



association of children's services

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August 2002

From the Co-Directors:

A gardener knows that one can lay out and plant a gorgeous plot of flowers, but without steady tending to food, water and weeding the garden will struggle. In the same way one can have a great philosophy and facility, and write wonderful words about a children's program, but if there isn't someone there making sure the philosophy, facility, words and staff all fit together the program will fail to meet its potential.

Another anxiety-producing study for working families hit the news, this one focusing on children under one whose mothers work out of the home. The S.F. Chronicle version of the story reported that, at age 3, such children score 6 points less on a school readiness test than children whose mothers are at home with them before the age of one. The N.Y. Times version included the information that the children tested were "in average-quality child care." The Time Magazine version noted there was no difference for children "with sensitive mothers who are in high quality child care." The professionals doing the study recognized that there are differences in quality of care but clearly some writers, like the general public, see no need to distinguish one type of care from another.

Part of the mission of AOCS is to counteract that view, helping the public understand first of all that there are vast differences in the quality of experiences for young children in out-of-home care, and secondly that the effect of poor or average child care is very different from that of quality child care for young children. Both the staff and parents at AOCS, who know how rich and wonderful quality care can be for children, know that



society can't afford the consequences of providing poor quality care for young children.

This mission is complicated because child care, day care, babysitting, Head Start, nursery schools, Child Development Centers and Early Childhood Education programs all have different styles and philosophies. College "lab" schools may be affiliated with the psychology department or the education department. All are different yet all are described with similar language. It can be so difficult for people to evaluate quality. Much of "quality care-giving" is intangible, but most evaluations are based on the tangible. Parents can easily be distracted by see-able qualities such as fancy equipment, cuteness, lots of space, teacher-directed lessons or fanciful styling of the facility. Studying the quality of the interactions between children and teachers takes more time and is much more subtle. So much information is available about all the pieces of a child's development that the basic needs and wholeness are lost.

A student who has worked at AOCS for several years recently was hired at the childcare center in a public university. Before she accepted the job she read their materials and discussed philosophy with the Program Director because she wanted to be sure she would be in a healthy, respectful environment for young children. This quote from the center's public information was backed up by the philosophy shared by the Program Director - and could describe AOCS:

*All classrooms offer a rich variety of space, materials, and activities organized to promote children's active exploration and mastery. The goals of the program reflect an abiding sense of respect for children, their unique cultures, and individual development.*

After a few days' work the student was distressed to find that though the facilities were indeed gorgeous, actions in the classrooms were far removed from the language of the handbook. Teachers did not show an "abiding sense of respect for children" - instead they did things like discuss children's developmental difficulties over the children's heads, tell the children one thing but then do another, and spell out "secrets" to each other so the children wouldn't know what they were saying. These are all things that go on in many poor-quality centers, but even with this young woman's experience at AOCS and attempt to ascertain the program's quality

before employment she was unable to learn the real quality of the program until she began to spend some time there. When she gave the Program Director two weeks' notice, the Director asked to know why she was leaving. To her credit, the Director was disturbed to hear these things about her program and promised to work on them. The student told me, however, that part of the problem seemed to be that the Program Director who was so articulate about how the program should be run was never seen IN the program.

At AOCS we not only know and can articulate how to give children what they need, we actually work constantly to make sure the children do get what they need. Most of this agency's leadership schedules regular hours in the programs - Ameena in Hedco, Janice and Claire in the Nursery School, and Amy in the NAC and Growing with Music classes. We also heartily resist all lures to expand the AOCS Children's Program to other sites, knowing that maintaining the quality of this program requires educated, thoughtful leaders who pay attention to the minutiae - how the baby is involved during a diaper change, whether children have time to complete activities before they need to move on, what words are said to a child when she bumps her knee, what is served for snack. Despite the best intentions, teachers in the classrooms can become overwhelmed by details and lose sight of the big picture so there must be on-going support from supervisors to keep the program's goals on track to serve the needs of the children.

The university center has a wonderful endowment as well as the academic resources of the university, yet its blessing is also its curse. While it is staffed by many who mean well, its "institutional status" means it can survive despite the absence of a leader who cares more about each child's daily experience than about the paperwork, staffing and management (not that these are inconsequential tasks!). That passion which shifts the program leaders from managers into coaches, who know that their work with staff and parents is every bit as meaningful as that with the children, is what translates into a program that serves the children's needs. Head Teachers and Program Directors at AOCS learn that, awkward as it may be to tell other adults what to do, the opportunity to help learning teachers become sensitive and appropriate in their responses to children is extremely satisfying - and that's what makes the program shine.

- *Liisa & Claire*

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### Snapshot in the Wobblies

A group of four Wobbly Walkers is sitting to eat lunch. The teacher sitting with them is Ben, who is serving food and helping them keep their focus on eating. A second teacher stands near to help those who are done eating take their plates to the sink, wash hands and get ready for nap. Suddenly a little one at the table takes a handful of rice and throws it at Ben. So Ben can continue to keep his full attention on helping the eaters continue to eat, the second teacher speaks to the child. She knows that the child has been eating for awhile and is beginning to play because he is full, so she says "When I see you throw the rice it shows me that you are all done. Lets take your dish to the sink and put your bib away. I see Kea ready to change your diaper and help you get ready for nap." As she speaks she begins pulling out the child's chair and loosening the bib, giving a clear message that lunch is over. The child, realizing he's lost his right to choose through this transition, begins to resist with "No! No!" The teacher responds "Next time you'll remember to say 'I'm all done'." She continues "I see Kea is all ready for you, there by the changing table". The teacher continues to "point the way" without negotiating with the child. She is sending a clear message that throwing food is not acceptable, while directing the child's attention to what is next on the day's agenda. As the child moves off toward the changing table the teacher notices a second child pick up a handful of rice. Knowing how this child loves to mimic behavior she steps close, watching to see if the full hand is going into the mouth or at Ben; as the little arm winds up for the throw the teacher puts a restraining hand on the child's fore-arm. "Remember to put that rice right in your mouth, teachers don't like to have rice thrown at them. We'll think you are all done eating...are you all done eating?" The child responds, "That's not a teacher, it's Ben!" Suppressing a smile the teacher repeats "You can say 'I'm all done' if you are ready to stop eating." The child gets up from the table saying "All done."

At that week's staff meeting the teachers discuss the incident, laughing with great pleasure in how smart the second child is, how quickly her mind moves to copy

the clever exit of her friend and to liven up lunch. They are enjoying the perfect toddler logic in her quick response that Ben isn't a teacher - after all, he is the only adult in the Wobbly Walkers who chooses not to wear an apron; he's out of uniform so he can't be categorized with the rudimentary logic of a one-year-old! The best part of the discussion comes when the teachers begin to analyze how they help this child by anticipating probable disruption and stop it before this bright little one is allowed to be "naughty" and do something that she knows is not a good idea. The goal of every teacher at AOCS is to avoid problems, and to build and reinforce in the children the self-concept that they are smart and good and able to succeed.

*-Claire*

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### Top Raffle Ticket Sellers

Over \$1000 was brought to AOCS by the 3 families who sold the most Raffle tickets! The top seller, Stephanie (Isabella Orduña's grandma), sold nearly \$500 worth and netted herself the first prize, a gift certificate to Lalime's Restaurant. Paul and Jan (Elizabeth and Robert's parents) sold \$275 worth of tickets and won a gift certificate to Ace Hardware. Brant and Hilary (Tess's parents) came in a few dollars behind Jan and Paul, and won a gift certificate to Rick & Ann's Café. Thanks for your hard work, everyone!

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### Coming Soon

#### Welcome to AOCS

- Isabella, parents Ben Haywood and Amber, and grandma Janice, was born July 8!
- Eleanor, parents Joy and Scott , big sister Clarisse in the Playroom, was born Jun 23!
- Sebastian, parents Kathy and Ben and big sister Genevieve in the Playroom, was born July 31st
- Sasha, parents Andrea and Greg and big sister Lily in the Playroom, joins the Infants.
- Nathaniel, parents Jonathan and Carman, joins the Infants.

#### Farewell to

- Sidney is leaving the Homeroom
- Lacy is leaving the Infant Group
- Elliot is leaving the Todds
- Marta, Teacher, is leaving the Nursery School.

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### Tiny Tickets

AOCS was invited last spring to participate in the BART "Tiny Tickets" program managed by the East Bay Community Foundation. Through this program non-profits may collect BART tickets with bits of value and submit them for payment.

To date AOCS has collected 126 tickets - BART is not interested in receiving fewer than 500 at a time! We are wondering if some of you have brilliant ideas of how to collect more tickets, or whether we should just give up on the program. Please share any ideas with us in the office.

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### AOCS Anniversaries

We honor the following staff with AOCS anniversaries in June:

- Janice, at AOCS since July 1997, 5 years!
- Helen, at AOCS since July 1987, 15 years!
- Mary Catherine, at AOCS since August 2001, 1 year
- Kea, at AOCS since August 1993, 9 years!

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### Birthday Books

- Stone Soup from Colin for his 6th Birthday.
- Hush Little Baby, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (in two versions), The Teddy Bears' Picnic, and Over the Rainbow from Mary Catherine for her birthday.

To celebrate your child's birthday or another event,

choose a book from the "Birthday Book" shelf, look inside for payment instructions, insert the check in the book and put in Liisa's box.

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### Self-Awareness — A Pre-Requisite For Peace

A positive self-image lies at the root of trusting human relationships. Children's self awareness grows tremendously in the early years, the time of recognizing the self as autonomous. Many factors contribute to this process.

The most basic is security, a feeling that comes with having had many experiences of being accepted rather than rejected, of feeling safe and nurtured rather than threatened and ignored. Trust is built when a child knows that, no matter what, she is valued and accepted and that, no matter what, adults will set reasonable limits and keep the world safe. From this base, children reach out, acquire skills, and become competent.

This learning by doing, if it is built on self-confidence and independence, requires unrushed time, room for mistakes, patient adults, and plenty of opportunities to experiment and express feelings. Along with this learning, children can cultivate positive feelings about their sexual and ethnic heritage, thus developing a healthy body image.

Altogether, a positive self-image brings feelings of trust, competence, and joy and reduces helplessness, apathy, and inability to respond. Furthermore, acceptance and love of self prepare the ground for accepting and loving others. *Hearing Everyone's Voice: Educating Young Children for Peace and a Democratic Community*, Edited by Susan Hopkins

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### Extra Booster Seat?

AOCS could use a Booster Seat for its emergency supplies. If you have one your child has outgrown, please bring it in.

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Thank You

Thanks to Mark (Jasper's dad) for spontaneously fixing the gate to the Big Yard, and working on phone cabling issues.

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Board of Directors' Report

### **Summary of the meeting June 20, 2002**

Budget for 2002-2003 In addition to the budget decisions made last month to increase income, the Board voted to increase tuition in the Hedco programs to cover more of the existing "gap" between current tuition rates and the actual cost of providing care to children that age. There was much discussion of the hardship that might result for some families, but the compelling arguments in favor of the increase were:

- AOCs must stay solvent in order to remain in existence
- The quality of the programs cannot be compromised
- Labor costs are the vast majority of the budget, and they are essential to the quality of the programs
- Increasing tuition allows more of the fundraising income to be targeted to assist families who need tuition assistance, rather than subsidizing all families regardless of need.

The final decision was to cover 33% of the "Hedco gap" this year, meaning all Hedco tuitions are still subsidized but to a lesser extent. Tuition in the Nursery School will fully cover the costs of enrollment for children 3 - 5. Rik, as Treasurer, will organize a meeting to present this information to parents in July.

### *Long Range Plan*

Shiree facilitated the final round of discussion on the Long Range Plan, with graphics to demonstrate the gaps and organizational glitches in the plan. The Board will vote on the final draft at the August meeting.

-Minutes Summarized by Liisa

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