Reflections from the Director’s Desk
Leisa Pollander, Executive Director

All of us need encouragement.
Somebody to believe in us –
to reassure and reinforce us.
-Charles R. Swindoll

Yesterday, as I watched the preschool class participate in a mini-graduation ceremony, I recognized the truth in the above quote. The children who presented in the fall as shy and reticent (or, in a few cases, as boisterous and unruly!) have all made tremendous progress in a few short months. One little girl has expanded on an inherent artistic flair; one little boy who was very bound to mom and dad now enters the classroom with hugs for the staff. Of the eleven children who entered in September speaking English as a Second Language, all are using English and are able to recognize – and most, to write – their names. In fact, after the ceremony, one little girl who spoke no English when she started two years ago, approached me and said “Hey, Leisa – can I hang with you?”! How quickly they learn and absorb is truly amazing!

It also occurred to me that no one individual is responsible for the level of progress we witness. Rather, a collective effort plants seeds that we see bloom during a child’s time at Sara Holbrook. We all learn from and benefit from knowing one another. The children learn from the staff, as well as from their own parents and from the greater community. The staff learn from the children and their families, from one another, and from the incredible volunteers who participate in the Center’s programs.

We each make our own way, being nurtured, guided and educated by those around us. Encouraging and nurturing others produces an immeasurable payback – and we, in turn, are nurtured by those around us.
Preschool Partners

Through a partnership with the University of Vermont Nursing Program, the Sara Holbrook Preschool welcomes nursing students into the classroom. During the spring semester, several students intern in the program, bringing their skills, creativity and eagerness to share and learn.

Just like her crimson red hair, Heidi Denton radiated in the preschool with infectious energy. Heidi, a senior nursing student, worked in the preschool four days a week, allowing her to build relationships with the 15 children. Reflecting on her time in the classroom, Heidi wrote, “Throughout these past seven weeks I have been there for these children and done all that I could to educate them about living a healthy lifestyle. I have emphasized why hand washing is so important, I have put bandages on their scraped knees and hands, I have explained to them why we need to eat healthy, I have shown them the importance of brushing their teeth and most importantly I have helped them play and share experiences with each other in a positive way. I have spent hours reading to them, interacting with them and being a role model for them.”

“We enjoyed having Heidi in the classroom”, attests Tricia Reynolds, Preschool Director. “Her warm smile and enthusiasm brought reassurance for our students who might be afraid of going to the doctor. In the dramatic play area, Heidi set up a doctor’s office and role played with the children. The kids loved playing with her—dressed up like little doctors, the children would make ‘the babies feel better just like Heidi’”.

“I have had an amazing eye-opener experience at the Sara Holbrook Center”, adds Heidi. “I recommend this site to anyone whom loves children and wants to help where they are needed”.

To reinforce lessons about dental hygiene, Heidi created a fun project; preschoolers brushed paper teeth white with toothbrushes and paint.

Poolside Read: Preschoolers listen to books on tape in their special spot—an empty pool!

Now I Know: Preschoolers prepare for kindergarten by learning to spell and write their names.

Music with Robert: Once a month, Robert Resnick, from the Fletcher Free Library, visits the preschool to share his musical talents with the kids. For his last visit of the school year, the children surprised Robert by making their own guitars and performing for him!
Experience Gifts: Gifts that Create Opportunities, Nurture Abilities & Make Memories

Imagine this: 36 kids on ice skates and only a handful of them had ever gone ice-skating before! Needless to say, it was a wild, fun adventure filled with gliding, stumbling, learning and smiles beaming with pride. This opportunity and many more were made possible thanks to the generosity of area businesses and community supporters. During the holiday season, the Center asks donors to skip material items and give opportunities through Experience Gifts. From painting pottery to indoor rock climbing, supporters purchase gift certificates or designate funds for particular experiences. Over the February and April school breaks, the Center then takes the kids out and about to do all the fun things. Teens at the Center get in on the fun as well, using Experience Gifts as a group with teen staff. Importantly, Experience Gifts give children opportunities they may otherwise not have.

“This channel of giving is different from traditional holiday giving. Shopping for a child is fun and many people like to buy clothes and toys”, explains Kim Wojcik, Administrative & Development Coordinator. “When we launched this giving program two years ago, we were nervous that people would not like it. However, the response has been so positive. This year over $4,000 were raised!”

Thirty-six children, kindergarten through fifth grade, went ice-skating at Leddy Park, sledding at Catamount Outdoor Family Center, bowling, painted pottery at the Blue Plate Ceramic Café, explored Native American art at the Fleming Museum and went rock climbing at Petra Cliffs. The children met at the Center at 8:00 a.m. for group play and art projects; after lunch, the group enjoyed the community outings and returned to the Center for 5:00 p.m. pick-up. Here are some picture highlights and quotes from the kids. Thank you for making this happen!

What We Are Looking Forward To:

- Preschool Graduation: 8 little ones are moving on to kindergarten!
- Expanded Summer Camp: We are now offering full-day camp.
- More Space: Barnes School is sharing their space with us. Summer Camp and New Arrivals will be held there, giving each program more room.
- 6 weeks of Summer Camp begins June 25th!
- New Arrivals begins July 2nd. This summer is the programs 18th year!
- Bob & Maggie Green Youth Adventure Camp: Teens will be exploring our Green Mountain State
- New Programming: A mentoring program is in the works
- 2nd Annual Night Golf Tournament: Friday, August 24th at the Links at Lang Farm in Essex!

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A Festival of Cultures: An International Exposition

On April 7th, Burlington High School’s gymnasium was once again transformed in a one-stop global expedition to celebrate cultural diversity in Burlington and beyond. The Festival featured twelve performances from Brazilian percussion and ancient Japanese rhythms to African dance and Chinese folk music. In addition to the music and ornate costumes, there were vendors selling ethnic items and foods, hands-on cultural demonstrations, art, activities for kids, henna art, face painting and a silent auction to support the Center. Overall, the festivities were fantastic!

Many, many thanks to everyone—performers, vendors, sponsors, advertisers, silent auction donors, volunteers, community supporters— for making the second annual Festival of Cultures a success!

The overwhelming generosity of the following sponsors made the Festival possible:

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