

Good News Gazette

October–November 2011

Parent-Teacher Partnerships

When you hear the words “partner” or “partnership,” what comes to mind? If you have seen *Dancing with the Stars*, you know that successful partners have to work together and spend a great deal of time practicing and communicating about their routines.

This hard work and communication isn't just for dancers. At Gretchen's House, we are committed to forming strong partnerships with parents, because we know that our efforts *together* will benefit the children in our care.

On the TV show, a professional dancer is paired with the celebrity. As I thought about this analogy, I realized that this is also true for us! Our teachers are trained in early childhood and have cared for many children, usually with many years of experience.

But people wouldn't tune into the show if it weren't for the celebrities – that's YOU. You bring the knowledge of your child and your family. That knowledge and loving bond with your child really make the partnership flourish.

Then it's all about practice, communication, and patience when one of us stumbles. That daily work isn't what makes the TV show

popular. In real life, it's the everyday routines and struggles that define who we are, and how we relate to each other has a big impact on our success.

So what can you do to foster a strong partnership with your child's teacher?

Well, you're already doing something important: reading our newsletter. We try to limit the amount of information we pass on to parents, because we know you are busy. But please do read what we post on bulletin

boards or send home. We'll try our best to do our part: to communicate with you in a timely manner, to give accurate information, and to vary the ways we offer information.

Have you checked out our website lately? We are continuing to

add features to enhance communication and provide resources for staff and families. Ask your child's teacher about their Myhouse page at www.gretchenshouse.com.

When things are don't go well, please let us know right away. We promise to do the same. If you have concerns about your child or have changes at home, please know that we will hold this information in confidence.

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Important Notes

Contracts for 2012

All currently enrolled families will receive a new child care contract for 2012 in November. These contracts reflect rates and days the centers will be closed for January-December, 2012.

Contracts for 2012 are due to the office by December 1, 2011. A \$50 late fee will be assessed for any renewing contracts that are turned in after that date.

Please note that January billing statements will go out before we close on December 23. Payments are due when centers reopen on January 2, 2012. Late fees will be assessed for payments made after Jan. 10.

Food From Home

Due to the serious nature of food allergies for many of the children in our programs, we have a strict "no sharing food from home" policy (please read the Birthday policy in this newsletter). In some of our programs (Scamp, school-age, WISD), children bring their lunches from home. However, *we ask parents not to send peanut butter or other nut products in these lunches.* Teachers will not allow children to share lunches brought from home.

Starting on Nov. 7, our fall/winter menu and new breakfast schedule will be in place. Schedules may vary slightly between programs, so please confirm the daily schedule with your child's teacher. If your child arrives late and has not eaten breakfast, please let one of the teachers know, and we will provide something for them. Please do not bring your child in with their breakfast from home. It is difficult for teachers to maintain a nut-free environment when children walk into the program, food in hand. In addition, children who arrive with food often want to join in the activities, spreading their food and germs throughout the room. We appreciate everyone's cooperation!

Please see your child's teacher or the center director if you have questions.

School Photos

Group photos taken by Dave Meyer continue into the month of October. We encourage families to check with Dave if you are looking for a family photograph.

Stadium	TBA
WISD	10/25
Oak Valley	
Garden/AMPS/Young 5s ..	10/19
Lake/AMPS/Forest	10/20

Curriculum Night

This is a great opportunity to see the room and hear about our program without children present. In addition, teachers will have more information on the HighScope approach, and what that looks like in our program.

Mt. Pleasant	10/20
WISD	10/17

Fall Potlucks

Our center potlucks are a great opportunity to meet other parents, get to know the teachers better, and sample some great food! (Some centers already held their potlucks.)

Dhu Varren	
Railroad	10/25
Pond	10/24
Farm	10/27

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Centers Closed

Please take note that all Gretchen's House Centers will be closed on Monday, January 16, 2012. We appreciate parent support of our staff training time.



Neighborhood News

The preschoolers at GH-Mt. Vernon harvested the last of their garden vegetables. They picked Swiss chard, green peppers, broccoli leaves, basil and a HUGE zucchini! The vegetables were loaded into a wagon and delivered to The Selma Caf  to use in their breakfasts. The garden is ready for the end of season cleaning except for the seven pumpkins that are almost ready to be picked.

The GH-Mt. Pleasant center enjoyed a sunny picnic at the County Farm Park playground in September. Families enjoyed eating, talking and playing together. New families had the opportunity to talk to experienced Gretchen’s House parents as well as meeting other new families.

The GH-Dhu Varren pancake dinner was great, tasty fun. A special thank you to all of the families and staff who came and donated time, supplies and money to benefit the March of Dimes. It was a delicious way to support an important cause.

Early LCC was a featured site on the 2011 Creativity Cruise sponsored by the Central Michigan Association for the Education of

Young Children (CMAEYC) on Saturday, October 1. Participants visited three childcare sites in the Lansing area to explore three different curriculum philosophies. Early LCC represented the Reggio Emilia approach.

GH-Mt. Vernon’s Fall Potluck was held indoors due to heavy rain. The parents and staff were amazed that 114 people were able to eat and socialize inside, despite the fact that it was raining cats and dogs outside!

The GH-Dhu Varren curriculum night was well attended and full of valuable information. A special thank you to all of the parents who spent the evening with us learning about their child’s experiences, development and the intentional teaching that is provided each day in our classrooms. It was so encouraging listening to the positive comments from parents about the program. What a great way to start the fall season.

GH-Mt. Vernon teacher’s Erin Dixon and Kristin Litchard hosted a cooking class for the families at Mt. Vernon. During the Saturday Cooking Workshop children and parents created taco mac and cheese, broccoli and cheese casserole and creamy macaroni and cheese. Lunch was enjoyed after preparing the main dishes. Each child that participated received an apron with their name on it to wear when they cook the recipes at home.



Staff News

On October 26, directors and staff from several centers will attend a special training on tips to recognize, prevent and manage infectious diseases in a child care program.



These staff members are celebrating Gretchen’s House anniversaries this October and November!

	Years
Laura Barker	11
Sunita Pawar	10
Laurie Jones	8
Anuradha Narula	7
Debra Marsh	5
Julie Morrison	5
Brian Wiltse	4
Bethany Leonard	4
Michael Roller	4
Lauren Hood Hamstra	4
Susan Leonard	4
Shalese Campbell	4
Karin Nowak	4
Amanda McCreight	4
Danielle Grimaldo	3
Jacquelyn MacMillan	2
Rebecca Milner	1
Megan VanderMeer	1
Abhirami Gunasingam	1
Rusul Salman	1
Heather Ballance	1
Lisa Paul	1
Rosemary Sondeen	1

Reusable Game Book

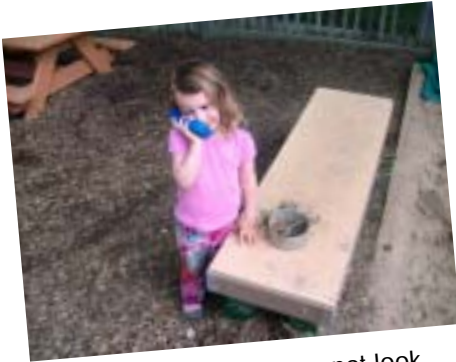
Does your child like paper games such as mazes and connect the dots?

- Put a collection of them inside clear plastic pages in a loose-leaf notebook.
- Tie a dry erase marker to a ring.
- A dry cloth will erase the marks so the puzzle can be completed another day.

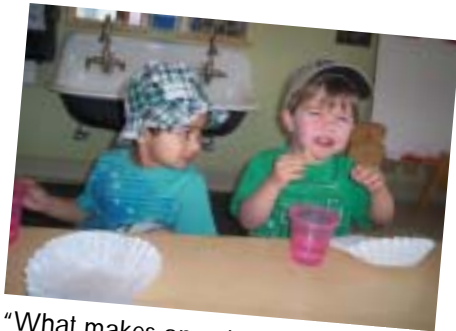
Reprinted from The Well-Centered Child, April 2007.



Literacy



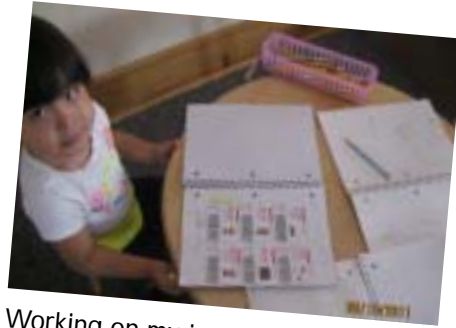
Talking on the phone may not look like a literacy activity, but I'm "phoning home" to get a recipe. I'm making connections between spoken and written words. (GH-Mt. Vernon)



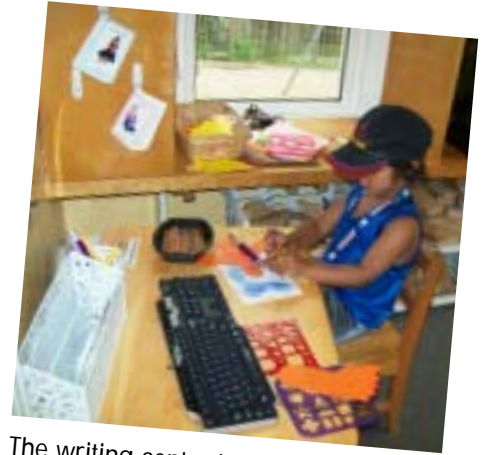
"What makes an octopus?" is a great snack-time conversation. Talking with friends helps me practice new words. (GH-Oak Valley)



Singing "Ring-Around-the-Rosie" together while we dance helps our brains make connections for later reading. (GH-Oak Valley)



Working on my journal is a good way to practice reading and writing skills! (GH-Dhu Varren)



The writing center has lots of important tools for building my literacy skills—and my teachers give me the time and support to work out my whole plan! (GH-Mt. Vernon)



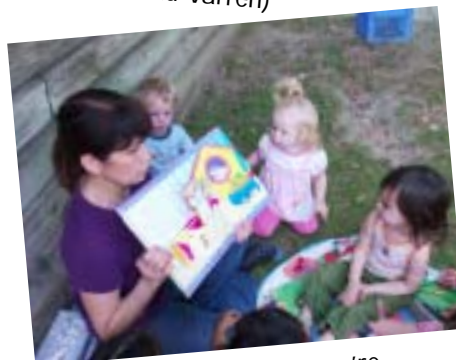
Looking at books with friends—sometimes I wear a helmet just to get into the spirit! (GH-Mt. Pleasant)



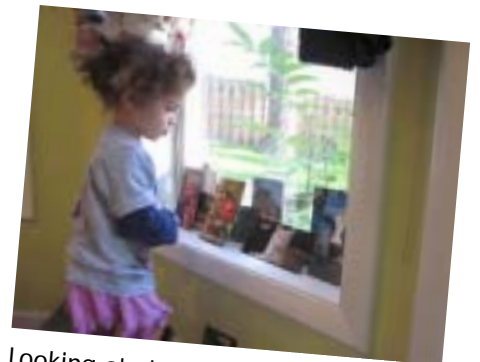
There's always room for one more on our teacher's lap. We love reading together! (GH-Dhu Varren)



I can sign in, just like Mom and Dad. (GH-Stadium)



Reading is fun wherever we're together—and the fun part makes us want to read more! (GH-Traver)



Looking at pictures with words helps me associate meaning with those letters and symbols. (GH-Mt. Pleasant)



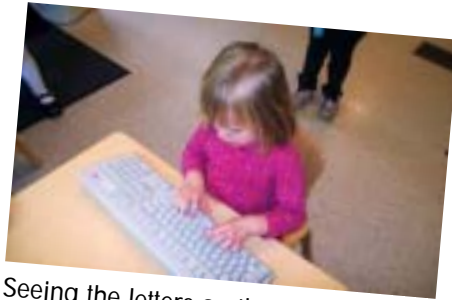
When you see a book you like, sometimes you just have to stop what you're doing, drop to the floor and read! (GH-Stadium)



Going over the steps to move and build with crates helps us practice our social and language skills. (GH-Oak Valley)



Drawing and cutting give me fine motor practice that helps me with my writing skills. (GH-Dhu Varren)



Seeing the letters on the keys and "typing" are helping me develop my pre-reading skills! (GH-Mt. Vernon)



When our teacher shares the message board with us, we learn to associate what she is saying with the symbols and words she has written. We even add our own messages sometimes! (GH-Traver)



Reading happens throughout our day. Sometimes it's fun to read a book with my friend's mom, and sometimes I want to read alone. Inside or out, books are fun! (GH-WISD)



I'm using the big foam letters to spell out my name – good practice for using my small muscles to hold a pencil and write. (GH-WISD)



You're never too young to enjoy reading with a friend! (GH-Mt. Pleasant)



Parent Advisory Group

Are you looking to get more involved in your center? Consider joining the Parent Advisory Group. The PAG mission statement:

To advise Gretchen's House on issues facing the GH community in a manner consistent with the best interests of children through a deliberative, inclusive, and participatory process.

The PAG meets bimonthly. Newcomers are welcome to sit in on a meeting or volunteer to help with various projects, if joining regularly isn't manageable for your family.

Please mark your calendars for November 14th, 6:30 p.m., for our first PAG meeting of the upcoming school year. The meeting will be held at our Dhu Varren location. Child care will be provided, but we do need to know ahead of time if you need care.

Please email Heidi (heidi.mcfadden@gretchenshouse.com) with any requests for childcare.

Birthday Policy

We know that parents have a lot of information coming their way: notes home, newsletters, and children's artwork clutter our desks at home. "I know they said something about birthdays, but I don't want to admit that I lost that note—"

Below is an excerpt from our Birthdays Purple Page, with our policy:

"We'd like to explain our firm policy of **no birthday treats from home**. Some of our children and staff have food allergies and/or dietary restrictions which would exclude them from food-focused celebrations. Some food allergies are so severe, even traces of the food can be life-threatening. Monitoring all food that comes in and out of the center is a time-consuming task *and* difficult to control 100%. Also, while we believe occasional treats are fine for young kids, we do need to be careful—the number of children in our programs means we may have several birthdays each week.

Sometimes parents ask to distribute small gifts or party favors at the center in honor of their children's birthdays. We have allowed

this in the past but have decided to discontinue it for several reasons. Monitoring toys or small gifts for age-appropriateness becomes one more task on busy teachers' to-do lists and can become a financial burden for parents. *We will only provide celebrations that involve fun rituals and/or special privileges, and which focus on the **child** whose birthday it is.*

Many families choose to mark special occasions by donating a favorite children's book or game to the center. We graciously accept these donations as we would at any time of the year, but we will not make them a focus of the celebration.

Parents **may** use our center space after hours or on the weekend, free of charge, to host private birthday parties for their children. To reserve a space, speak with your center director well in advance. Invitations should be mailed (*not distributed in parent mailboxes*), so that children who are not invited do not feel left out. Parents must leave the center space clean, taking special care not to leave any traces of outside food."

Children Aren't the Only Ones



It's not only children who benefit from play. Adults do too. We need play breaks in our grown-up lives every day but especially in times of stress or worry. Play relaxes and strengthens us. It keeps our thinking flexible and adaptable and restores our enthusiasm.

Because play is a state of mind, it can be hard to define. Even so, most of us can tell when we're playing. We know it's play when it's satisfying, when it causes us to lose track of time, when it's our own choice, and when we know we're not seeking any outside recognition for doing it.

Play can be as simple as pausing to turn a slotted spoon into a bubble wand while washing dishes or as involved an complex as a game of chess.

Some say that, for them, play includes:

- laughing with an old friend
- cooking a favorite meal
- solving a puzzle
- throwing a Frisbee
- playing in the snow with your child
- gardening
- imagining possibilities
- laughing with a new friend

Reprinted from The Well-Centered Child, December 2006.



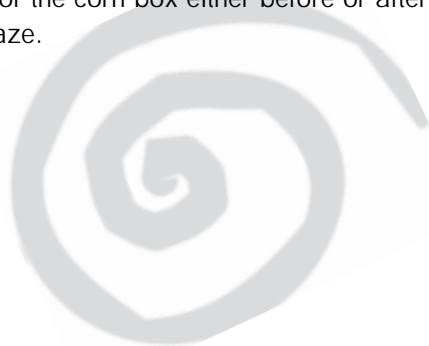
Medication

If your child needs medication while in our care, please remember that we can only administer medications which are in their original pharmacy or OTC container, labeled with your child's name. We must have a signed permission slip filled out by you that includes the dosage, frequency, and any observed side effects. We do not administer medications to reduce fever. We suggest that parents ask their pharmacist to split the prescription between two containers, so that one can be left at the center. _

Upcoming Events

During the month of October, Traver's Main House Preschool will hold a Food Gatherers food drive in memory of Eric Keefauver. Eric was a former GH parent who passed away in August of this year. We have very fond memories of his daughter, Lily. Our hearts go out to her and her mom during this difficult time.

On November 8 Traver's School-age will visit The Blast Corn Maze! The corn maze is located in Dexter. School-agers will explore a ten-acre field of corn with 3 1/2 miles of trails. They can play in the mountain of straw or the corn box either before or after the maze.



Partnerships

continued from page 1

But letting us know what's going on at your end will help us be better partners to you, and we'll be better equipped to give your child what s/he needs.

And we want to learn more from you, too. As the expert on your own child, you hold vital information that can make your child's experience in our program more positive, and make our teachers much more effective. We will share our general knowledge with you, and we count on hearing your specific observations about your child as well.

Curriculum night and center potlucks are also opportunities to build strong connections with your child's teacher, as well as with other families. You are building friendships and a support network that will go far beyond your years at Gretchen's House.

Thank you for choosing us as your partner. We look forward to a great year as we learn new steps and try out some new routines. Keep us posted on how we're doing!

Heidi McFadden



Purple Pages

Our Purple Pages are mini-newsletters which Gretchen's House developed in response to frequently asked questions, parent surveys, and requests for reading materials. They summarize basic developmental issues, our approach to handling each issue in the classroom, and suggestions for families. Speak to your center staff about obtaining copies, or visit our website.



CPR/ First Aid

Parents are welcome to sign up for CPR and First Aid training through Gretchen's House. We schedule regular trainings each month for our staff. Cost to parents is \$20 for First Aid, \$14 for CPR, or \$30 for both. Classes are held at GH-Oak Valley, and they start at 6:00 p.m. Please contact Heike at Oak Valley to register: hhampel@gretchenshouse.com or 734.327.6126.

Upcoming Classes:

October 17
Initial First Aid and CPR

October 18
CPR Renewal

November 15
Initial First Aid and CPR

November 16
CPR Renewal

December 7
Initial First Aid and CPR

December 8
CPR Renewal



...because learning should be fun!



The GH name in lights at the Michigan Theater for the September 25 screening of James and the Giant Peach.

