

# Good News Gazette

November-December 2019

## Supporting Children in Learning about Diversity and Combatting Bias

As an African American teacher, diversity has always been an important topic to me. Children have come up to me numerous times asking why my hair is so big and puffy (I use to wear an afro) or why my skin is dark or brown. I've heard a saying that life is full of teachable moments, so as a minority, I try to use those moments to teach... about my culture, my race and my pride in my identity as an African American. After all, children see color. They see differences in hair, skin, eyes, clothes, food, etc. When we pretend that they don't or ignore their curiosity, it can make them think that there is shame in being different. I'm not ashamed to have brown skin, so I always answer their questions.

At Gretchen's House, we have been working to create an anti-bias curriculum at our centers. We created an Anti-Bias committee to help provide information to families and educators on how to support children in learning about diversity and developing positive racial/self-identities so as to avoid biased opinions and behaviors. One of the goals of an anti-bias curriculum is to empower children by helping them to foster positive self and group identities, empathetic interactions and activism. Adding that to our High Scope curriculum, we work to help children have a sense of belonging to a community. We also help them to learn to take personal

responsibility in making sure others are treated with respect and fairly.

Teachers support an anti-bias curriculum by working hard to incorporate diversity in the classroom. In the classroom, non-stereotypical books depicting people of other races are present. Images showing people of different physical abilities and in non-gender stereotypical careers are shown in different places on the walls and shelves. We even openly invite families to share some materials from their homes and cultures to help promote diversity and give children a healthy sense of self identity by seeing a part of their culture in the classroom. Even though all of these things are done, there leaves the question of, is it enough? What else can we do to support children in learning about diversity and combatting bias?

### 1) Provide Books and Other Positive Images

One of the easiest ways to support children in learning about diversity is through non-stereotypical books. Books that depict characters of different races, families and cultures gives children insight into the lives of others. It helps to provide them with an appreciation about diversity and arms them with the knowledge that we live in a vast world full of people who are different than us. It is also



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## Important Notes

### Contracts for 2020

All currently enrolled infant/toddler and preschool families received a new child care contract for 2020 in November. These contracts reflect rates and days the centers will be closed for January-December, 2020.

*Contracts for 2020 are due to the office by Friday, November 30th.* If you have questions about your schedule or fees, see your center director as soon as possible.

Please note that January billing statements will go out before we close on December 21st. Payments are due when centers reopen on January 2, 2020. Late fees will be assessed for payments made after January 10<sup>th</sup>.

### Thanksgiving Break

All Gretchen's House Centers will be **closed November 28–29.**

### Winter Break

All Gretchen's House Centers will be **closed December 23-January 1.** We will reopen again on Thursday, January 2, 2020. If your family will be gone before or after the break, please let us know in advance. Many teachers request time off during the holidays. Substitutes are in short supply at this time of year, so it helps us to know if attendance will be low.

### No Public School Days

Chelsea schools are closed on Nov 27, we are offering full day care.

The Chelsea and Ann Arbor Public Schools will be closed 12/23/19-1/3/20. School resumes on Monday, 1/6/20. Our winter holiday coincides

with some of these dates, but our school age programs will offer full day care for kindergarten and school age children on January 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>. Sign-up sheets are posted in the Older Preschool and School-age rooms.

### Food from Home

Due to the serious nature of food allergies for many of the children in our programs, we have established 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.

A light breakfast is available for those who arrive early, from 7:15 to 7:45 a.m. Our morning snack (a heartier option) is then served around 9:00. *Please note that exact times may vary between centers. Your child's teacher will share the classroom schedule with you.*

If you've had a crazy morning and your child did not get to eat at home, but you're missing our morning meal opportunities, please let one of the teachers know. They will be happy to get something for your child.

*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.



# Neighborhood News

Mt. Vernon center engaged with the community this fall with trips to Wasem’s Apple Orchard and Blast Corn Maze-a great big Thank You to the many parents that were able to join us for these field trips! Also, walks in Neighborhood – to the Baby House to visit with old friends and Eberwhite woods to observe the changes that fall brings, collecting leaves and acorns. Also, to the new playground at Eberwhite! The center was happy to host the child care during the big build weekend, and then we were able to visit and play on the playground during the No Public School Days. Finally, we enjoyed the annual Halloween Parade from Eberwhite Elementary-it is always exciting to see the many GH alumni as the entire Elementary School parades past our playgrounds in costume.

Mt. Pleasant infants have enjoyed watching the construction of a new home in the neighborhood. On our daily walks the infants have been stopping and watching the workers and construction vehicles digging out the new foundation.

Mt. Pleasant toddlers at Mount Pleasant made apple pies. Using apples that the Big House children gathered for us on their field trip to Wassum’s Apple Orchard. The toddler’s took turns turning the crank of the apple peeler and then adding the apples and cinnamon to the pies. They all enjoyed the smell of pies baking and then eating them for snack.

Oak Valley held their Harvest Fest on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Activities for children included pumpkins, golf tee and hammers (toddlers) and screws and screwdrivers (preschool); pumpkin ring toss; pumpkins and markers; bowling; beads and pipe cleaners (preschool). Children had fun with the activities. We added straw bales for climbing and jumping on each of the playgrounds.

The Chelsea center had over 100 family members on Oct 18<sup>th</sup> at the fall family gath-

ering for pumpkin carving! After a wonderful potluck dinner, the children picked pumpkins for the pumpkin patch and then carved them with their family. A great time was by all. What amazing faces the pumpkins had.

The Chelsea Preschool children passed out treats to the school community as part of their outreach program.

Traver teachers brought all of the child sized rakes to each of the playgrounds. The children have really enjoyed raking and composting the leaves from the outdoor spaces!

Dhu Varren families were disappointed to have their annual Independence Lake Potluck cancelled due to the weather, however we had a wonderful turn out for each wing potluck held in the gym.

GH-Dhu Varren - Our preschool classrooms enjoyed fun-filled field trips to Three Cedars Farm for pumpkins, hayrides and cider and donuts. Riding on the Gretchen’s House bus continues to be a highlight for all field trips!

Dhu Varren had great participation and turn out for our curriculum nights. Railroad infant and toddler families enjoyed an easy to join freeze dance activity to start the night that allowed for a fun introduction to what their little ones experience at GH!

During the upcoming renovation of the WISD/High Point building, our GH-WISD will relocate to First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor. We will host an Open House on Friday January 3 4-5:30 pm. 4001 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

Mt. Vernon will adopt a family through the Women’s Center during this charitable giving season.

Oak Valley Staff - Ann Arbor Therapy presented “Feeding Development and How to Help Picky Eaters” on November 11<sup>th</sup>.



These staff members are celebrating Gretchen’s House anniversaries this November & December!

	<b>Years</b>
Anuradh Narula	15
Kelly Lessard	13
Karin Nowak	12
Danielle Wiener	12
Cassandra Castro	4
Kristall Tedesco	4
Emily Schinske	4
Mikalhia Hollins	3
Abby Boerema	3
Jasmine Beemon	2
Chona Vincent	2
Courtney Rouse	2
Ann Schafenacker	1
Viviana Esquivel	1

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## Language, Literacy and Communication

Language, Literacy & Communication at Gretchen's House takes on a variety of looks. We believe the best way to support literacy development is to expose children to rich language and wordplay in context. We want children to find books irresistible! You will see plenty of print in our classrooms, because exposure to a print-rich environment at an early age is a predictor of later vocabulary skills.



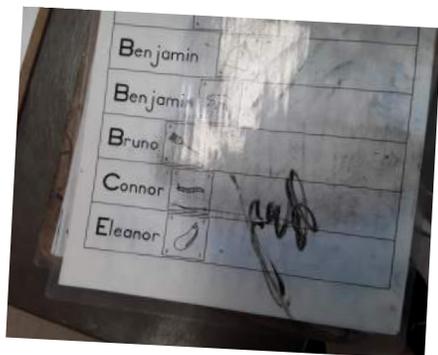
Making books is a typical activity that preschoolers work on. Afterwards, if they chose, they can add it to our bookshelves for all to enjoy.



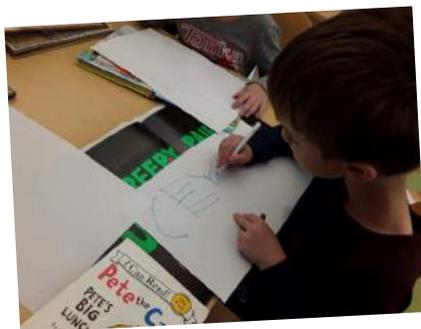
Sometimes, it's just a reach out to be picked up and hugged. We love this communication too!!



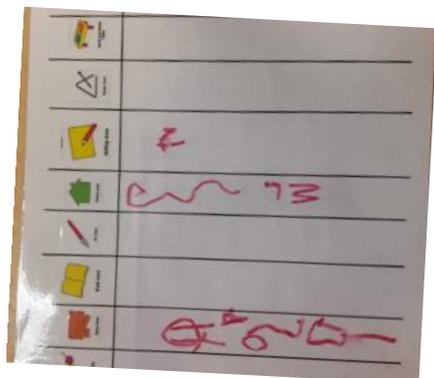
We have many open-ended materials in our classroom. Here we use links to make the letter "Y".



We have sign-in sheets where the children sign themselves in when they arrive to start their day. Sometimes we use the same template for planning our work time. Our names and classroom areas are also connected to a letter link or picture. Letter links help us identify sounds and how they connect to letters.



We have many items available for writing and communicating our thoughts. Some materials that we have ready for us in our classrooms are dry erase boards and markers, paper, pencils, crayons, makers, envelopes and, of course, our very own journals.



Part of communication at Gretchen's House is learning how to problem-solve. We teach young children how to solve their problems in a safe environment with lots of support. You may often hear your child say, "we have a problem" or "what are we going to do about this?"



Part of our print-rich environments includes our daily schedule. You can find these in all our classrooms. The daily schedule uses pictures and words (in all languages represented in our classroom).



## Parking Lot Safety

As you well know, our parking lots can get very crowded at drop-off and pick-up times. To keep everyone safe, we ask that you please:

- Do not leave your unattended car running, ever.
- Never leave children alone in the car.
- Drive slowly, even if you are running late!
- Hold hands of small children and stay within arms reach of older ones.
- Park your car in a way that allows other drivers to enter their cars and exit the parking lot safely, even if you will just be away from your vehicle momentarily.

## Birthday Policy

We know that parents have a lot of information coming their way: emails, blog updates, in addition to papers - 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. Many 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 can sometimes have several birthdays in one 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."

## Neighborhood News

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Chelsea will be gathering donations for Faith in Action in December.

Traver is looking forward to collecting toy donations for Mott Children's Hospital this December.

WISD will be closed January 2 and 3, 2020 for staff to prep new classrooms.

Stadium will be hosting a Pajama Drive: In November we will be hosting a scholastic pajama drive. For every pair of pajamas that is donated through the Great Bedtime Story Pajama Drive, Scholastic Book Clubs will donate a brand-new book to Pajama Program to give kids affected by instability a good night—for a good day! The pajama drive is organized in partnership with Pajama Program, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting a comforting bedtime routine for children affected by instability in order to help them thrive. Keep an eye out for the pajama bins in both the preschool and infant/toddler buildings this November.

On December 17th Stadium teachers will host our annual Family Holiday Party from 5-6:30. We hope that you can make it!



# Supporting Children/Diversity & Bias

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important for families and teachers to take the time to read these books with children to help provide them with a better understanding. Books and positive images are a great start in recognizing diversity and helping to satisfy children’s curiosity.

## 2) Be the Role Model They Need

As supportive adults in a child’s life, we are their greatest teachers and the greatest source in their development into adults. In the future, how they view racism, bias and discrimination is all based on how the adults in their lives react to these issues. Children are more likely to develop a sensitivity to culture and appreciation for diversity if they see the adults around them be culturally sensitive and appreciate diversity. If children see their family or teachers taking a stand against discrimination and instead affirming positivity about a person’s character, they will grow into individuals who will someday do the same. They will someday take responsibility in making sure that others are treated fairly.

## 3) Don’t Be Afraid to Have Those Conversations

It’s no secret that most adults don’t feel confident in having conversations about diversity with young children. Having conversations about diversity and bias does not create prejudice in young children. In fact, not talking about it and letting them form opinions from negative, outside sources can be harmful. It’s okay to talk about differences between cultures and families and letting them know that diversity is a wonderful aspect of our world. It’s also important to talk about similarities and let them know that even though language and customs are performed in different ways, we are all more alike than we are different. It is never too early to start talking about diversity with children.

The next time a child ask me why my skin is brown, I’ll smile and tell them that I was born this way. That everyone is born with different colors of skin, hair, eyes, physical abilities, genders and that there is absolutely nothing wrong with it. Diversity is beautiful and I like that have brown skin because it is the color of a chocolate bar. Maybe they’ll smile and tell me that they like chocolate candy too. Even if they don’t completely understand the full message, I will know that I planted a small seed there. I will know that it is a beginning to a topic that they will find themselves experiencing and witnessing throughout their entire lives. Even if the next time they see a darker skinned person, they think of chocolate, at least it won’t be a negative thought. At least, it will be with a smile.

*Alicia Oldham*

Infant/Toddler Teacher  
Mt. Pleasant



## Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Centers Closed

Please take note that all Gretchen’s House Centers will be closed on Monday, January 20, 2020. Our teachers will receive training and have time to work on classroom projects that can’t be done while children are present. We appreciate parent support of our staff training time.



## CPR and First Aid

Sessions begin with CPR renewal, so those who do not need First Aid will be free to leave following the first half of the session. Trainings are held at our Oak Valley center and start at 6:00 pm. Sign up with Heike at 734-327-6126 or email her at heike.hampel@gretchens-house.com.

Upcoming dates:

**2019**  
December 10

**2020**  
January 8  
February 11  
March 11



*...because learning should be fun!*

**Celebrate!**



### Center Winter Holiday Celebrations

- 12/12 Chelsea's Cookie Decorating Party at both North and South
- 12/12 Traver's Winter Celebration
- 12/12 Oak Valley Winter Wonderland
- 12/12 Farm (Dhu Varren)
- 12/10 Pond (Dhu Varren)
- 12/11 Railroad (Dhu Varren)
- 12/13 Winter Family Fun 6pm @ Saline Rec Center
- 1/15 Mt. Pleasant Winter Party
- 12/17 Mt. Vernon Holiday Family Gathering.

### Staff News

Oak Valley teachers, Kelly Lessard, Marsha Tam and Lindsey Hayes all participated in the annual Making Strides Against Cancer walk. The walk was held on the grounds of WCC on October 19<sup>th</sup>.

Oak Valley Staff - Ann Arbor Therapy will present "Feeding Development and How to Help Picky Eaters" on November 11<sup>th</sup>.

Amanda Shukwit attended the MiAEYC Infant Toddler Conference on October 25<sup>th</sup>.