

A child stands in a field of tall grass at night, reaching up to touch a large, glowing yellow star in a dark blue sky filled with smaller stars and constellations.

ADDISON COUNTY

Early Childhood Guide

- Act 76 living up to its promise
- Childcare is always improving
- Educators taught to see infants as capable, curious and connected
- Families stay connected to preschools
- Programs cultivate social-emotional learning
- Storytelling engages young minds
- And More

A Publication of the Addison Independent • April 9, 2026

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Addison Early Childhood Regional Council

Working Together for Kids and Families

Each April, Vermont joins communities across the country in celebrating the *Week of the Young Child*, a time to recognize the importance of early learning and the people who make it possible.

As part of the statewide Building Bright Futures Network, the Addison Early Childhood Council has spent the past year listening to and learning from families, educators, health providers, and community partners in the Addison region to understand what's working well and where support is needed.

REGIONAL DATA HIGHLIGHTS

"The State of Vermont's Children: 2025 Year in Review" highlights statewide trends and Addison County's unique strengths and challenges.

- Child population: Addison County is home to roughly 2,300 children from birth to age 8.

- Child care access: Our child care programs are strong, but there are not enough child care spots in our region, especially for infants and toddlers. Families continue to face waitlists and limited options, especially for nontraditional hours.

- Developmental screening: The Addison region performs above the statewide average, with over 70% of children receiving recommended developmental screenings. This demonstrates strong coordination among pediatric practices, early educators, and family support programs.

- Economic stability: Approximately one in three children in Addison County lives in a household earning below Vermont's livable wage, highlighting the importance

of accessible child care, transportation, and wraparound supports.

- Mental health: There were increased referrals for early childhood mental health services in 2025.

WHERE WE FOCUSED OUR ENERGY

Throughout the year, the Addison Regional Council focused on several key areas to strengthen our region's early childhood system:

Supporting Migrant Families

We created a Migrant Family Support subcommittee to better understand and respond to the needs of migrant children and families in the region. This group has begun mapping resources, identifying barriers, and building relationships with trusted community partners to ensure all families can access early learning, health care, and basic needs.

Addressing Substance Misuse with Compassion and Collaboration

In November, the Addison Regional Council hosted a conversation with local experts about substance use. We focused on empathy, reducing stigma, and how we can work together to support families. The discussion helped Regional Council members understand families' challenges and strengthen referral pathways.

Understanding Statewide Policy Recommendations & Proposed Universal Pre-Kindergarten Changes

Each fall, Building Bright Futures publishes Policy Recommendations from Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network for the coming year. As part of the Network, the Addison Regional



Council helped to shape the 2026 Policy Recommendations.

Priorities include streamlining fingerprint-based background checks for child care workers, advancing pre-K access, and sustaining efforts to protect Vermont's new child care investments. Our Regional Council took a closer look at potential local and statewide Universal Pre-K changes and talked about what potential local and statewide Universal Pre-K changes could mean for local programs, schools, and families. The conversation helped

partners plan ahead for possible changes in funding, enrollment, and how services are offered.

Deepening Understanding of Grief, Loss, and Postpartum Mental Health

Presentations from Empty Arms Vermont and Blooming Circle gave us a clearer picture of what families face during pregnancy loss, infant loss, and postpartum mental health challenges. This helped our region strengthen how we show up for families with understanding and coordinated support.

(See Council, Page 4)

Council

(Continued from Page 3)

ADDISON COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD SUMMIT

In October, the Council hosted the second annual **Addison County Early Childhood Summit**. This year's Summit theme focused on Transitions, bringing together early childhood educators, health professionals, family service providers, and community leaders to explore how we can strengthen systems that support children and families, especially during key transitions like entering child care, preschool, and kindergarten.

If you are interested in joining the Addison Early Childhood Regional Council, please contact Building Bright Futures Regional Manager Darla Senecal at dsenecal@buildingbrightfutures.org. Our meetings are open to



anyone who is invested in the well-being of children and families in the Addison region.



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Cultivating a Culture of Inquiry:

The Growth of
Reggio-Inspired
Practice Across
Vermont

By JACQUELYN PRIME

Over the past several years, Reggio-inspired early childhood education has steadily deepened across Vermont, supported by RIVET (Reggio Inspired Vermont Early Education Team), a growing network of educators committed to reflective practice, collaboration, and research alongside children. What began as a small circle of practitioners has evolved into a dynamic statewide community guided by the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. This approach is grounded in documentation, professional dialogue, and a shared vision of children as capable, curious, and rich in potential.

The Reggio Emilia approach traces its roots to a vision held by the citizens of Villa Cellia, a village on the outskirts of Reggio Emilia that suffered the ravages of World War II. Guided by educator Loris Malaguzzi and shaped by families rebuilding their community, the philosophy emerged from a deep commitment to democracy, participation, and the rights of children. At its core is the understanding that children are protagonists in their own learning. Teachers are researchers and collaborators, engaged in processes of observation, interpretation, and co-construction rather than the delivery of predetermined content. The environment serves as a third teacher, intentionally designed to provoke inquiry, foster relationships, and facilitate dialogue.

Documentation functions as both a research tool and a communicative act, making learning visible and opening space for reflection. Central to this philosophy is the concept of the hundred languages of children, which recognizes the many symbolic and expressive

ways children construct meaning through materials, movement, sound, light, storytelling, and countless other forms of representation.

To be Reggio-inspired in Vermont is not to replicate the schools of Reggio Emilia, but to interpret its principles with integrity and intentionality within local contexts. Across the state, educators are grounding this work in place-based inquiry, building relationships with forests, rivers, farms, and seasonal rhythms as essential contexts for children's research and meaning-making.

In 2025, Mary Johnson Children's Center in Middlebury deepened its commitment to this work by sending four educators on a week-long study delegation to Reggio Emilia, Italy. During the visit, educators spent time in infant and toddler programs as well as preschool settings, engaging in dialogue with curriculum leaders, studio teachers, educators, and families. Much of the experience also included lectures and extended study within the Loris Malaguzzi Center, where participants explored documentation, *progettazione* (a responsive and reflective approach to curriculum design based on children's ideas and evolving inquiries), and the values that underpin Reggio Emilia's educational approach. The experience profoundly supported the growth and development of teachers, deepening their image of the child as capable and full of potential, and expanding their understanding of learning as a co-constructed process. Educators strengthened their capacity to form intentional relationships with materials, recognizing them as languages for thinking and expression.

Within Vermont, mentorship



has been central to sustaining and deepening this work. Supported by Building Bright Futures grants, RIVET has organized documentation initiatives at Mary Johnson Children's Center and across the state, creating meaningful entry points for educators across a wide spectrum of experience. For those new to the field, documentation has served as an accessible pathway into Reggio-inspired practice. For more experienced educators, it has offered depth, complexity, and opportunities for critical reflection. Through sustained observation, the study of documentation, and facilitated

professional dialogue, educators have strengthened their ability to interpret children's thinking and to respond to children's questions and ideas with thoughtfully designed materials and experiences through intentional *progettazione*.

RIVET's broader efforts have further expanded this statewide community of practice. Centers have opened their doors for reciprocal visits, creating opportunities for educators to study environments and curriculum in context. Presentations at the Vermont State Kindergarten Conference have introduced

(See *Inquiry*, Page 8)

Seeing Infants
as Capable,
Curious and
Connected

Reggio-Inspired Learning Begins at Birth



By COURTNEY OTIS

A baby leans forward, studying the light as it reflects across the floor.

Another pauses, hand hovering, deciding whether to reach for a basket or turn toward a familiar voice.

An educator waits nearby, not to direct, but to notice.

In a Reggio-inspired approach, these are not small moments.

They are the curriculum.

When many people hear the word school, they picture desks, letters, and older children. Yet learning begins long before that. From the very start of life, infants are building theories about the world: Who will respond to me? What happens when I move my body? How do things feel, sound, change?

Reggio-inspired education invites us to see babies

differently, not as empty vessels waiting to be filled, but as strong, capable, and full of potential. Infants are researchers. They are communicators. They are citizens of our community.

This image of the child changes everything.

It means we slow down.

We observe before we step in.

We value wonder over rushing.

We create environments that invite exploration rather than entertainment.

A simple mirror becomes a place for identity.

A basket of natural materials becomes a laboratory of texture and sound.

A caregiving routine becomes a conversation of trust.

Even diaper changes, bottles, and transitions hold rich opportunities for connection

(See Reggio, Page 7)

Life can be heavy.

Our muscles are strong, willing and ready to help shoulder the load.

At Addison County Home Health and Hospice, we support families through both joyful and challenging times, helping guide decisions about healthcare needs and lifestyle changes.

We collaborate with community organizations and healthcare providers to deliver supportive and preventative services for families with newborns and young children who may be at risk for medical or emotional challenges. Some private insurance policies have postpartum benefits, which may include supportive skilled nursing visits.

Our maternal-child health nurses provide in-home visits during the prenatal and postpartum period, offering education and guidance relating to pregnancy, labor and deliver, breastfeeding and newborn care.



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Reggio

(Continued from Page 6)
 and learning. When an educator narrates, waits for a response, or offers a choice, a child experiences respect. Over time, that respect grows into confidence.

Families are essential partners in this journey. You are your child's first teacher, and your knowledge, culture, and dreams shape the classroom community. When we listen to families, we build continuity between home and school, helping children feel safe, seen, and understood.

What might look like simple play from the outside is actually deep intellectual work. Infants

are forming relationships, testing ideas, and building the foundation for how they will see themselves as learners for years to come.

When we trust babies to be capable, they show us just how much they can do.

Reggio-inspired learning reminds us that education is not something we start later. It begins in arms, on the floor, in eye contact, in shared discovery. It begins at birth.

Editor's note: Courtney Otis is Curriculum Coordinator at Red Clover Children's Center in Middlebury.



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Inquiry

(Continued from Page 5)

Reggio-inspired perspectives to a broader audience. Ongoing communities of practice and study groups have created sustained spaces for dialogue, supporting educators in developing shared language around documentation, ethics, and collaborative research. This work has fostered relationships across programs and contributed to a culture of intellectual rigor, reflection, and professional generosity.

This past fall, Camp Meade opened its doors to educators who gathered for a RIVET mini-conference centered on children's relationships with trees and the natural world.

The gathering emphasized the importance of engaging with the hundred languages through direct, material experience. With the guidance of Vermont artists who generously donated their time and materials, participants explored the creation of natural pigments, experimented with printmaking and photography, engaged in papermaking and clay work, and developed handmade books. These experiences were not approached as technical skill building alone, but as opportunities to build relationships with materials. Through experiencing texture, resistance, transformation, and possibility firsthand, educators



expanded their capacity to thoughtfully extend children's inquiries. The focus on trees and local ecology reflected Vermont's commitment to grounding Reggio-inspired practice in place-based relationships.

Building upon years of study, mentorship, and collaborative infrastructure, Vermont now stands at a significant moment. With the generous support of the Vermont Department of Children and Families Child Development Division and RIVET, in partnership with Reggio Children and North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, the Exhibition and Atelier Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material and the NAREA 22nd Summer Conference will be hosted at the Winooski School District this summer.

The Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material Exhibition and Atelier will offer educators, children, and families the opportunity to engage directly with

documentation and pedagogical research emerging from Reggio Emilia's city-wide system of early education and care. Visitors will encounter panels, artifacts, and materials that illuminate children's thinking and the collaborative processes that sustain it. More than an exhibition, it represents an invitation to dialogue, reflection, and continued growth. The NAREA 22nd Summer Conference will feature two Italian educators from Reggio Emilia, as well as opportunities to interact with materials in the atelier and to visit Reggio-inspired Vermont early childhood programs.

For further information about the Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material Exhibition and Atelier and to register for the 22nd NAREA Summer Conference, visit the RIVET website at www.rivetnetwork.net.

Editor's note: Jacquelyn Prime is an MJCC Teacher and RIVET Steering Committee Member.

Act 76 in Action: Supporting Families in Addison County

By **KIMBERLY BELL**

For families with young children, access to reliable, affordable child care can make all the difference. In Vermont, that support is becoming more of a reality. Parenting comes with many challenges, but finding quality care and building a support system shouldn't be one families face alone. For my husband and me, having moved here, that sense of community has grown through our daughter's school, my work, and the relationships we've built along the way.

In 2023, legislative Act 76 was passed to expand public access to affordable, high-quality child care from birth to pre-K in Vermont. The law also created a payroll tax, with contributions from employers, to fund ongoing child care subsidies and future investments. Through the Child

Care Financial Assistance Program, eligible families can afford care by covering part or all of the cost, reducing out-of-pocket expenses and supporting parents' ability to work, attend school, or participate in job training.

Following this monumental bill, "more than 100 new programs have opened, adding over 1,700 spaces and 400 early childhood educator jobs." These numbers reinforce Vermont's commitment to supporting young families. Looking closer to home, how has this bill affected our small community in East Middlebury and throughout Addison County?

Following the passing of Act 76, Mary Johnson Children's Center expanded its East Middlebury location by 16 spots (10 for children age 18-36 months) and hired four

(See Act 76, Page 10)



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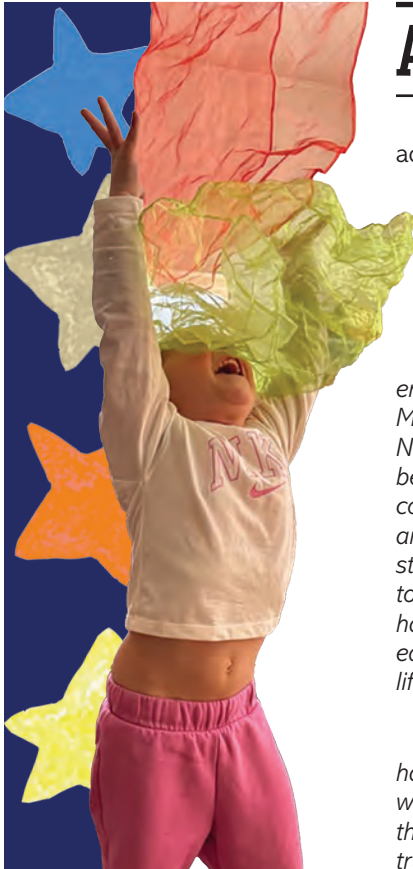


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Act 76

(Continued from Page 9)
 additional teachers. This state funding made in-house growth possible, allowing the school to better serve local families. As shared by those directly impacted:

“By having our children enrolled in the program at MCNS (Middlebury Cooperative Nursery School), we have both been able to work full-time while contributing to our community and our families overall financial stability. I was able to return to a career that I love and have invested a lot of time and education in throughout my adult life.”

— Ashley Sherry

“MJCC allows our family to have flexibility and support as working parents, while knowing that our child is in the hands of trusted, capable, empathetic, and

dedicated people. Knowing the most critical period of a child’s development is birth to 5, every parent in Vermont deserves that kind of piece of mind.

— The Paterno Family

“[Mary Johnson Children’s Center has] created a world-class, evidence-based program in our town, and it is an extraordinary gift to raise our children alongside them. MCNS/ MJCC supports families every day and makes it possible for working parents like ourselves to remain rooted in this community

— Sarafina Midzik

“I’m so grateful as a working parent to be able to drop my child off at a school that takes the time to get to know who she is as a person.”

— Reed Tso

These experiences highlight a broader truth: Access to high-

quality early childhood education supports not only children, but entire families and communities.

So what is next for early childhood in Vermont’s legislation? As of March 2026, S.206 — the ECE profession bill — is under consideration. It seeks to establish a statewide licensure system for early childhood educators, creating clear qualifications, career pathways, and professional recognition. By aligning credentials across the field, the bill aims to support and retain high-quality educators in our communities.



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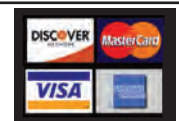


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Why have Week of the Young Child?



You may be wondering how the Week of the Young Child started and why we celebrate it not only as a community but nationally.

100 years ago, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (known as NAEYC) began, and at the time it was called the National Association for Nursery Education. This was a time when educators and researchers began to mold nursery schools for young children to attend. Around 40 years later they evolved into the current name that many refer to as NAEYC. When

this happened, Head Start programs were launched so there began to be a focus on preschool education. For the Green Mountain State we started the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children in 1972. By having this Association, educators have worked together to advance early childhood education as a profession.

Why is this even important? Think back to your grandparents' or great-grandparents' time. Most stayed home and helped on the farm or around the homes. They didn't have a lot of education. I

myself went to preschool part-time for socialization and to get comfortable with a group of children my own age before the school years began.

Today most families have both

parents working and their children in

(See Why?, Page 12)



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Why?

(Continued from Page 11)
 an early education center, early education registered home, or a preschool program. The importance of having quality early childhood education places to learn is due to how short a window our young children's growth and development happen. The first five years of life is when 90% of the child's brain is developed. Having a child in a play-based program helps the child to learn naturally the developmental skills they will need before entering kindergarten. They are learning how to regulate their emotions and work on social emotional skills while there. They are learning cognitive skills, large and gross motor skills and so much more. They get real life experiences that they can't get from being on technology or going to work with a parent.

Our own Gov. Phill Scott has made proclamations that the Week of the Young Child be celebrated. These proclamations were issued in partnership with VTAEYC and others to emphasize the importance of early childhood education. The need for early childhood education continues to

grow, and future early childhood educators are needed to provide rich, high quality educational experiences for young children and their families. S.206, The Early Childhood Educator Professional Bill has been making progress in the Senate. This bill is a major step in ensuring early childhood educators are recognized and valued as professionals. No longer will they be looked at as a babysitter or daycare provider but as the Early Educators that they are. This will ensure transparency for families and accountability for the great investments Vermont has made in the early childhood workforce so far.

So, on this Week of the Young Child, celebrate that the educators are improving the profession to offer the best education for your young children. Children will enjoy daily activities such as Music Monday, Tasty Tuesday, Work Together Wednesday, Artsy Thursday, and Family Friday. I encourage you to celebrate with your child on these days with some hands-on activities to make lasting memories and support their brain development.



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Learn about social-emotional learning

By PEG SUTLIVE

“Social and emotional skills are the ‘bricks and mortar’ of all areas of development,” according to Jack Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (Epstein, 2009).

In the world of early education, Addison County educators fully embrace the importance of this learning. Social and emotional development is a child’s developing capacities to experience, regulate, and express a range of emotions, develop close relationships with other children and adults, actively explore their environments, and learn. Just like how children learn to walk, talk and read in an individual way, children also learn social-emotional skills at their own unique pace.

To understand more about

what this learning looks like in a classroom, I interviewed Sarah Perrotte, an early educator at the Addison County Early Learning Center (ACELC). At ACELC there are two classrooms: a Head Start preschool, and an Early Head Start toddler classroom. Sarah is one of three teachers in the toddler classroom, along with Holli Boise and Amy Stonoha.

Peg: Hello, Sarah! Can you tell me a little bit about how you became an early educator?

Sarah: My passion is advocating for children and families during the earliest years, because that’s when brain development is happening most rapidly. The first three years are foundational, and I believe every family deserves the support and resources needed to give their

(See Sutlive, Page 15)



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Sutlive

(Continued from Page 13)

child the strongest possible start.

Peg: In a typical day, what are some ways that you plan and include social-emotional instruction?

Sarah: We prioritize intentional social-emotional teaching. In our small groups, we focus on three things: helping children name their emotions, teaching them to advocate for their needs, and facilitating inclusive peer interactions like turn-taking.

Peg: Are there specific tools or materials that support children's SEL (social-emotional learning)?

Sarah: Tools can support social-emotional learning, but what matters most are the relationships we build with children. When adults are responsive to their needs and emotions, children feel safe,

included, and able to grow their social and emotional skills.

Peg: Here is a scenario that I know many families can relate to. How might your team respond?

Two children are playing with Magna-Tiles. One child is gathering most of the Magna-Tiles to keep in front of him. The other child reaches for some and gets upset when the other child yells "Mine!"

Sarah: When resources like Magna-Tiles are limited, we use it as a teaching moment. We model "turn" using both sign language and verbal cues. If a child is struggling, we use a visual timer so they know exactly when it will be their turn again, ensuring everyone feels supported and included.

Peg: How is the way you teach SEL different from the practices, say 20 years ago?

Sarah: We've moved from a reactive to a proactive model. By intentionally teaching emotional




literacy and social skills daily, we are helping children build a toolkit for navigating life's challenges.

Peg: If you could give advice to parents as they navigate the emotional development of

toddlers, what would it be?

Sarah: Be patient with yourself because it's not always easy. The goal is to help your child feel safe expressing their emotions. It takes practice, but the benefits are huge!






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Schools make family connections



At **Starksboro Cooperative Preschool**, family and community are central to everything we do. As a cooperative preschool, families play an active role in supporting the program. Parents contribute through shared responsibilities that help keep tuition costs manageable while strengthening their connection to the school. These contributions might include shoveling snow, washing towels or donating snacks.

Throughout the year we host family celebrations that allow time to connect more deeply with one another. In a rural community like Starksboro, these gatherings create meaningful opportunities for families to meet, share experiences, and form lasting friendships.

One especially memorable celebration took place in November as we prepared for Thanksgiving, when we invited families to join us for "Breakfast in the Forest." Parents and grandparents arrived bundled in warm layers after a light dusting of snow to share the morning with the children. We offered coffee donated by Ridge Roaster, tea, carrot cupcakes made with carrots from Footprint Farm, along with bagels, fruit, and warm apple cider. Teachers tended a small fire while children proudly guided their families to their favorite places in the woods. The morning was filled with outdoor play, conversation, and a quiet morning in nature. Most importantly, the gathering gave families time to connect with one another. By the end of the morning many of us were saying the same thing: "We should do this every week!"

Here are what other preschools around the area are offering as ways for families to connect.

At **Orwell Early Education**

Program we strive to host family events every month but the event everyone loves the most is our annual museum. We hang panels of the children's work, pictures of their creations through the year and display art on tables. We have computers playing videos. It's a wonderful celebration of the children's work and growth and inspires family conversation with one another as we celebrate a year of hard work.

Mary Johnson Children's Center: Each fall, we host a family dinner where children make sauce, bread, salad, and even gelato. Our annual pumpkin pie-making gathering brings families together before Thanksgiving, and classrooms often host events inspired by the interests of the children. Our toddler group had a rave this fall, and another group met at the pump track for bike riding.

At **Quarry Hill School** our Peace and Love Celebration is a pizza party where we recognize and share our learning about the many people who have made contributions in our world and community that make things more just, kind and beautiful for everyone. We learn about Martin Luther King, Jr., children's author Todd Parr, and local peacemakers who work in hospitals, are volunteer firefighters, librarians or make sure we have good food to eat.

At **Wren's Nest at Willowell**, every fall we do a welcome potluck for our families in the evening, as a chance for teachers and students to get to know each other with families and siblings joining in. We also have a lantern walk during the darkest time of the year. Students bake bread and make lanterns that light the way as they walk through the forest with a song they learn.



Forest schools raise the next generation of environmentalists



By **EMMA SEKERCAN**

In a society increasingly consumed by time spent indoors, distracted by technology and disconnected from the outdoor world, forest schools are becoming more and more critical to the health and wellbeing of our children and the environment.

Experiences in early childhood greatly influence the trajectory of children's lives. When children can truly connect with the natural world, they develop an innate awareness, curiosity, and care for the ecosystems that are crucial to our planet's survival.

Environmental education in our school systems is often taught through the context of massive, far away issues such as the deforestation of rainforests and endangered animals that live on other continents, before students even know the plants and animals in their backyard. David Sobel

writes in his book "Beyond Ecophobia," "If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it."

We must allow children to start by connecting with and caring about the local environments that cradle them. This allows them to have the capacity to learn about and think of solutions for broader issues as they grow older. Children form a deep sense of place when they spend significant amounts of uninterrupted and child-led time outdoors in a permanent location(s). Children become in tune with the weather, seasons, plants, animals, the way the creek bends, the good climbing trees, the list could go on. At forest *(See Forest schools, Page 18)*



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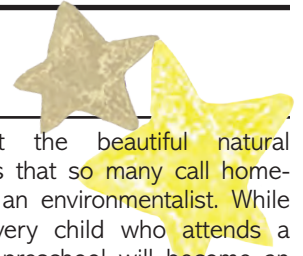
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Forest schools



(Continued from Page 17)
nature as much as they learn from teachers and each other.

Tucked up on a hill in Bristol, between a swath of forest and a meadow leading to wetlands, you'll find Wren's Nest Forest Preschool. Here, a bustling group of 3- to 5-year-old children can be found immersed in the Vermont landscape. In her book "Teaching The Cedarsong Way," Erin Kenny writes, "Many leading adult environmentalists cite two primary reasons for their commitment to stewardship and their involvement

with environmental activism: Extended periods of unstructured nature time during childhood and a nature mentor who taught them to respect the natural world."

At Wren's Nest, the children continue to deepen their connection to each play spot in the forest with every visit. While their time is unstructured, they naturally fall back into the rhythms of the forest and the inspiration that specific downed logs, branches, rocks, acorns, etc. in each place hold. The children are already developing a sense of

respect and empathy for nature and each other, guided by the mentorship of teachers who care deeply about the earth. We use inquiry based teaching to guide the children to understanding the forest and how to respect it.

Forest schools not only allow young children to deeply connect with the outdoor world, they also allow children the space to develop critical thinking skills, perseverance, emotional regulation skills, and teamwork. These important skills are needed to stand up for and

protect the beautiful natural spaces that so many call home-to be an environmentalist. While not every child who attends a forest preschool will become an environmental activist, the traits and values that forest school fosters will create a generation of people who can move through life and lead compassionately; as critical thinkers, and clear communicators.

Editor's note: Emma Sekercan is a teacher at Wren's Nest Forest Preschool.



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DIRECTORY

Center/Home	Name	Ages	Schedule	PreK Partner	Town	Notes/Contact Info
Center	Quarry Hill School	3-5	School Year/school day	Yes	Middlebury	www.quarryhillschool.org office@quarryhillschool.org
Center	Otter Creek Child Center	6 wks-5	Year Round, M-F	Yes	Middlebury	www.ottercreekcc.org office@ottercreekcc.org
Center	Evergreen Preschool	3-5	School Year/half day and full day	Yes	Vergennes	Evergreenpreschoolvt@gmail.com
Center	MAUSD Early Education Program	3-5	School Year/half day and full day options	Yes	Bristol	lindsay.hance@mausd.org
Center	MAUSD Early Education Program	3-5	School Year/half day and full day options	Yes	Bristol	heidi.bullock@mausd.org
Center	Wren's Nest Forest Preschool	3-5	School Year, M-F, 8-4:30	Yes	Bristol	info@willowell.org
Home	Carolyn Fogg	Birth-12	Full Year, M-F, 7-4:30	Yes	Monkton	cfogg1979@gmail.com
Center	Starksboro Cooperative Preschool	3-5	School Year, M-F, + Summer Program, half day, 7:30-1, & full day, 7:30-4:30	Yes	Starksboro	starkscoop@gmail.com
Center	Aurora Preschool	3-5	Year Round, 7:30-5	No	Middlebury	auroralearningcentervt@gmail.com
Center	Bristol Family Center	6 wks-6 years	Year Round, M-F	Yes	Bristol	www.bristolfamilycenter.org awhitcomb@bristolfamilycenter.org
Center	Addison County Parent Child Center	0-5	School Year, 8-4 and M-F, 8-4 in summer	Yes	Serving Addison County in Middlebury, with transportation	dbailey@addisoncountypcc.org
Home	Mountain Road Preschool	6 wks - 10 yrs	Full Year, M-F, 7:15-4:45	Yes	Addison	mountainroadpreschool@yahoo.com
Home	Misty Scott	6 wks - 12 yrs	Full Year, M-F, 7-5	No	Vergennes	www.facebook.com/CuriousKidsChild-CareMistyScott ckcc@comcast.net 802-877-6977 3 STAR Provider
Home	Evelyn Burlock	6 wks - 12 yrs	Full Year, M-F, 7-5	No	Vergennes	eburlock27@yahoo.com 802-877-2506
Center	Mary Johnson Children's Center (MJCC)	3 mos - 5 yrs	Full Year	Yes	Middlebury	www.mjccvt.org office@mjccvt.org
Center	Middlebury Cooperative Nursery School (MJCC)	18 mos - 5 yrs	Full Year	Yes	East Middlebury	www.mjccvt.org office@mjccvt.org
Center	Orwell Early Education Program (MJCC)	3 yrs-5 yrs	School Year & Summer Session	Yes	Middlebury	www.mjccvt.org office@mjccvt.org
Center	Middlebury After School Program (MJCC)	K-5th grade	After School- School Year until 5:30. Summer 8-5	No	Middlebury	www.mjccvt.org school-age@mjccvt.org

DIRECTORY

Center/Home	Name	Ages	Schedule	PreK Partner	Town	Notes/Contact Info
Home	Heather Armell	6 wks-5 yrs	Full Year, M-F, 7:15-4:30,	No	Monkton	littleykes2007@yahoo.com
Home	Bethany Hallock	Birth to 12	Full Year, M-F 7:30-4:30,	No	Ferrisburgh	gbthallock@juno.com
Home	Donna Meacham	Birth to 12	Full Year, M-F, 7:30-4:30	No	New Haven	dondarmea@gmavt.net 802-453-5383
Center	Lincoln Cooperative Preschool	3-5	7:30-3. Some after care available	Yes	Lincoln	preschool@gmavt.net
Home	Sunshine Childcare	Birth-5	Full Year, M-F, 7-5	No	Addison	sunshinecc21@gmail.com
Home	Jennifer Cyr Family Child Care	Birth-4	Year-Round, M-TH	No	Middlebury	www.jennifercyrfamilychildcare.com jennifercyr2@gmail.com
Center	Addison County Early Learning Center (Head Start)	16 mos-5, 12 mos-5 starting Sept. 26	Preschool-School Year, Toddler classroom-Year Round, both, M-F, 8:30-2:30	Yes	New Haven	psutlive@cvoeo.org, Peg Sutlive
Public Pre-K (Center)	ANWSD Early Education Program	3-5	School Year only, 8:15 -1:15. Extended care, 1:15-4:30	Yes	Ferrisburgh	mtierney@anwsd.org, Marcie Tierney
Home	Laura Weber	Birth-12	Year Round, M-F, 7-4:30	No	Hancock	lmw15vt@yahoo.com
Center	The Ark Preschool/Kindergarten	3 yrs-Kindergarten school year. 3-10 summer	School Year & Summer program, M-F, 7:30-5	No	Waltham	arkdirector@victoryvt.org Rachael Boyce, Director 802-877-3393
Center	Cornerstone Preschool	3-5	School Year, M-F, 7:30-5	No	Vergennes	office@cornerstone-prek.org
Center/School	Bridport Central School Preschool	3-5	School Year, M-Th, 7:45-2:45	Yes	Bridport	Heather Adams, Preschool Director, 802-758-2331 hadams@acsdvt.org
Center/School	Mary Hogan Preschool	3-5	School Year, M-Th 8:15-2:15	Yes	Middlebury	Kim Forbes, Preschool Director 802-382-1438 kforbes@acsdvt.org
Center	A.R.K. Child Care at Whiting	6 wks -5	Year Round, M-F, 7:30 -5	No	Whiting	Rebecca Kerr, Program Director 802-623-7991 arkchildcare2018@gmail.com
Home	Muffy's Family Child Care and Preschool Program	Infant-School age	Year Round, M-F, 8-4:30	Yes	Orwell	muffykgart@gmail.com 802-948-2561 (Leave message)
Home	Discovery Hill Child Care and Preschool	Infant-School age	Year Round, M-F, 7-4:30	Yes	Bristol	kidsfirstdhfcc@yahoo.com 802-989-1225
Home	Stacey Rheaume	6 wks - 12	Year-Round, M-F 7-4:30	No	Salisbury	rrheaume5@yahoo.com 802-349-5082

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DIRECTORY

Center/Home	Name	Ages	Schedule	PreK Partner	Town	Notes/Contact Info
Center	Bridge School Beginners Preschool	3-5	Year Round, M-F, 8-3:30 with AfterCare until 4:30 during the school year	Yes	Middlebury	Lindsay Hard Director/Lead Teacher lindsay@bridgeschoolvermont.org 802-388-3498
Center	Salisbury Family Center	6 wks-5	Year Round, M-F, 7:30-4:30	No	Salisbury	Christian Bowdish, Director salisburyfamilycenter@gmail.com 802-352-9800
Licensed Home	Pea Ridge Farm School	2.5-5	Year Round, M-F, 8-4		Middlebury	
Home	Anne Audy: Superhero Academy	Infant-School age	School Year, M-F, 7-5. Summer part-time only	No	Ferrisburgh	Anne.Emmel.Dunham@gmail.com 802-355-0506
Center	Red Clover Children's Center	Birth-3	Year Round, M-F	Yes	Middlebury	admin@redcloverchildren.org Redcloverchildren.org
Center	The Growing Tree	12 mos-5	Year Round, M-F, 7:30-8:30	No	Ferrisburgh	thegrowingtree.squarespace.com tgtaddison@gmail.com 802-759-2924
Home	Samantha Latreille Child Care	Birth-School Age	Year Round, M-F, 7:15-4:30	No	Bridport	Slatreille123@gmail.com 802-349-2565 Samantha Latreille



Mother appreciates early education for her children



By SAMANTHA PAQUETTE

As an early educator in one of the preschool classrooms at Bristol Family Center, I have been given the opportunity to learn and grow in this field with continuous support from my director, assistant director, and coworkers.

Also, I am currently enrolled in my final semester at the Community College of Vermont, where I will soon complete my Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The knowledge I've gained from my classes, various trainings, and the guidance of the early educators I work beside has helped me better understand each child and how to support them in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways.

Although I am an early

educator, I am also a mother to two young boys. As a parent, I am deeply grateful that my children have had access to early childhood education at Bristol Family Center. Their early educators have given them the opportunity to learn crucial developmental skills that have helped them form relationships, build independence, and grow into confident learners.

As early childhood educators we shape the young minds of children by giving them the confidence, curiosity, and perspective to explore the world, all while ensuring they feel safe, loved, and supported. We are the steppingstones in a child's educational journey, influencing how they see themselves, others, and the world around them.



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Early education is more than daycare

By **JESSICA RINGEY**

Being an early educator is more than a profession to me; it's a calling that I truly believe shapes the foundation of human development. As early educators we work with children during the most formative years of life. In these years, learning is not just academic; it is emotional, social, physical, and deeply personal. To be an early educator is to stand at the beginning of someone's lifelong journey and is so important and special.

Early childhood education is powerful because it honors the whole child, their curiosity, emotions, relationships, and their emerging sense of self. In the infant room learning looks like building connection, trust, and offering exploration. Every coo, every reach, every

moment of eye contact is communication. Every routine, feeding, diapering, napping and curriculum becomes a chance to build security and belonging.

The Week of the Young Child is a reminder of why our work matters. A reminder that early childhood programs are a school not daycare. It highlights the dedication, patience and passion that early educators bring into the classrooms every single day. It is also a celebration of the children and their joy, their resilience, and the incredible growth.

Being part of this field is an honor. It is meaningful, emotional, and deeply rewarding. I am grateful for the opportunity to support children and families during these precious early years and I am

(See Ringey, Page 27)



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MIDDLEBURY
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Center expansion opens more childcare slots, aids economic development

By **JOHN FLOWERS & JOHN S. McCRIGHT**

MIDDLEBURY — The Otter Creek Child Center (OCCC) at 150 Weybridge St. was a hub of industriousness and creativity for the second half of 2024 through most of 2025 — without a single kid taking part.

Toy loaders, excavators and dump trucks that got regular workouts in the Middlebury center's front yard gave way to the real McCoy's, operated by adults who erected a major addition to the building that, once completed this past November, made every toddler (and parent) proud.

"The kids have absolutely loved the space," said Linda January, OCCC's executive director.

"It's a really beautiful space, and it feels really special to be in a building that is designed for young children."

The \$10 million expansion and renovation effort began in March of 2024 with the removal of an on-site barn (that now stands at Sunrise Orchards in Cornwall). The centerpiece of the project is a three-story, 12,000-square-foot addition. The new space, coupled with renovations to the original OCCC building, is allowing the center to dramatically ramp up both its staffing and enrollment.

In December of 2023 the Middlebury Development Review Board gave its unanimous approval to OCCC's expansion plan, which will create 77 much-needed additional childcare slots, for a new total of 139. With 10 of the 13 classrooms open, the center currently has 98 children enrolled, and expects to ramp up to full capacity in the fall, January said.

More children means more classes and more teachers. As of last fall, OCCC ran five classrooms while overseeing the College Street Children's Center, which runs three. The new space in the expansion allows for the addition of two infant rooms and a toddler classroom.

Since the 2022-2023 academic year, OCCC has increased its ranks by six teachers, and it's adding nine more. That will bring OCCC's total staffing to 24 classroom educators, six "floating" educators, an executive director, three program directors and a newly created post of family & engagement coordinator. Plans call for the addition of two new preschool classrooms during the fall of 2026, if enrollment allows.

And that shouldn't be a problem for OCCC, which last fall had 240 kids on its waiting list.

There was a time when cash-strapped childcare organizations could only afford compensation on par with the fast-food industry. But a 0.44% state payroll tax created through Act 76 of 2023 has generated new funds to help the state's childcare centers expand their enrollment capacity, upgrade their facilities, and increase compensation and professional development opportunities for their educators and staff.

Also fueling the OCCC expansion — also called the Community Child Care Expansion Project — has been an assortment of grants and a \$4 million commitment from Middlebury College, the county's largest employer. The institution's buy-in has included the gift of a 2.5-acre Weybridge Street

(See *Expansion*, Page 29)





Ringey

(Continued from Page 25)
proud to stand alongside other educators who give so much of themselves to this work.

I am a proud mom of four children, ages 2, 9, 10 and 14. I work full-time as a lead teacher in the infant room and I am a full-time student through Vermont State Colleges. I am expecting to receive my bachelor's degree and teaching

license in the Spring of 2027. All four of my children have attended the Bristol Family Center. It has become such a special place in our family and I'm so thankful for the opportunity that they got to be in such a loving experience there.

Editor's note: Jessica Ringey is Lead Teacher in the Infant Room at Bristol Family Center.



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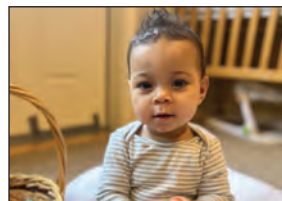
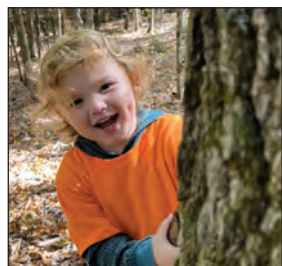
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Expansion

(Continued from Page 26)

parcel just west of OCCC to help make the new addition possible. A dearth of childcare and affordable housing have been major impediments to Addison County's — and indeed, the state's — efforts to attract young families to populate schools and fill jobs.

The college's, state's and federal government's recent investments in OCCC are now mushrooming at 150 Weybridge St. A walkthrough of the building last fall as construction was in the home stretch allowed a visitor to easily imagine children coloring, reading, laughing and singing in any of the 13 classrooms. That's more than triple the four classrooms OCCC had before temporarily relocating to the college-owned Inn on the Green in 2024.

Children returning to 150

Weybridge St. found, in addition to the more numerous and spacious classrooms, three playgrounds and a butterfly garden.

KITCHEN & ELEVATOR

A commercial kitchen will be equipped to pump out around 400 meals a day, once the expanded center reaches full capacity.

Ample lighting, cascading through a generous number of windows, showers children and educators with Vitamin D and good vibes.

An elevator helps ensure OCCC is accessible to all staff, kids and visitors.

"We'll be fully compliant with ADA; we weren't before," January said, noting the original building's many limitations.

Need a spot to stash your gloves, scarf or backpack? There are cubbies everywhere. There's



a special storage area inside for strollers. Since OCCC serves children ages 6 weeks to 5 years, a lot of strollers are needed for the tiniest tots.

A little library is taking shape near the corridor linking the new addition with the 100-plus-year-old structure OCCC has called home since 1984.

A large mechanical room that serves as the building's central nervous system includes heat pumps that will crank out cool air during the summer. Natural gas is used only to heat radiant flooring; the rest of the building will run on electricity. The structure has been prepped to host solar panels — likely on its south facing roof — if a pivot to green energy proves feasible.

Wood, PVC, glass and steel aren't the only materials that

have flooded OCCC site during construction, according to Naylor & Breen Project Superintendent Jason Wisell. He noted the rear slope of the expansion parcel tapered down to the Otter Creek. That slope had to be built up.

"When we started last spring, we had to bring in gray dirt to bring (the topography) up to the new grade to start our foundations. We brought over 1,500 dump truck loads of fill in, just to get started."

As construction head toward the finish line, he estimated that another 1,000 truck loads would be needed on top of that, by the time all was said and done.

A wider, two-way access/exit driveway leads from Weybridge Street to a more ample parking area for up to 42 vehicles. A (See Otter Creek, Page 36)

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We can all be peacemakers

By ERIN DAVIS

We are emerging from a period of Wintering at Quarry Hill School. During the darkest time of the year we find ourselves serving warm foods for snacks like oatmeal, scrambled eggs, and homemade cheesy pasta. We read stories about winter animals that create gentle dens under the snow. We look at books that illustrate the tracks of our local animals and even spy these prints in our own play yard, mostly from bunnies, but also birds or mice, and play with toy families of these animals in our snowy white playdoh.

At circle time, we light a candle and notice how it slows us down as it gently glows. We think about how we can make our own light shine, singing songs like "This Little Light of Mine." This idea of a "shining light" inside of us ties beautifully into our annual exploration of Peacemakers.

Peacemakers are people who use their own "light" to make the world more gentle and fair.

This unit starts in January when we return from the busy holiday season around the time of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Our study begins with MLK as we get to know his face in photographs and illustration. We listen to the sound of his distinct voice in audio recordings of his "I Have A Dream" speech. And we think about how he used his voice to make our public spaces more safe, fair and accessible: schools, buses, parks and restaurants.

Our study evolves to include other leaders, artists and everyday people throughout history who have shared their gifts generously. We soon begin to notice peacemakers in our own community in our firefighters and EMT's who help people when they are having a bad day, trash collectors who help keep our town clean, librarians who help us pursue our curiosity, nurses who help babies be born, doctors who work to heal us when we are sick, friends who

(See Peacemakers, Page 31)



Peacemakers

(Continued from Page 30)

help and comfort us when we are in need. There are so many peacemakers all around us.

What is a peacemaker?

- They are helpers.
- They take care of other people.
- They are kind to friends.

The children begin to incorporate this vocabulary into their interactions with each other, "Olivia was a peacemaker, she gave me a turn!" And soon begin to self-identify as peacemakers. "I was a peacemaker, I helped set the napkins," or "I helped my mom pack my lunch," or "I let Liam go first."

We celebrate these moments of patience, generosity and helpfulness as we learn and grow together. Again we sing together a new song: "We are the peacemakers, we know just what to say / We are the peacemakers, we know just what to do / I am a Peacemaker and you can be one too."

We can all be peacemakers.

Editor's note: Erin Davis is an early childhood educator at Quarry Hill School.



Storytelling can engage young minds

By **GABBY SULLIVAN**

Throughout this year, I engaged in an ongoing storytelling project grounded in Reggio-inspired approaches, particularly the practice of observing children's interests and relaunching investigations based on their wants, needs, and levels of engagement. My goal was to explore multiple ways to support storytelling and written expression while remaining responsive to how children connected with their work.

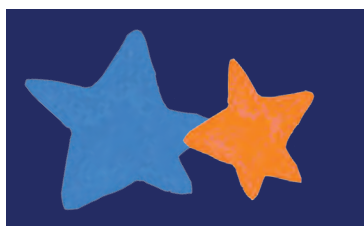
At the beginning of the year, storytelling was introduced through familiar and meaningful themes such as fishing and hunting. These experiences

provided a concrete foundation for narrative development, allowing children to form stories based on real-life experiences, imaginative play, and shared classroom explorations. From there, I expanded the project by having children read different types of stories and experiment with changing story endings as a way to explore narrative structure and cause-and-effect within storytelling. While this approach offered valuable learning opportunities, it did not fully sustain the level of engagement I was hoping to see.

As the project evolved, children demonstrated a strong interest in introducing monsters, villains, and

"evil" characters into their narratives. Rather than redirecting or minimizing these darker themes, I intentionally allowed space for them to unfold. In Reggio-inspired practice, children's ideas, no matter how complex or uncomfortable, are seen as worthy of investigation. Monsters and antagonists often represent children's attempts to process fear, power, justice, and control. By permitting these themes, children were able to externalize emotions, experiment with moral roles, and explore cause-and-effect within a safe and imaginative context.

This led to the introduction (See *Storytelling*, Page 32)



Natural Beginnings

Vicki is a board-certified registered lactation consultant who offers home, phone, and telemedicine visits for breastfeeding mothers who are facing various challenges in Addison and Rutland counties, and some areas in New York State. She also has a monthly prenatal breastfeeding class available on Zoom. Mothers can feel overwhelmed when trying to balance milk production, latching issues, nipple soreness, engorgement, pumping, and returning to work. Vicki is available to help during this transitional period – you are not alone! Schedule an appointment today.

Vicki is a provider for BCBS, MVP, CBA Blue, and Vermont Medicaid for in-home and virtual consultations, personal use breast pumps, and pumping supplies.



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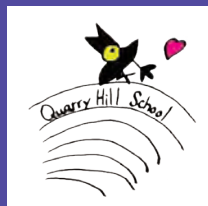
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Storytelling

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of pop-up books and the incorporation of monsters and villains as central story elements. This relaunch transformed the investigation and reignited excitement around storytelling. Children became deeply engaged in designing their own monsters and problem-solving how to turn their two-dimensional drawings into three-dimensional pop-up characters within a story. This process supported not only narrative thinking but also spatial awareness, fine motor skills, and collaborative dialogue.

Allowing darker play without shutting it down communicates trust in children's capacities and honors their full emotional range. When educators remain present, curious, and reflective, children learn that their thoughts are valued and that complex feelings can be explored safely through play and art. Open-ended materials, flexible story outcomes, and minimal adult control created an environment where children felt empowered to take creative risks and expand their ideas beyond conventional or "safe" storylines.

Through this Reggio-inspired process of listening, reflecting, and relaunching ideas, I observed a genuine sense of joy and confidence emerge in the children's

storytelling. They became invested in their characters, their books, and the stories they were creating. I feel especially proud of this project because it reflects a responsive teaching practice that values children's voices and demonstrates how meaningful learning can grow when educators remain flexible, reflective, and open to following the children's lead.

Children are viewed as capable, complex thinkers who construct knowledge through experience, dialogue, and creative exploration. This philosophy strongly supported my storytelling project, in which children engaged in creating and reimagining stories through hands-on experiences, including the design and construction of pop-up monster books. Storytelling became not just a literacy activity, but a vehicle for emotional expression, identity exploration, and collaborative meaning-making.

In the end, the value of this work lies not in the stories themselves, but in what they revealed children's capacity to imagine, to confront complexity, and to create meaning when given the freedom to do so.

Editor's note: Gabby Sullivan is a Preschool Teacher at Mary Johnson Children's Center.



Expressing gratitude helps everyone



By **MONICA BENJAMIN**

Around Valentine's Day, when we are all thinking about love, I like to expand that to include kindness and gratitude too. Chocolate and valentines are lovely, but a grateful heart lasts a lot longer than a box of candy.

Journaling is one of my favorite small habits. I'm not always consistent with journaling — some weeks I'm on a roll, and other weeks my notebook gathers a little dust. When I'm in one of those slumps, gratitude journaling is my reset button. It's quick, simple, and a gentle way to reconnect with what really matters.

Here's a recent example from my own list:

I am grateful for:

• My husband, who somehow manages to be my biggest cheerleader, steady teammate,

and voice of calm all at once. His support, encouragement, and sense of humor keep our family running and keep me grounded.

• My daughter, who has taught me the true meaning of love — and who also finds new and creative ways to challenge me every single day.

• The staff at Mary Hogan School — teachers, paraeducators, school nurse, custodial staff, and school nutrition staff and anyone else I forgot — who show up every day to make the school a safe, joyful place for kids to learn and grow.

• Middlebury Snowbowl, our family's home away from home in the winter time and our favorite place to ski — so welcoming, so family-friendly, and where we always know we'll run into friends to ski with.

That little list took me about

seven minutes to write. Seven minutes! Yet the boost it gave my mood lasted far longer. Putting gratitude into words has a way of shifting your mindset from "everything is going wrong" to "actually, there is a lot going right."

When life feels hectic (which, as parents, it often does), try pausing for a moment and writing down a few things you're grateful for. It doesn't have to be fancy or profound —

just honest. It's amazing how such a small act can soften a hard day.

Editor's note: Middlebury resident Monica Benjamin is a nurse practitioner at Porter Pediatrics in Middlebury.



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Parents need to play, too

By **MONICA BENJAMIN**

Parents, book a playdate for yourself. You won't regret it.

I didn't fully appreciate the importance of playdates for parents until I became one myself. Getting together with other families who have kids around your child's age — letting the kids play while you get some grown-up conversation — feels pretty magical. But let me tell you what might be even more magical: parent playdates without the kids.

Every Thursday, I have the privilege of getting together with a group of friends to move our bodies and reconnect. In the winter months, we head to the Snow Bowl to skin up the mountain (yes, we literally hike uphill with skis on — surprisingly fun!) and then enjoy a few lift runs. When the weather warms up, you'll find us paddle

boarding on Lake Dunmore, running or walking on the TAM, or finding some other way to be active around town.

These Thursday evenings are sacred. My husband and my daughter know that on Thursdays, starting around 5:15 pm, Mom is off duty — they'll see me in the morning. After our exercise, we usually linger for food, drinks and unhurried conversation. I look forward to Thursdays all week.

It's a powerful reminder that as parents, we need time to play with our friends too. I am without a doubt a better parent because of this time — more patient, more present and more myself. So don't hesitate to make a playdate with your friends. It's not selfish: it's essential, and well worth your time. After all, kids shouldn't be the only ones who get to have fun playing.



Editor's note: Middlebury resident Monica Benjamin is a nurse practitioner at Porter Pediatrics in Middlebury.

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Otter Creek

(Continued from Page 29)

sidewalk on the building side of the driveway gives folks of all ages safer passage to the facility.

As an extra security measure, the building has but one public access — through a glass doorway that's monitored by

the front office, which will “buzz in” visitors and parents. Other doorways are locked and can only be opened by staff.

There are many striking exterior features within the new construction, but one of the most endearing — and practical — is

the covered porch that adorns the entire parking lot-facing façade of the addition.

And speaking of practical, the building is endowed with 17 commodes — adult versions as well as mini comfort stations for those still in potty training.

“There are itty bitty toilets in all of the classrooms, and classroom sinks are installed at child height so even one-year-olds can wash hands on their own,” January noted in a recent interview.

The staff aren't the only one glowing over this wonderful new childcare space. OCCC board member Meg Howard, who also has a child at the center, is bowled over by the outcome of the project.

“It was absolutely worth the effort,” she said, marveling at the way the new construction is sized for its smallest clients.

“When you have a space that is curated specifically for the use case it was meant for — in this case childcare — the organization can operate better for children, staff and all the teachers.”

Construction crews will be finishing up a few details this spring, January said. And they will come back in the fall to plant some trees and line the parking

lot, she added.

HELP FROM THE COLLEGE

January gave a shout-out to the college for its support of the project. Whereas a lot of funding came from five years of raising funds through state and federal grant, the college did kick in a substantial amount of money in addition to the neighboring land. January also praised the college for the loan of the Inn on the Green space during construction.

“The Inn on the Green (worked) out well for us. It's actually allowed us to do a little expansion. We've been able to do five classrooms over there.

January is glad that the expanded space will help it meet one of its important goals — that it serve more Addison County families.

“It increases access to childcare for more families, and it supports family mainly so (that after the birth of a child) they could go back to works, full-time or part-time.

“The larger goal was to increase capacity of childcare in the county and the economic impact of that is families have more access to childcare slots and can go to work.”

John Flowers is at johnf@addisonindependent.com.



Happy Birthday, Baby!

By SARAH HARRIS

Somehow it happened: our baby turned one this winter. Which is also to say that my husband and I survived our first year of parenting. And what a year it was. So much has happened since February 2025, when our daughter's challenging birth landed us in the Dartmouth-Hitchcock NICU. The three of us weren't together in those early golden hours. Instead, we packed our baby off in an ambulance, in the care of highly qualified strangers, who drove her over the mountains in the middle of the night.

Thankfully, she got strong quickly, and four days later we were home — exhausted, weepy at the sheer love of it all, and ready for our real life to begin. I remember my husband taking her on a tour of the house, explaining the art on the walls. Art? Who

could be bothered with art? I was consumed by milk, measuring my worth in ounces as I pumped colostrum, parceled out precious donor milk from the freezer, and waited for my milk to come in. Milk — how much expressed, how much drunk, how much time at breast or bottle — ruled our days and nights. It was pretty much all I thought about for months. The cool thing is — it worked. The baby grew.

This first year of parenting has thrown us a lot of curveballs, and I've never worked so hard or been so tired. I've also never been so joyful. Bringing home a baby and watching them grow right in front of you: it's utterly quotidian and miraculous, a chaos project with its own ancient schedule. Now, a year in, our daughter crawls, dances to music and pets the cat. She points at everything and asks, "What's that?" We answer over



and over again, helping her build her world as it expands beyond our cocoon.

In late February we threw a big party to celebrate her birthday. In truth, it was also a party for us. We hadn't hosted a big gathering since before the baby was born; it was nice to remember that we

could. I was glad to be surrounded by our friends and family — the people who supported us this first monumental year, and who will shape our child's life in the years to come. Because here's the thing about turning one: you and your child have come so far. But you're both still at the beginning.

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