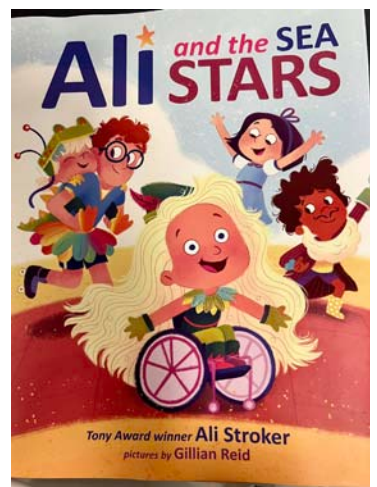




Broadway Star Ali Stroker Visits OCC



Charismatic Tony-award winning actress Ali Stroker visited some of our classes and read her picture book, "Ali and the Sea Stars," about a high-spirited girl in a wheelchair who stages a show for her hometown. The story is based on the life-changing summer Ali performed in her first musical by the Jersey Shore, Ali's joie de vivre was contagious, as the children spontaneously sang and danced with her at the culmination of the story.

"Color with a Cop" at the Ossining Children's Center

Several of Ossining's Finest have been spending an occasional morning at the Ossining Children's Center (OCC) doing art projects and playing on the playground with our four-year-olds. "Color with a Cop" is part of a national community policing initiative to help build trust between children and their local police officers.

"We want our children to know that the police are our neighborhood friends and helpers," says OCC Assistant Executive Director Claudia Berk. "This is a great experience for our kids."



Concentration: Sergeant Jeff Chavez and his art buddies are all intensely focused on their artwork.



A Sticky Situation: Officer Ellen Martinez helps one of our pre-kindergartners manage a glue stick.

From the River to the Sky: Teatown Brings Nature Study to OCC



Teatown Turtle Visits OCC: Our four-year-olds are fascinated by their freshwater reptilian visitor.



This is for the Birds: Ms. Mac from Teatown Lake Reservation immersed the children in a hands-on study of bird migration. She started talking about owls and their feathers. Each child got a magnifying glass and a feather to look at. She explained that many birds examine trees for bugs and seeds to eat, and then she gave them fresh tree branches to search for bird food. She explained how some birds, like geese, migrate when it gets cold. She showed them a picture of the geese flying in a V formation and explained why. Then they all pretended to be geese flying behind Ms. Mac over rivers and through mountains. Finally, she read the book *Going Home*.

OCC Voices

The Ossining Children’s Center has been such an amazing part of our family, giving both our kids a safe and loving place to grow. We know how crucial early quality child care is for setting up a lifetime of learning, and the OCC has been exceptional. With both my parents being teachers who taught me the value of education, we really appreciate how the center is filled with passionate, dedicated educators and caregivers. We also love that the OCC mirrors the rich diversity of our community, letting our kids learn and play with friends from all sorts of backgrounds, and the fact that it offers quality, accessible childcare has been so important for us.

Amelia Falco, OCC Parent



Amelia with her husband Ben, and their two little ones Caroline and Dalton

Farewell to Gerri

Gerri DeSilva, our head preschool teacher and coordinator of our volunteer program, retired last November after 32 years of service to OCC. As a teacher of three-year-olds, she touched the lives of hundreds of children. As coordinator of volunteers, she was the face of OCC in the community. And, as head teacher in our preschool program, she was a problem solver and handled many administrative details. We miss her, but she promises to visit.



Gerri DeSilva with two of her favorite alumni Anabel Reed and Jiji Vanegas.

Classroom Corner

Did Punxsutawney Phil see his shadow? More importantly, did the energetic kids in our Universal Pre-K classes see their shadows? The real question is — are we in for six more weeks of winter, or can we ditch the parkas? Even the weatherman seems unsure these days. Regardless, our youngsters had a blast making stylish groundhog hats, checking out their shadows, and exploring the science behind it all. Thank you, Mother Nature, for the sunshine, and a big shoutout to Andrea Sauro, our “garden lady,” for the fantastic groundhog program.



Dave Reisman, the author of the “Cows Can’t” series, visited the Children’s Center. He read his whimsical books to our classes, including titles like *Cows Can’t Jump* and *Cows Can’t Quack*. Dave also gave the children an insightful look into the process of writing and illustrating a book, showing samples of his work in various stages of completion.



Author David Reisman reads to 4-year-olds

Book Review: *The Daycare Myth*

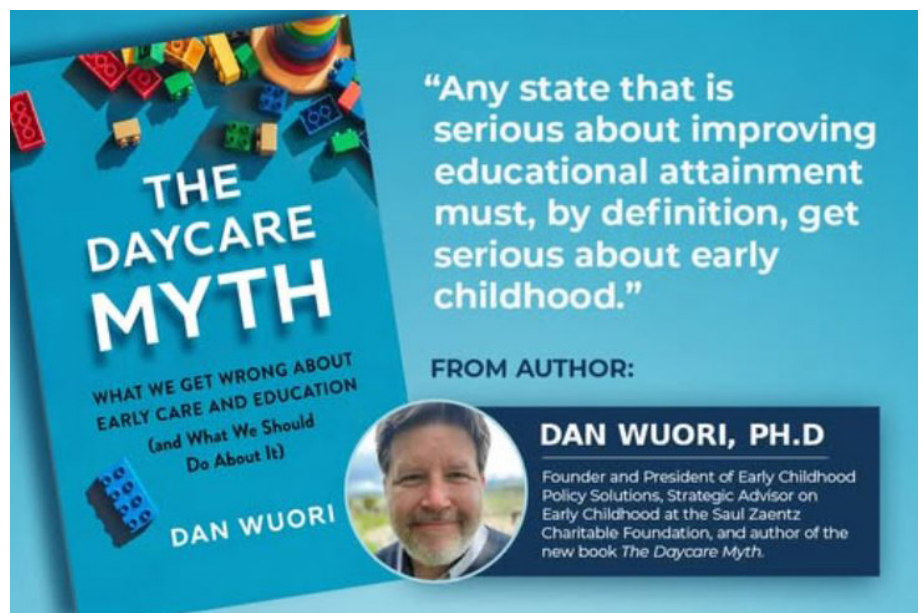
Dan Wuori, the social media sensation known for his adorable videos of infants and toddlers coupled with insightful commentary, has put his wealth of knowledge into a game-changing book: *The Daycare Myth: What We Get Wrong About Early Care and Education (and What We Should Do About It)*.

Daycare misconceptions: Wuori busts the myth that early childhood care is just babysitting. From birth to age four, children’s brains are still under construction, building the essential neural pathways for optimal cognitive function. And guess what? The environment they are in is always educational – be it good or bad. Wuori highlights the stark contrast between nurturing, stimulating settings and the detrimental impact of purely custodial care.

Child care teachers: the unsung heroes. These dedicated individuals play a pivotal role in shaping young minds but are unfortunately paid less than fast food workers. Wuori’s eye-opening insights reveal the urgent need to recognize early childhood education as a public good, deserving of the same respect and investment as K-12 education.

A call to action. What sets Wuori’s book apart is his masterful storytelling that weaves together the history of child care, cutting-edge science, real-life challenges of working parents, and the struggles of child care providers. Each chapter offers tailored advice for parents, educators, and policymakers, making a compelling case for overhauling public policy and significantly investing in early childhood education.

The Daycare Myth is a rallying cry for change, making it a must-read for anyone passionate about giving children the best start in life. Let’s champion the change our children deserve.



OCC's Special Hidden Power: Grandmothers

What is it about grandmothers?

"I wish that every child could have the kinds of experiences that my own grandchildren have," says a grandmother, who also happens to be a long-time supporter of the Ossining Children's Center.

Indeed, we have heard similar comments countless times from grandmothers who support OCC — donors, volunteers, and board members.

James Rilling, an anthropologist at Emory University, has studied brain scans of grandmothers looking at photos of their grandchildren.

"What really jumps out is the activation in areas of the brain associated with emotional empathy," Rilling said. "That suggests that grandmothers are geared toward what their grandchildren are feeling when they interact with them."

The grandmothers in our OCC community express an empathy that extends beyond their own grandchildren. They talk about the kinds of activities that they think every child should have: exposure to the natural world and its creatures, hands-on farming and gardening, trips to science and art museums, participation in the performing arts, playing with educational toys, engaging in imaginative play, exposure to books and having someone read to them every day.

Myriad scientific studies have proven what mothers and grandmothers have known intuitively for years: that these kinds of experiences in the preschool years have a life-long impact. A study of brain scans that tracked preschoolers through their teen years showed that the development of the cortex in late teens was closely correlated with a child's cognitive stimulation before the age of five.

The members of OCC's unofficial "grandmothers' club" express their wide-ranging empathy through generous donations, volunteer work with our youngsters, and their service on the Board and committees. Indeed, about a third of the members of OCC's Board of Directors are grandmothers.

What about grandfathers?

Lest we be accused of sexism, we have a growing cadre of grandfathers who are stepping up to become more engaged with the work of OCC. And we want more. How about it, gentlemen?



Grandma Angie," a long-time member of our infant-toddler staff, truly loves her job.

Charitable Giving and Tax Planning for Uncertainty

Beginning in 2026, many of the tax reductions and other changes brought about by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 will expire. Although Congress may step in before the end of 2025, if nothing is done the changes will take effect as scheduled. This means that the amount of the standard deduction will be cut in half, income tax rates will increase, tax brackets will change and the amount of your estate that can pass tax free will be reduced. Moreover, it's also uncertain what kinds of changes the current presidential administration will attempt to enact.

In light of all of this uncertainty, here are some possible options for your charitable giving.

Please consult with your own tax advisor regarding the feasibility of these options for you.

Accelerate Charitable Gifts – Giving before the end of 2025, especially a gift of income producing assets, would eliminate that income that could be taxed at a higher rate in 2026.

Qualified Charitable Distributions – If you are over age 70 1/2, a qualified charitable distribution from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) avoids the income tax you would otherwise pay on a withdrawal.

Estate Tax Planning – Now is the time to plan for the possibility that your estate may become taxable in 2026, when the value of an estate that can pass tax-free is scheduled to be cut in half. An estate gift to the people and causes that you care about can reduce your estate taxes and allow you to control where your money goes.



Warm Coats, Warm Hearts



Heartfelt Thanks to Thornwood Cleaners: They generously dry-cleaned donated winter coats free of charge, ensuring warmth and comfort for those in need this season. Their community spirit truly shines!



A returning favorite for our preschoolers, “Men on the Hill” shared their musical talents with our youngsters at holiday time. Pictured here, the children are mesmerized by Don Simon’s skill on the accordion.

Joyful Thanks for Festive Fun!

We are thrilled to share that our Festive Fair was a tremendous success, raising \$10,000 for enrichment programs at OCC thanks to the incredible generosity of our community.

A huge shout-out to all of our Festive Partners:

Briarcliff Fire Department * Donato’s Trattoria * Holbrook Cottage * Houlihan Lawrence * Images Art Gallery * Janniello’s Specialty Foods * Teacher and Storyteller Betsy Kates * Local Artist Dennis Kirby * Manor Wines and Spirits * March Boutique * Mike Risko Music * Saltbox Sash * Village of Briarcliff Manor

Thank you to everyone who participated. Whether you attended the luncheon, bought raffle tickets, or did your holiday shopping at the participating shops, your generosity and involvement have made a significant impact, and we couldn’t have done it without you. See you next year!



The Briarcliff Manor Fire Department brought Santa and his sleigh – aka a fire truck with flashing lights – to spread holiday cheer.



A big holiday cheer to the Mike Risko Band, our volunteer elves from Girl Scout Troop 1426 in Hawthorne, and the ever-jolly Frosty the Snowman for making our sing-along truly magical.

Celebrating Martin Luther King at OCC

In celebration of Martin Luther King Day, our children engaged in activities that honor Dr. King's legacy of equality and service. These moments captured in the photos reflect the joy and learning experienced by our young learners as they embrace the values of kindness and unity.



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