junior League of Holyoke created about their Head Start Program.

### Series 3. Internal Notes and Memos and Orientations for Volunteers (2 folders)

c. 1964 - c. 1971

Consists of internal notes and memoranda written by Junior League members to each other about the Head Start Program. Also contains guidelines from the Association of Junior Leagues of America for "League Involvement in Federal Programs." Consists, as well, of materials related to the orientation and training of volunteers for the Junior League of Holyoke's Head Start Program.

### Series 4. Publicity and Newspaper Clippings (6 folders)

1965 - 1974

Consists of newspaper clippings and photocopies of them, related to the Junior League of Holyoke's Head Start Program. Included in this series are the original contents of a black vinyl binder that the Junior League of Holyoke had filled with newspaper clippings about the Head Start Program. (The Holyoke History Room has discarded the binder.) This series also consists of some publicity from Holyoke's South Congregational Church, detailing equipment and toys "needed for Operation Head Start Pre-School Center Program."

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## Search Terms

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The following terms represent persons, organizations, and topics documented in this collection. Use these headings to search for additional materials.

Subjects

- Junior League
- Junior League of Holyoke, Inc.
- Joan. C. Steiger or Mrs. Robert K. Steiger
- Head Start
- Head Start Programs
- Operation Head Start
- Preschool children
- Children and poverty
- Poor children—Education (Preschool)----United States