



Building Bright Tomorrows...Today

Spring 2017

Looking Back 40 Years of Integrated Preschool

40 years ago, before Old Mill Center opened its doors, children with disabilities were not able to participate in the educational opportunities open to typically developing children.

Historically, children with disabilities were often isolated by their families and community. "Even in the 1900s, children were sent to work houses or mental institutions to live out their lives into adulthood," notes Education Manager Jill Irwin. "Some families just closeted their children in their homes to hide the shame of having a child that was different." Later, in the 1930s, special schools for children with disabilities were opened, but they provided little education, and served mostly as residential institutions.

Changes began to occur when some teachers began to see these children benefit from education and learn to build skills. Specialty teaching evolved in the '50s and '60s, however, "...the focus remained on isolating children from their peers," says Jill.



1979—Old Mill Center's location in a remodeled home on 8th Street

A milestone happened when the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed, providing the legal foundation for educational support for children with disabilities from elementary school up. The act covered school-age children, but had no provisions for early education. The importance of brain development in the early years of childhood was not yet recognized.



Old Mill Center's Integrated Preschool teaches children with special needs alongside typically developing children. All the children learn from each other. A developed sense of empathy is an indicator of academic and social success in later life. "Embrace others and learn from them. Use every moment as a teachable moment. Remind the kids that everyone makes mistakes, even teachers. They love that!"—Teacher Alicia

Old Mill Center founders Bev Larson and Barb Kralj knew in their hearts and minds that young children with special needs deserved the same educational opportunities as older children. A federal grant enabled Bev and Barb to develop and test the curriculum that would serve as the foundation for their dream: the Integrated Preschool.

The driving force behind Integrated Preschool is to allow kids with special needs to learn alongside typically developing kids. This is called "mainstreaming." In 1986, federal law was passed to assure educational access to all children, from birth to age 21. While access is guaranteed, effective engagement varies according to the skills and resources of each education provider.

At Old Mill Center, highly trained staff have extensive experience working with all of the children in the classroom. In addition to engaged teachers, Jill says, a guiding idea behind the dynamic of the class is that "reciprocal relationships build stronger children. Kids learn things from peers that adult instruction can't impart." This early brain building supports school success for all the children.

The preschool collaborates closely with Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education at Linn Benton Lincoln Education Service District, which provides additional support for modification of curriculum.



Straight from the Director

Welcome to Spring - a time of hope, renewal and light. As I ponder our current political situation and the circumstances our clients face I often try to answer the question "Why have we not been able to find sustainable solutions for many of the challenges we have faced for so long?"

We have the knowledge. We have the advice from those who live and suffer the challenges, and we have global, national and local experts who suggest solutions. I often think what we miss is the will to take a long-term view: prevention pays off in 5, 10, 15, 20 years. Health care reform will take a generation to show sustainable results.

Lasting solutions need the support of a majority of people – working across their differences because of shared goals, particularly humanitarian goals and willing to stick it out for more than one election cycle. Can we do that? Can true change start locally and grow?

Bev Larson, Barb Kralj and their supporters' dream did not come to fruition in 1 year – but 40 years later the change they dreamed of is reality, and children who develop differently are integrated at the preschool level in many places. The work is not over, but it has shifted a paradigm. We are grateful for their vision and dedication, and for your support.

Please stand with us as we address other obstacles to the well-being and quality of life of the children and families we serve.

Thank you for your support.

Bettina Schempf
Executive Director

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Help and Healing

Looking Back: 40 Years of Integrated Preschool cont'd

All children benefit from the integration. “For typically developing children, the biggest benefit at a young age is how you relate to peers who are different from you,” say Old Mill Center Integrated Preschool teachers Alicia McWilliams and Donna Brown. “How do you communicate with people who speak differently than you? How are you successful when others have a different way of learning? This program builds empathy, an important indicator of academic and social success later in life, and it prepares children for what the real world can look like.”

While access to inclusive educational practices is now the national norm, it takes commitment and skill to ensure that a program meets the needs of all children. That commitment, guided by the vision of its founders, lives on at Old Mill Center’s Integrated Preschool.

Thanks to contributors Bobbie Weber, Jill Irwin, Alicia McWilliams, and Donna Brown

I believe that the Integrated Preschool meets specific or unique needs in a variety of ways:

- **Ages 3-5 are combined, not separated**
- **Potty training not required**
- **We accept some children removed from other programs for being “too aggressive” or “too hard”**

We **strategize** as a teaching and family team to keep all children in the program.
We **acknowledge** all the positive skills our kids have and build upon those.
We **delight** in the growth we see them make.

We don’t give up on any of the kids.
—Teacher Alicia

Looking Back with Co-founder Barb Kralj



Barb Kralj in 1977

Old Mill Center began in the 1970s as the vision of two friends, Bev Larson and Barb Kralj. “We always knew we would build a school,” said Barb. “The vision Bev had for education, and taking care of kids and family—that was always her priority.” Through their work with parents whose children had developmental disabilities, they realized there were many in the community who had needs that were not being met. Together, they created Old Mill School, offering “A Special Education Experience” to all children.

By collaborating with Ann Smart and Bobbie Weber at LBCC, in 1977 Bev and Barb were able to offer inclusive classes to children of all abilities. They worked out of the First Congregational Church until 1979, when they moved into an old house on 8th Street.

In 1980, Bev’s tireless grant writing paid off. Old Mill School received a \$310,000 federal grant for the development of a curriculum. OSU practicum students started learning and working with the school’s children and families. A group of supporters created the “OMS Guild,” a fundraising entity devoted to Old Mill School, claiming over 50 members. “The community really took us on,” says Barb.

With the commitment and energy of Bev and Barb, staff, volunteers, and the Old Mill School Guild, the school grew. In 1985, Barb stepped away to raise her family, and Bev oversaw the expansion of Old Mill School into the organization it is today: Old Mill Center for Children and Families, serving children and families in the local community with five unique programs.

Special thanks to Barb Kralj

Self-Regulation Helping Children Learn

Self-regulation is the ability to manage one’s emotion, behavior, and attention depending on different situations.

When a child is participating in an activity they need energy. Some children have to spend much more energy than others to participate in the same task.

For example, during story time one child may find it easy to sit still and listen while another child has so much energy that it is an effort to sit still and listen. Another child might be distracted by her surroundings and work extra hard to pay attention.

The key to helping these children who have to work harder is not to stop their impulses but to allow them to deal effectively with their stressors. When children are exposed to less stress they have more energy to control their impulses and to learn.

Learning to self-regulate is very similar to learning to drive a car. It takes time and practice to figure out when to start braking, when to accelerate, and how to do both smoothly. Some kids will tend to push too hard on the accelerator; some will start braking way too soon. Parents and caregivers can help children navigate these important skills to help them learn more successfully.

Self-regulation is critical for children. It helps a child feel more at ease. It is also an indicator and predictor of higher achievement later in life. In a now-famous study from 1989, children were told they could have one marshmallow immediately, or several marshmallows if they just waited until the researcher returned to the room in a few minutes. The 30% of children who successfully waited and received more marshmallows went on to higher academic achievements, lower antisocial behavior, and less drug use.

4 Key Ways to Enhance Your Child’s Self-Regulation

Be a Detective

Try to figure out your child’s stressors. What helps him stay calm and alert? What leaves her overly excited?

Mindfulness Programs

Mindfulness principles can help children identify their energy states. Try using the car analogy: My car engine is running really fast, really slow, or just right. Once children understand their energy states, we can help them learn how to get to “just right” on their own.

Play

Play encourages communication about wants, and can build a child’s understanding of connections between objects, people, and ideas. Maintaining play requires self-direction, which helps build regulatory skills.

Exercise

Exercise that works deep muscles can be soothing.

Information excerpted from the works of Stuart Shanker

Program News & Notes

You can donate new and gently-used items to make a difference in the lives of Old Mill Center's children and families.

Arts and Crafts

These items are used in our children's classrooms, art therapy room, and reception areas. Arts and crafts can help build fine and gross motor skills, soothe strong feelings during counseling, or help communicate complex emotions.

Children's gardening gloves
Construction paper
Markers, watercolors
Glue—clear, white, stick
Children's round-tipped scissors
Knitting supplies
Magazines for collages
Beads and jewelry making materials
Clay and playdough
Popsicle sticks, glue guns
Gift cards to craft stores

Wishlist!

Skill-Building Support

These items support the security and skill-building of our children and families. These help parents strengthen the family bond, and provide children with tools to build new skills.

GROK! Games Non-Violent Communication
Card Decks—Original, Kids, Jumbo editions
(www.groidtheworld.com)
CDs of common nursery rhymes/kid's songs
Crawling tunnel
Foam floor puzzles
Chewy tubes (www.chewytubes.com)—these oral & motor tools help develop biting & chewing skills for children with special needs

Warm & Dry

Safety and security is vital to a child's best start in life. Food, clothing that fits, physical safety, and basic hygiene care are a critical part of family support.

Gender neutral children's sweat pants & T-shirts, sizes m-xl
Child-proof cabinet locks
Diapers & pull-ups—sizes 5 & 6
Diaper wipes
Child safety gates
Car seat mirrors
SAD light therapy lamps

Office Supplies

Help keep our mail dry and our holes punched!

Mailbox cover—Are you handy with construction? Our mailbox has a leak!
Love seats, comfortable chairs—for counseling offices & waiting areas
Heavy duty 3-hole punch

Seeking **Volunteers** for Resource Closet

Our Resource Closet can mean the difference between a child's full tummy of food and a diaper rash so severe that DHS is called in for neglect. How can that be? Many of the families we serve rely on Oregon SNAP benefits for their groceries. Unfortunately, items such as clothing, diapers and medicine can't be purchased using food stamps.

When the end of the month comes, parents can find themselves forced to choose between feeding their children or buying diapers. **This is a choice we wish no parent had to make.** Because of this, we maintain a Resource Closet, stocked with diapers, clothes, hygiene products, and other items that can't be purchased with food stamps.

Our Relief Nursery staff would love for someone with great organizational skills to help maintain and organize the Closet. Volunteer shifts would be 1-2 hours every 2 weeks, with a seasonal restocking of the Closet twice per year. This is a great opportunity for a social or church group! Interested? **Email Cindy Bond at cindy_bond@oldmillcenter.org**



Program Director Cindy Bond helps organize the Resource Closet.

A Teen's Grief... A Family's Healing

Sarah and her grandmother were extremely close. Since the contentious divorce of her parents she spent more and more time with her. Then, when Sarah was 14, her grandmother passed away unexpectedly, **leaving a hole in her world.** The sudden death hit Sarah's dad equally hard. He struggled with depression, and lost his job. Around the same time, Sarah's home life was complicated when her mother pulled away to focus on her new boyfriend and his kids moving in with them. **The new home situation was overwhelming for Sarah.** Combined with her father's challenges, her distant mother, and her grief over losing her grandmother, Sarah began acting out, her grades suffered, and soon she was spending her days in bed or skipping school.

Her father feared for her future but didn't feel equipped to help. **He turned to Old Mill Center's Outpatient Services.** Both he and Sarah attended individual counseling sessions. She was able to deal with the emotional consequences of his mother's passing, and with time he learned skills to manage his symptoms of depression. He is now employed again and able to meaningfully parent. Sarah is better able to cope with her feelings, **she is participating with the family in a positive way, and is once again attending school regularly.** She even has plans to attend community college when she graduates.

Thanks to the Community

MAY 6

Dinner & Auction!

Join us for our annual dinner and auction and help us celebrate our 40th birthday! We are planning a magical evening of food, fun, and most importantly...fundraising!

Tickets are available online at
www.oldmillcenter.org



Enter our raffle for a
2017 Toyota Rav4 or
Subaru Forester!
Tickets are \$100 each and
only 400 will be sold.
Buy online at
www.oldmillcenter.org



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A Look Inside Our Open House Celebration

Thank you to everyone who attended our Open House Celebration on Saturday, March 18th! People came to learn more about our facility and the services we offer, and enjoyed live music from Tin Can Alley and Suz Doyle & Friends, massages from Margie Carlson Massage Therapy and Balance In Touch Massage Therapy, and kids got to romp in our therapeutic Monkey Room with the team from STAR Sports Corvallis.



*George Cuniff & Becki Goslow
were raffle ticket maven*

Thank you everyone for joining us!



*STAR Sports Corvallis
brought the fun to kids
exploring our
therapeutic Monkey
Room*

Thanks to

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BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER



Thanks to Elmer's staff members for their spirit!

Many thanks to Elmer's Restaurant for their month-long promotion of Old Mill Center. Staff wore OMC shirts to help raise awareness, and Elmer's matched diners' donations.

Elmer's raised over \$2,000 for our programs! Thank you especially to owners Luis and Patty Perez. We are so grateful for their generosity and commitment to our community!



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