there's Power in the Play
There’s POWER in the Play

Do you ever watch nature documentaries? If you do, you’ve seen the footage of the lion cub bursting through the bush to pounce on his sister or baby gorillas swinging from tree limbs as they play a game of tag. In the wild, young animals play to practice and develop skills that will aid them their entire lives. Young humans learn the same way. Playing allows children to use their imagination, develop problem-solving skills, socialize, and make sense of the world around them.

Children possess a natural curiosity and play offers the perfect outlet. When guided, encouraged and inspired by nurturing teachers and advocates like you, play becomes learning. With your support and the support of others like you, Child Saving Institute provides a variety of opportunities for learning—both for the young children we serve in our programs as well as for others in our community who are committed to the value of early childhood education.

In this issue, we’d like to share highlights about the work YOU do in our community.

One of the programs you support is KidSquad, a free educational resource available to all licensed child care programs in Douglas and Sarpy County that accept Title XX clients. We’ll give you a behind-the-scenes glimpse of one in-home center in North Omaha where you make a difference every day. In fact, Shelina Williams, one of the owners of Purposely Created Child Care, gave us the theme for this newsletter. She is thrilled with information she’s learned since working with KidSquad, including, “There’s power in the play!”

Yes, there is, Shelina—and it is an educational tenet long supported by Connie Spellman, the namesake of the Spellman Child Development Center on the College of Saint Mary campus, now managed by Child Saving Institute. We are delighted by this opportunity to share our quality play and learning philosophy in this established center.

As always, it’s important to note we couldn’t do this work without YOU. You are making a life-changing difference for our youngest citizens throughout our community. We know you have lots of friends, but we’re forever grateful you’ve chosen to make a play date with us.

Thank you!

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Partnering with Parents

Samantha Richardson knows the value of a good education. Currently a student teacher at Bellevue East High School, Sam will be graduating from College of Saint Mary in December. Because of her passion for quality education, she enrolled her son, Walter, now 3 ½, in the Early Head Start (EHS) program at Child Saving Institute’s Early Childhood Education Center when he was 9 months old.

Sam says it’s been a wonderful experience. She explained that Walter is half Japanese and that when he was a toddler, his teacher encouraged him to use his developing Japanese language skills, even learning a few simple Japanese phrases herself so she could better communicate with him. “She embraced our family diversity and brought it into the classroom so he was more comfortable,” Sam recalls.

Recently Walter, a bright and engaging little boy (he is already sight reading and speaks some Spanish), “graduated” from the federally-funded EHS program and Sam faced difficult decisions regarding his care. Although she loved CSI and the quality education and support of the teachers, she feared she would have to move him to another school because of her limited means. Sorry to lose Walter, but ever attentive to the needs of CSI’s families, Kathy Hubbard (then Walter’s teacher, but now the Center Site Coordinator), helped Sam research other daycares that would offer bus service to a Head Start program. “Kathy wanted Walter to stay, but she was willing to aid in the transition because she wanted what was best for us,” Sam says. Fortunately, Sam received special approval to accept her student teaching hours and was able to qualify for Title XX, a federal child care subsidy, and Walter is now learning and thriving in Miss Katy’s preschool class.

Sam says she is grateful for CSI’s focus on the needs of the whole family. She recounted her grandfather’s recent passing, followed a week later by her grandmother’s death. Walter’s teacher spoke to her about explaining death to Walter, offering information in a way he could understand while, at the same time, providing him reassurance. “I couldn’t have asked for a better relationship—a partnership—with a caregiver for the past three years,” Sam concludes. “They have been there every step of the way offering me advice and support, and Walter the best possible care.”
KidSquad in the Community

You would never guess the magical world of learning and fun that lies behind the front door of a well-maintained white frame house in a quiet north Omaha neighborhood. At Purposely Created Childcare & Learning Center, LLC, everyone is learning—teachers and toddlers alike.

Sisters Carliss Miller and Shelina Williams opened Purposely Created a year ago, taking over the entire first floor of Williams’ home. (She and her family live in the lower level.) Determined to make their child care a success, Shelina and Carliss were eager to learn more about best practices in early childhood education and approached Child Saving Institute’s KidSquad. KidSquad is a program dedicated to helping young children develop social and emotional skills so they can decrease challenging behaviors and learn to get along well with others and manage their emotions in healthy ways. In addition, KidSquad also offers customized education consultation to support community child care programs and home-based daycares so all children can be exposed to quality early childhood education. The program is free to eligible licensed child care homes and centers that accept Title XX.

The day we visited Purposely Created, KidSquad Early Childhood Specialist Ingrid Thomsen was on the floor of the bright and cheery front room surrounded by six little learners holding baby dolls. Ingrid was guiding the multi-age group through “Baby Doll Circle Time,” a lesson plan that teaches young children about empathy, emotions, and caring for one another. Shelina explained that before KidSquad, she and Carliss had relied solely on their own experiences raising children to run their center. “KidSquad has allowed us to perfect our early childhood program and really work at creating a great learning environment,” she says proudly.

With the help of a child care environment rating scale, the sisters learned ways to improve the program’s physical environment, basic care of children, curriculum, interactions, schedule and program structure, and how to address parent and staff needs. Once the assessment was completed they applied for and received the first of two $500 mini grants to make changes to the physical environment—changes that included lowered tables and chairs, and helping to create separate learning stations with the use of movable storage units. The second mini grant was used for purchasing educational toys and learning supplies—a playhouse, a sand and water play table, blocks, easel, and science and art supplies. Carliss, who works with the infants and babies, also purchased stimulating toys and equipment for the baby room.

“We want to make this the best quality child care, the best standard of excellence we can.”

“KidSquad is not only giving us the guidance we need, but also access to resources we didn’t know were available,” Shelina continues, noting that she and Carliss have attended multiple training courses in recent months. “Plus Ingrid introduces new ideas and resources every week and we’re so excited to have access to this. She’s teaching us that there’s power in the play and that kids are learning all the time. She’s helping us with curriculum building and guiding us to help the kids with emotional growth and regulation. We want to make this the best quality child care, the best standard of excellence we can. We’re going to make it great!”

If you know a child care provider who could benefit from this free program, contact KidSquad at 402.504.3637.

Child Saving Institute is the lead agency in a collaborative group of agencies that highly value children, families and early childhood educators in the Omaha community. The collaboration also includes: Center for Holistic Development; Early Childhood Training Center; Heartland Family Service; Lutheran Family Services; Munroe Meyer Institute; and Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare.
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Total Babe (and PreK) Magnets

There are changes afoot in Child Saving Institute’s early childhood programs! Two new site coordinators have been hired for the program on Child Saving Institute’s main campus, as well as at the Spellman Child Development Center, managed by CSI, on the College of Saint Mary Campus.

Kathy Hubbard

Kathy Hubbard is the new site coordinator at Child Saving Institute’s Early Childhood Education Center. A graduate of University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she started at CSI right out of college in 2009. “The best thing about my job is the relationships we establish with the kids and families,” she says. “In addition to creating strong bonds with the children, we’re able to provide a comforting, reassuring presence for first-time moms or parents taking their kids to child care for the first time.”

In her initial position as an Early Childhood Specialist in a multi-age room, Kathy enjoyed the opportunity for playfulness and creativity and establishing close relationships with the children and parents she works with every day. Now she’s ready for the next step. “I want to foster a really positive environment for everyone,” she says. “I have an open door policy; I want to meet with our parents and teachers as often as I can. I want to support the teachers and assist them with their needs so their positive outlooks and dedication filters out to everyone we serve.”

Marie Poly

Marie Poly once dreamed of being on the stage, but since graduating with a theater degree from the University of Nebraska-Kearney in 2008, she has done her best work in front of a lively audience of preschoolers.

Marie also joined CSI right out of college and soon discovered early childhood education was her passion. She enrolled in Peru State College to study education and, before her promotion to Spellman Center site coordinator, served as an Early Childhood Senior Specialist.

“I decided to make my career with CSI because I liked their philosophy about children and early childhood education,” Marie explains. “I also believe in the importance of attachment and relationships and my experiences here have made me even more passionate about the incredible early childhood learning window.”

You want the best for your little one. So do we.

Both the Child Saving Institute Early Childhood Education Center and the Spellman Child Development Center on the College of Saint Mary Campus currently have openings for toddlers and preschoolers.

So much more than a daycare, our programs focus on fun, imaginative, academic and developmental growth, ensuring children who leave our program are ready for kindergarten and beyond. Please call 402.504.3671 for more information or to arrange a tour.

Spell-Bound

Known for our quality early childhood education programs, Child Saving Institute is now managing the venerable Spellman Child Development Center on the College of Saint Mary Campus. Though our involvement began in January 2012, the facility itself has a long and fascinating history. We visited with the center’s namesake, Connie Spellman, about the program and how it came to bear her name.

Before serving in her current position as the founding director of Omaha by Design, Connie worked for the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. While at the Chamber, President George H.W. Bush unveiled America 2000, an education strategy with eight specific goals for the revitalization of America’s schools, including the first goal that all children enter school ready to learn. C.R. “Bob” Bell, President of the Chamber at that time, thought the initiative fit perfectly with his goal to more aggressively connect local businesses with education reform. Bell named Connie as the Chamber’s education director, launching her 10-year immersion in this community-enhancing project.

Connie noted this was a time before the quality child care programs at ConAgra and Union Pacific. “Not only did the Greater Omaha Chamber think this was very important, but there was growing community focus and interest as well.” This vanguard included John Gottschalk, then CEO and Publisher of the Omaha World-Herald, who stepped up to serve as Chairman of the “Omaha 2000” initiative for the next decade.

Connie and her colleagues established a successful model early childhood education center at a property owned by Westside Community Schools, but with the lease end-date looming, she hurried to find a different home for Omaha 2000 Early Childhood Education Center. She found a property adjoining the College of Saint Mary owned by the Aksarben Future Trust. The Trust agreed to give the land to the college in perpetuity if the site would always be used as a child care program. Connie, with the help of numerous corporate and philanthropic foundations, including major gifts from the ConAgra Foundation and the Kiewit Foundation, raised just over $2 million for the project.

Built, furnished and filled with happy children, Omaha 2000 hosted an opening ceremony on January 10, 2000. “We were all so excited to have this kind of resource,” Connie recalls. “We were providing quality early childhood education as a model for the community and, with the facility’s placement on the College of Saint Mary campus, were able to make the link to teacher training—a future benefit for all children.”

When Connie retired later that year, Bob Bell and John Gottschalk surprised her with a special gift—the renaming of the facility as “The Connie Spellman Child Development Center.” She was delighted by the recognition for her decade-long commitment to kids.

“I am honored to have this program named for me—very honored,” she notes. “What better gift is there than helping our youngest children get off to a good start?”

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Child Saving Institute News
Mark Your Calendars!

Don’t miss out on a moment of the fun and philanthropic opportunities we have planned for you in the coming months! Visit our website, childsaving.org, or call 504-3661 for more information about these events and how you can get involved!

PurseOnalities | Friday, October 25
Hilton Omaha | 1001 Cass St. | 10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Great purse packages and great fun, all for great kids. Tickets start at $75 per person. To purchase tickets or for more information, please visit childsaving.org or call 402-504-3661.

Honorary Chairman | Mary Maxwell
Event Chairmen | Angela Drew, Lucy Newberry & Christine Nikunen
Keynote Speaker | Carol Hunter, CEO/Co-Founder of FGI International

Substitute Santa | Mon. - Sat., Dec. 9 - 14
Drop gifts & gift cards off at 4545 Dodge St. | 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Please help the CSI Guild provide a joyful holiday for hundreds of children and teens in our community. Donate cash, gifts or gift cards to the Substitute Santa program serving foster kids, shelter youth and struggling families. For details, visit childsaving.org or call 402-504-3661.