LIFE IS MESSY!

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Life is messy

To the untrained eye, sometimes messes just look like...well, a mess.

But at Child Saving Institute, when we see toddlers covered in mud, we know it represents LEARNING!

Or when we see an emotionally closed off 8-year-old suddenly smear red and black paint across a sheet of paper, we know it represents SHARING!

And that thunderous outpouring of messy emotions from the teens in our shelter—anger, pain, fear, and anxiety—that’s actually HEALING.

At Child Saving Institute, "Life is Messy" isn’t just a catch phrase; it’s a valuable philosophy for learning and healing, and quite frankly, it’s simply more FUN! Mud pies, shaving cream sculptures, toilet paper toss, bubbles, finger paint...you name it, we’ve used it!

At CSI, messy fingers and messy emotions are just part of our work—your work. No one ever said healing the suffering of abused and neglected kids was easy or neat, but it certainly makes our jobs so much easier to know you’re there, friend, lending a little elbow grease to the cause.

THANK YOU.

Weathering the Storm
KidSquad helps families

Beautiful, blonde Caden, the little boy with the ear-to-ear grin, enthusiastically entered second grade a couple weeks ago eager to learn. He has come a long way since his mom, Tara, was called away from work to find then-Kindergartner Caden being restrained on the floor in the principal’s office.

“The office looked like a disaster area. He had completely destroyed it,” she recalls. “But you really couldn’t blame him. He simply had no control over it. He felt I had rejected him and he acted out.”

Tara speaks freely about her past drug use and frequent separations from her young son. She was only 15 the first time she tried meth and the addiction progressively worsened until she was eventually disappearing for months at a time. Then she met Caden’s dad and they did drugs together. By the time she found out she was expecting, she was well into her pregnancy, but made a conscious effort to get sober. It lasted until a month after Caden was born in 2006. Eventually, Caden’s paternal grandmother, Debbie, took guardianship of the then-toddler for nearly two years.

But Debbie struggled. Caden, not yet two, was kicked out of several daycares due to his volatile behavior. At a time when attachment and trust is so critical to learning, he was being disrupted again and again. That’s when Debbie discovered Child Saving Institute’s KidSquad.

KidSquad offers a holistic approach to addressing behavioral problems so young children aren’t disrupted from their childcare environments. It involves CSI therapists working with psychologists, school counselors, teachers, and caregivers to ensure there is consistency and follow-through at all levels.

With everyone on the same page, the program focuses on teaching social and emotional skills so the children can decrease challenging behaviors and learn to manage their emotions in healthy ways. The program is free to eligible licensed child care homes and centers in Douglas and Sarpy Counties that accept Title XX.

KidSquad Therapist Amanda Schraut soon realized Caden could be best served in CSI’s Early Childhood Education program. “Oh, the poor CSI people,” Debbie says drily. “He was like a tornado at the beginning, but it began to get better.

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We definitely witnessed the care and concern, and the wonderful feeling of support CSI gave our family.”

Eight months later, Tara went into rehab, followed by a residential 12-step program. When she had been sober for a year, she began seeing Caden during supervised visits and eventually they were reunited. In the meantime, Debbie had been attending family therapy with Caden and Amanda. Later Tara joined the therapy sessions in an effort to rebuild her relationship with her son.

Although Caden did enroll in Kindergarten when he turned five, he struggled with behavioral issues and was suspended. He repeated Kindergarten the following year, and is now on track in second grade. He continues to meet with Amanda twice a month. Tara is also headed in the right direction, achieving five years of sobriety in June. And Debbie, who first turned to CSI to help her family heal, now gives back to the agency by serving as a volunteer on the CSI Guild Board. “I hate to even think about what would have happened without Child Saving Institute,” she says.

“Because of CSI, we are all doing so much better now,” Tara concludes.
Messy with a method

Their offices are overflowing with toys, hair gel, buckets of sand, games, art supplies, yarn babies, and puppets. And sitting atop their cubicule walls like soldiers at attention are plastic bottles of viscous fluid and glitter... slowly, slowly settling to the bottom.

Whereas Freud had his couch, the therapy crew at Child Saving Institute use these items as their “tools of the trade”—the tools of healing children who are struggling to overcome neglect and abuse.

Nora, 4, stands silently at the tray, grabbing handfuls of the smooth, cool sand and letting it trickle through her fingers. Though her outbursts and tantrums are legendary, the sand soothes her as Halbur gently prompts her to unlock some secrets behind the more than 50 scars and marks that cover her small, thin body.

Providing therapy to children is different than providing traditional therapy to adults. Children and adolescents are generally not able to sort through their thoughts and may not share their experiences using words. Instead, they often express their thoughts and feelings best through their behaviors. CSI Clinical Services Supervisor Joanna Halbur and the other therapists on her team rely on a variety of specialized trainings for their work with children who have experienced trauma. Four of our therapists recently added another invaluable training to their therapeutic arsenal when they completed a 10-month course on Play Therapy.

Although she is constantly looking for new creative play activities through sources like Pinterest, Halbur says she has found the sand tray to be particularly helpful. With the sand tray, the child creates a world using miniatures that have meaning to them. Over the course of several months, the therapists are able to see progress as the children make breakthroughs. For example, burying figurines can often represent buried secrets, or fences may represent blocking off a disturbing memory. A totally empty sand tray can mean an empty life or depression. Once their sand tray stage is “set,” Halbur asks them to give their sand tray world a title, and then tell the story behind it. For her part, Halbur listens and asks questions, but always stays in the metaphor to help the child retain a safe distance, asking “How does the little girl feel?” rather than saying “you.”

At the conclusion of the session, she takes pictures of the sand tray to accompany her notes. She also asks the child if there is anything they would like to change—something they are often eager to do. When the child returns the following week, she has noticed they have been thinking about their story and may choose to share another scene revealing yet another part of their trauma. “It keeps the painful stuff at a distance but, at the same time, allows them to talk about it,” she explains. “It definitely gets messy in the play therapy room,” she says with a smile. “There’s a lot of vacuuming going on after sessions.”

The sand tray can be therapeutic in other ways, too.

Nora, 4, stands silently at the tray, grabbing handfuls of the smooth, cool sand and letting it trickle through her fingers. Though her outbursts and tantrums are legendary, the sand soothes her as Halbur gently prompts her to unlock some of the secrets behind the more than 50 scars and marks that cover her small, thin body.

Nora and her younger brother were removed from their home because they were routinely beaten with a looped nylon rope—just one of the means of punishment meted out by their drug-addicted mother. Now, Joanna and an extraordinarily patient and nurturing foster mom, Annie, work together to help the children feel safe, secure and loved. Joanna explains that over the past six months she has been helping Annie try to build attachment with the little ones—a key to creating successful relationships going forward. One of the methods Annie uses is the “Lotion Song.” Just as Joanna taught her, Annie sings a song while Nora gently rubs lotion into her hands and feet. Then Annie rubs the lotion into Nora’s hands and feet.

“Human touch helps build attachment,” Joanna explains. “They need to associate touch with safety. And it was especially important for Nora to be able to give and receive loving touch from another person because she had always been the one who took care of her brother.” In addition, Nora has started allowing Annie to gently rub lotion on her everyday boo boos, like a scraped knee or pinched finger, in an exercise known as “fixing hurts.” She doesn’t yet allow Annie to rub lotion on her scars—that will take more bonding and healing.

A Little Less Messy Technique: Just Breathe...

Like Halbur, Therapist Katie Ladd uses the techniques she’s learned through Play Therapy, but has also introduced a holistic, meditation-based approach to help her young clients learn to relax and soothe their past trauma and current painful emotions.

“In school, we want kids to sit still and be good at listening to instructions and following specific tasks,” Ladd notes. “But to get to the learning, you have to take care of the other levels first. Kids who have experienced trauma in early life have to get back to basic sensory foundations before they can get to higher level processing.”

Ladd has introduced a child’s yoga game into her practice, where the child draws a card and tries to hold the designated pose for 10 seconds. “When people do yoga, it reconnects the mind and body, and when you can get two of the three in sync, then you can work on emotions. It gives the kids a sense of control and it’s empowering.”

Another tool Ladd uses is the five-senses dice box. The child rolls the dice and then shares something they see in the room, or a sound they hear. “It’s an anchoring technique that brings them into the present,” she explains. “It allows them to identify what’s happening NOW, and allows them to feel safe, secure and confident enough to get to the source of the trauma.”

Clinical Services Supervisor Joanna Halbur

Sensory bottles or “calm down” bottles as they’re sometimes called. When the child is struggling, the therapist shakes the bottle and the child is asked to calm down, relax, and get control of their emotions for the length of time it takes for the glitter to settle to the bottom.

One child’s sand tray. The mom figure is fenced off, separated by a jail cell and blocked by trees. She is surrounded by cigarettes, alcohol bottles, and a buried pill, which may mean a hidden addiction issue. Bright colored stones surround the little girl, father, grandmother, and baby in safety. They are all facing toward each other—representing closeness and support. Other nurturing symbols include balloons, a heart, a dog, and a guardian angel.
**Season of Change**

“It is never easy saying goodbye to someone who has given so much to the children of our community, so it is bittersweet to announce Wanda Gottschalk’s retirement as CSI Chief Development Officer—a position at which she excelled for more than 18 years. While we wish Wanda all the best in this new chapter of her life, we are also fortunate to have found an exceptionally qualified candidate to transition into this critical post. Please join me in welcoming Dawn Hovey.”

And thus, with CSI President & CEO Peg Harriott’s announcement, a new era at Child Saving Institute begins.

Though the child welfare system has been ever-evolving in recent years, one of the main constants at CSI has been Wanda’s enthusiasm, warmth, dedication—and signature silver bob.

Wanda joined Child Saving Institute in November 1995 as the Chief Development Officer. But her commitment to young people in need didn’t begin when she started receiving a paycheck. Her hiring followed years of volunteering her time and talent to the agency, including serving as a CSI Board member and as a charter member of the CSI Guild. It was her way of “giving back” to the agency where she and her husband adopted two of their three children.

During her tenure at Child Saving Institute, Wanda led the agency through four successful capital campaigns and completed the largest campaign in CSI’s history, which resulted in our beautiful, state-of-the-art facility. It is, no doubt, Wanda’s irrepressible passion and unparalleled commitment to children and families that has allowed her to raise tens of millions for vulnerable kids.

Lesser persons might be cowed by sustaining such a legacy, but Dawn Hovey comes with her own experience in the areas of fundraising, grant writing and philanthropic foundations. She’s not only served as a philanthropic leader in community foundations, but has raised support for healthcare organizations, including the prestigious Menninger Clinic psychiatric hospital. Her experience working with donors, family foundations, and community foundations will be invaluable for the kids of Child Saving Institute.

“I’m looking forward to continuing the work Wanda has done,” Dawn says. “She has a wonderful record, and I’m grateful to be following in a position that has been so well-managed. I look forward to building on our long-established relationships and developing new ones, and I’m especially excited to use my skills to support those on the front lines who provide the programs and services to children in need. As a mother, I want the best for ALL our kids, and I look forward to playing a vital role in making that happen.”

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**How to Get Messy**

Our Nature Explore playground was hopping this June as the children in our childcare center enjoyed International Mud Day!
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 | Thursday, October 2
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 | Carmen Gottschalk
Event Chairmen | Addie Hollingsworth, Maria Kookan & Mary O’Connell
Keynote Speaker | Derek Clark, Inspirational foster care speaker, author, & survivor of child abuse

Substitute Santa | Wed. - Fri., Dec. 10 - 12
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.