

OSSINING CHILDREN'S CENTER

Fall 2021 Newsletter



Back to School Days are Happy Days

We are overjoyed to be back to school! Over the past 18 months, so much has happened: babies were born, kindergarteners graduated to first grade, first steps were made – but none of us had our full share of friends, hugs, parties or days in school with our peers and our teachers, and many of us felt that loss.



“Children and adolescents are probably more likely to experience high rates of depression, and most likely anxiety, during and after enforced isolation,” states the Psychiatric Times. “Clinical services should offer preventive support and early intervention where possible and be prepared for an increase in mental health problems.”

This is where the unique family-centered approach that OCC takes really comes in handy. We are prepared to take on the toughest



situations because we are small and community supported with a social worker on staff. Terry Becker, LMSW says, “We are seeing a whole new set of challenges just in these beginning weeks, which we are exploring by connecting with families and public school teachers. By working individually with those children affected, consulting with classroom staff, and collaborating with families and members of our community network, we feel well positioned to support our children through these challenging times.”

Music is Back

Over the past year and a half, COVID restrictions have prevented OCC from offering enrichment classes, like music with Ms. Rose, that have become signature offerings of our unique program for young children. OCC believes that a well-rounded education includes time in the garden, singing, dancing and playing instruments – but we’ve had to limit the people in the building to only staff and children – even our parents are just seeing the Center indoors for the first time! We have to ramp up slowly since we are recovering in every way and still have restrictions to abide by. But having Ms. Rose back feels like we are returning to something essential, and that’s a really wonderful feeling.



Child Care Funding: A Call to Action

By Howard Milbert, Executive Director

The Westchester County Board of Legislators is in the midst of the budget process for the County’s 2022 fiscal year. I am asking you, our donor community, to join us in reaching out to our county legislators to increase child care funding to the “Market Rate.”

Thanks to you – our loyal donors – and to COVID relief funding, the Ossining Children’s Center has managed to make ends meet during the pandemic. However, we anticipate that 2022 will be much more challenging – not just for OCC – but for all licensed child care providers. Child care has been chronically under-funded; COVID relief funding hasn’t addressed that ongoing issue.

In 2010 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established “Market Rate” as a guideline for Counties to pay for child care subsidies for low income working families. “Market Rate” was set so that children from low income families would be able to enroll in **high quality** child care.

Westchester County pays child care subsidies for infant, toddler, Prekindergarten, before- and after school programs; payments for preschoolers are \$1,700 less per child per year than the New York State Market Rate. There are similar gaps between the market rate and County payments for infants, toddlers, and school-age youngsters. (Moreover, even the Market Rate doesn’t come close to covering the cost of OCC’s high quality programs.) With 68 low-income families in preschool and other programs, OCC is underpaid by \$92,294, year after year.

Child care centers have started to limit the number of low income children they enroll; they simply can’t afford to enroll as many low income working families as need child care.

Please call your County legislator and ask her to increase the County child care subsidy to the Market Rate.

District 3 (Mount Pleasant, North Castle, Pleasantville and parts of Briarcliff Manor, Sleepy Hollow and Greenburgh)
Margaret A. Cunzio *Minority Leader*; 914-995-2847, mac5@westchestergov.com

District 9 (Ossining, Briarcliff, Croton, and parts of Cortlandt and the City of Peekskill)
Catherine Borgia, *Chair, Budget and Appropriations Committee; Co-Chair, Families Task Force*; 914- 995-2812; cxb9@westchestergov.com

Mailing address for County Legislators:
800 Michaelian Office Building
148 Martine Avenue
White Plains, NY 10601



Leave your mark on the future

There are ways to support the Ossining Children’s Center for many years to come. You can begin today – with a legacy gift through your estate plan.

Of course, your family comes first. After you have taken care of your family in your estate plan, please consider a gift to the Ossining Children’s Center. Contact us for more information on the different ways to plan your legacy for the future, for example:

- A bequest through your will
- Donate life insurance that your heirs no longer need
- A charitable remainder trust
- Designate OCC as the beneficiary of your IRAs

Of course, always consult with your own tax advisor when considering a significant charitable gift.

For more information, please contact Shawn Cribari at 914-941-0230, Extension 313.

The Holidays are Coming

The chilly mornings and the abundance of Halloween candy are telltale signs that the holidays are near. OCC's dedicated dream team of volunteers are ready, planning a season of holiday cheer for our OCC families. After a difficult year for many, our volunteers can't wait to help spread some love and joy. Plans include a toy drive, an in-school holiday craft, and yummy holiday candy bags. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months. If you would like to lend a hand please email our Volunteer Coordinator Nance Dickinson at nance81@icloud.com. We are so grateful for Nance and for all of our volunteers. Thank you for all you do!



Volunteer extraordinaire Stacey Winnick displays the many generous donations to last year's toy drive.

OCC Bids Farewell to our Friend Neil Woolf

We are so sad to bid farewell to our wonderful friend, Neil Woolf, one of the kindest people we've ever known. Everyone in Ossining knew Neil as the owner of Bob's Army and Navy store, which has existed since 1946 and was originally opened by Neil's mother and father.

But at OCC we know Neil also as a former Board President. He presided over the opening of OCC's Terry Crandall Infant and Toddler Center at 92 South Highland Avenue in 1996. That expansion was fueled, in part, by the Board's decision to provide care for the infant children of teen mothers so that those young women could complete high school. That commitment resulted in OCC's first capital campaign, which funded the purchase and renovation of 92 South Highland.

Neil also had a wonderful way of connecting to the children and the programs. He welcomed our children to visit the store, providing many of them with their first lesson in busi-



Neil Woolf with OCC kids

ness. Neil also generously provided T-shirts for our summer program, taking great care to make sure each and every child had the right size T-shirt. Then, with a smile and a funny quip, he personally delivered the shirts to OCC. Neil will always have a special place in our hearts and we are going to miss him.



Save the date for

OCC's Spring Gala

April 3, 2022

Abigail Kirsch at
Tappan Hill Mansion

Our Children, Our Future – Capital Campaign Celebration

On September 18, friends and supporters gathered at the new Ossining Children’s Center to celebrate OCC’s successful capital campaign: Our Children Our Future. The celebration was a heartfelt thank you to our amazing community of donors who helped make our dreams come true. Speakers included County Executive George Latimer, Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, and OCC Board President Vanessa Pairis. The Arthur and Rebecca Samberg Building is testament to the loyalty of our generous community. As Natalie Gorlin, OCC board member and building committee chair, said in her remarks, “Brick by brick we have built a lot more than just the building standing behind me. We have formed strong friendships and secured a brighter future for children.”

Keep reading to see more highlights from the day’s festivities.



The morning began with a special thank you breakfast.
Left to Right: Mirla and George Morrison, Barbara and Earle Ellefsen, and Assemblywoman Sandy Galef.

Guests Gathered for the Curran Family Field Dedication



President Mary Beth Merryman of Saint Faith’s House Foundation addressed the crowd. Saint Faith’s has been a supporter and good friend to OCC for over 35 years.



Connie Curran spoke on the importance of outdoor free play and the amazing experiences our children have every day on our beautiful field.



OCC Board Member Natalie Gorlin led the ribbon cutting ceremony for our OCC brick walk.



HOLBROOK COTTAGE
PRESENTS

Festive Fair

a holiday celebration benefitting the Ossining Children’s Center

NOVEMBER 19 & 20, 2021
11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

WIN A BEAUTIFUL HOLIDAY DISPLAY
SAMPLE HOLIDAY TREATS*ENJOY LIVE MUSIC
PHOTOS WITH SANTA

SHOP UNIQUE HOLIDAY GIFTS AT MARCH BOUTIQUE
WONDEROUS THINGS AND HOLBROOK COTTAGE.
A PERCENTAGE OF ALL PURCHASES SUPPORT
OSSINING CHILDREN’S CENTER







Board President Vanessa Pairis and Kindergarten Head Teacher Rebekah Schactel read the inspiring messages.



Guests were welcomed by a rainbow as they appreciated our newly installed donor recognition wall and explored the Rebecca and Arthur Samberg Building.

In the afternoon the Celebration kept right on going. OCC hosted a "meet and greet" for our parents and caregivers, complete with live music from the Thornwoods, pizza, and a special open house with staggered tours to maintain COVID-safety measures. Our parents were thrilled to see their children's classrooms for the first time and the kids were so proud to show off their school!

If you would like to come see yourself, call our Development Office at 914-941-0230, ext. 313 to schedule a tour. We would love to show you our new home!



Eddy and his friends couldn't get enough pizza.



None can resist Lennon's silly smile.



Astor and Owen have been friends since they were 6 months old.

The Morrissy Family: OCC Supporters for a Quarter Century

By Shawn Cribari, Director of Development

What a pleasant surprise I had on a beautiful September day when Mary Lou and Jennifer Morrissy stopped in for a tour of our new building. The Morrissys have been long-time friends of OCC, so it was a treat to show off our new home.

The Morrissys are a tightly knit family, including the four adult children and two spouses, seven grandchildren, and two great grandchildren of Mary Lou and her late husband, Jerry.

The family members share a commitment to social justice and, with three



Mary Lou Morrissy expresses her excitement after her tour of the Rebecca and Arthur Samberg Building.

educators among their ranks, they believe in education as the great equalizer.

The family's friendship with OCC began some 25 years ago when Jerry joined our board and became a valued advisor on strategic planning, fundraising, and public advocacy. After retiring from the board after two terms, he continued to work on the Development Committee. He also worked closely with Howard for many years on strategy and messaging for public advocacy of child care funding.

The Morrissys have found different ways to help OCC. Tom and Trish Morrissy served on fundraising event committees. Emmett Morrissy, their son, now age 25, did his Eagle Scout project for us in 2013; he and fellow Scouts built raised garden beds for our children's garden at 90 South Highland Avenue.

Sadly, Jerry passed away in 2017. Mary Lou and her adult children have continued to support OCC with regular donations. They often observe holidays and milestones by asking friends and family, "in lieu of gifts, please make a contribution to the Ossining Children's Center."

Commenting after her tour of the new Center, Jennifer wrote to me, "The new space is just amazing! It is a child-centered, bright and happy space, a premier model of early education."

"With all the difficulties in our society now," she continued, "we need to keep shining the light on our most precious resource, our children. This is our first responsibility as good citizens."

OCC Expands Infant Program

When our board first envisioned a new sustainable OCC ready to meet the growing needs in infant care in Ossining, they had no way of knowing a pandemic would bring child care for our youngest to the forefront of national conversation. At the height of the pandemic over two-thirds of families reported struggling to find care for young children.

As the day care infrastructure broke down in many communities, centers like OCC played a key role in supporting the health of our families and our larger communities. Now that the world is opening up, parents are relying on child care providers more than ever to keep their children safe, healthy, and happy.

Placing your three month old child in care is scary and even more so during a pandemic. That's where Claudia Weger comes in, OCC's Assistant Executive Director, who has worked at OCC for over 30 years. "Deciding on care providers for your baby is a tough and nerve wracking decision," says Claudia. "When parents walk through our red doors, they find a safe, nurturing environment filled with love and support.

OCC is our babies' home away from home."

This past September we opened two new infant rooms, tripling the size of our program. "It feels good to know these parents trust us," continued Claudia. "We are so excited to get to know their beautiful babies."



In Memoriam Sally Ziegler (1935-2021)

Sally Ziegler, an OCC legend, died on September 9. Sally served on the board for several years during the 1960's, and became president in 1970. A year later, the board asked her to become Executive Director when the Center was going through a leadership crisis. She served as Executive Director from 1971-1981.

It was she who first educated and engaged the OCC board, staff, and parents in advocacy for government funding. She formed the Westchester Day Care Council, composed of directors of child care centers throughout Westchester, and involved all of the centers' staff, boards and families in going to County budget meetings. She left OCC in 1981 to become Executive Director of the Day Care Council, which became what we now know as the Child Care Council of Westchester.



Sally Ziegler

Sally served as deacon at All Saints Episcopal Church in Briarcliff, and, when she and her husband Ted retired and moved to Colorado, she served as a deacon at Grace and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Colorado Springs. True to form, the day before she died, she visited a parishioner in the hospital.

She was featured in an article in The New York Times in January of 1996 as the "architect of gains in child care." During one Westchester County budget hearing, she brought 1,000 parents who all testified – making the hearing last past midnight; this induced County Executive Andrew O'Rourke to reinstate \$1 million that had been cut from the child care budget.

She is survived by her adult children, Andrew, Matthew, and Sally W. Ziegler, as well as four grandchildren and one great grandchild.



Sally with Kids

A Tale of Two Toms: Our Community Partners in Action

Another of the many things that makes OCC such a special place for our children and families is the love and support the Center receives from our community partners.

Tom Williamson Landscaping

When landscaper Tom Williamson was approached over 10 years ago about donating his services to a small community nonprofit day care center, Tom replied with an enthusiastic yes. Tom and his crew have been keeping our grounds looking lovely and welcoming ever since. Tom and his team landscaped 92 South Highland when OCC acquired the building, accepting only a thank you for their efforts. Over the years, whenever OCC has reached out, Tom has been there, ready and happy to help. Most recently, his crew installed the remaining bricks into our walkway, leaving even more inspiring messages for our children and families. The generosity of our community partners like Tom inspires us everyday.

We are so lucky to have him and look forward to many more projects together.



Fable Farm

For the past two years, our friends at Fable Farm have generously donated fresh produce, from tomatoes for a summer salad to potatoes for a winter stew. After a long day, our parents love bringing home fresh vegetables from OCC to incorporate into a healthy dinner. Fable Farm Owner, Tom Deacon says, "In the past year, we have had amazing opportunities to work with schools and educational organizations. Our workshops encourage healthy eating and show children how fun it is to plant and grow. We are dedicated

to sustainable farming, and our produce is organic and pesticide free."

OCC volunteers connected with Tom as he was looking to get his extra produce into the hands of people who needed it. "We strongly believe in zero waste," continued Tom "especially with the struggles we've all had over the past year. We were thrilled that we could give a little extra help to families at OCC." A huge thank you to everyone at Fable Farm for your support and friendship and yummy fruits and veggies!



We Are Family

These four young women have been friends since they were in the OCC early childhood program. They maintain that they are much more than friends, though; they feel like an extended family. And their OCC connection is multi-generational: their moms, and one of their grandmas are all long-time OCC staff. “All of our moms are friends, so we have always spent a lot of time together,” says Jiji Vanegas (second from left).

Now, all four of these young women work at OCC part-time while attending high school or college.

Left to Right:

Makayla Patterson is a junior at Ossining High School and works in our “young threes” class after school. She started at OCC at age four, in Martha Warner’s class. She remembers vividly that she never slept at naptime, and would often chat with Martha. Although Martha retired from OCC in 2014 and moved away from the area, Makayla still talks with her on the phone a few times a year. Makayla aspires to be a nurse. Her grandmother, **Hope Patterson**, is an organizer extraordinaire, keeping OCC’s main office in order.

Jiji Vanegas, who started at OCC as a 10-month-old, is now an Ossining High School sophomore. She and Makayla are BFFs. Her clearest memories of OCC are of the after-school program and summer camp. She loved the volunteers that would come in and do special projects and/or lessons with the kids. Jiji’s mom, **Tanya Vanegas**, is OCC’s bookkeeper and accounts payable maven. Tanya also attended OCC as a child.

Shasiry Ovalle, a graphic design major at SUNY Purchase, started at OCC when she was three years old in Gerri DeSilva’s class. She especially loved the fall activities at OCC: the fall festival with the Ossining High School band, pumpkin painting, and the annual apple picking trip. Her favorite year at OCC was when she was in kindergarten – it was then that she met



her closest friends; she now helps out in the kindergarten class after school. “OCC is my second home,” she says. Shasiry’s mom, **Ingrid Perez-Cruz**, is our receptionist – the first face that greets you when you enter our front door.

Isabel “Izzy” Nin started at OCC at age three, also in Gerri’s class; she is now a sophomore at New York City’s Fashion Institute of Technology. She and Shasiry are bosom buddies. Izzy commutes to college from Ossining on the 7:13 train every morning and usually gets home between 6:00 and 8:00 pm. Fridays are an exception, and that’s when she comes to work in the OCC main and/or business

office, depending where she is needed. She also does some OCC work remotely on weekends. She values the skills she has acquired by working at OCC. “I used to be terrified of answering the phone,” she says. “Now I’m very comfortable doing it.” **Azalia “Sal” Velez-Nin**, Izzy’s mom, is our office manager.

This short article doesn’t do justice to the affection these four young women clearly have for one another, nor the close bond that their entire families enjoy. Suffice it to say, many OCC friendships are deep and long-lasting.

Ossining Children’s Center



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Executive Director

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