



## Julie Burns

In 1996, Julie Burns ('88) [née Brown] was working in New York with school-aged children from impoverished backgrounds who were suffering from a variety of cognitive and emotional issues. "Was there a point when I could have entered into their lives and helped



prevent these problems?" she wondered. "What if I could have reached the mother at pregnancy?"

At the same time she was entertaining these questions, several friends were having babies. These children would be entering a world of plenty. Yet her Medicaid patients at the Karen Horney Clinic on East 62nd were living in poverty. "There had to be a resource to pass on the wealth of items available to more fortunate families" she thought.

Two years later, Burns established Room to Grow, a nonprofit organization that provides poor parents with guidance, support, and baby items throughout their child's first three years of life. Burns opened a storefront in East Harlem and filled it with new and nearly new items, all donated from better off

families in the community as well as from corporate donors. Parents meet with a social worker for a two hour appointment every three months. "During their one-on-one visit, they have the opportunity to select clothing, books, toys, and other needed items, while also receiving the support and information that a parent of a growing baby needs," she says.

Now at Room to Grow's current location at 21st Street, one full-time social worker sees 200 families, all referred from prenatal clinics throughout the five boroughs. This December, Burns is opening Room to Grow in Boston. In 2005, the organization will expand their space in New York and add another social worker, effectively doubling the number of families seen there.

"Every parent wants to provide a wealth of things for their child," says Burns. "But providing toys, books, and clothing is a means to a larger end. We can give them these wonderful things while helping them navigate this incredible journey and feel in control."

Though she might not be using her LSA art history degree every day on the job, Burns says that her time at Michigan greatly influenced who she is and how she sees the world. "Whatever creative or entrepreneurial strengths it takes to build and run a business, and the inclination to think about the world beyond oneself, developed in me during my wonderful experiences in college. This includes the people I met, the classes I took, and the resources that I developed as I became an adult there."

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