

Head Start End-of-Year Celebration

One of Head Start's areas of focus is family and community engagement, and building relationships with families. Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start Program welcomed children and families to a Family Fun Day on August 7 at Fort Hunt Park in Alexandria. This event gave families

and staff an opportunity to celebrate together achievements within the program and community. More than 450 children, families and staff participated in various activities such as creative dancing and train rides, as well as sampling a diverse variety of foods.

It was the highlight of the end-of-year celebration, when the rising kindergarteners received their certificates of completion from Head Start. This year, GMVCHS sent 114 children to kindergarten, more than 68 percent of the children enrolled for Program Year 2012-2013.



CCAR Invests in Families' Success

Office for Children's Child Care Assistance and Referral program provides child care subsidies to income-eligible families who are working, in school or participating in an approved activity.

CCAR staff is available at several regional offices to assist families in submitting paperwork. Child care specialists cover all areas of Fairfax County working with families and child care programs. CCAR also provides resource and referral assistance for families in the community seeking child care. Many parents search for care using the online database of child care

providers on Child Care Central, OFC's website.

CCAR recently conducted a customer satisfaction survey of families who have received services from them. Ninety-seven percent of the survey respondents rated CCAR's services as good or excellent. This level of satisfaction is especially telling as the demand for services has outpaced the program's capacity.

In addition to these positive results, many respondents specifically complimented members of the CCAR staff or wrote about their appreciation for the program:

"I'm very thankful for the financial help that I'm receiving. It's very hard on me as a single mom of 3."

"This is one the best services. Staff are all very friendly, and thanks for providing service in time and communicating clearly."

Carol Keil, director of CCAR, said, "The CCAR staff works diligently to help families find and afford the quality child care they need to be able to work or seek an education. Our staff is deeply invested in helping our families achieve success."

SACC Partners with Park Authority and National Park Service for Orientation



DFS Director Nannette Bowler, OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie, Keynote Speakers Billy B. and National Park Service Associate Director Julia Washburn, with SACC Director Anne Goldstein.

More than 700 SACC teachers recently attended an annual orientation to learn about the curriculum focus for this year, “Digging Deeper into the Wonders of Nature,” which encourages teachers to tap into children’s innate curiosity about nature to expand their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world.

SACC welcomed Julia Washburn, the National Park Service’s Associate Director for Interpretation and Education, and Billy B., a natural

science song and dance man, as keynote speakers. Washburn introduced teachers to various outdoor recreation opportunities and natural resources found in the Washington area’s 14 national parks. Billy B.’s active presentation focused on techniques for developing songs, dances and audience participatory routines that teach natural science concepts.

SACC teachers learned about topics including forensic science, microbiology, weather, healthy eating, movement and nature, gardening, and reptiles and amphibians. Workshops gave teachers a hands-on opportunity to learn techniques for creating new activities in these areas, as well as provided fresh approaches to tried and true nature exploration activities that they can use with children in SACC.

Workshops and exhibits featured an array of leading organizations in the field, including the National Museum

of Health and Medicine, the US Geological Survey, NASA Science Mission, the Virginia Audubon Council and National Audubon Society, National Geographic, and WRC NBC Washington. Additional presentations from the National Park Service included “Healthy Parks Healthy People” and “Interpreting Natural Resources in our National Parks.” A variety of Fairfax County Park Authority parks, nature centers and programs also were represented. Park Authority presenters spoke on subjects ranging from “Astronomy” to “Stones and Bones.”

Anne Goldstein, SACC director commented, “SACC staff ended their day with information, inspiration, and new ideas. Partnering with organizations such as the Fairfax County Park Authority and the National Park Service opens the door to endless opportunities for the children to discover and explore the wonders of nature!”





Digging Deeper Into the Wonders of Nature

Curriculum Highlights 2013 – 2014

SACC's 2013-2014 focus, "Digging Deeper into the Wonders of Nature" will invite children to connect to nature in a meaningful way. Children will have the opportunity to dig deeper into nature through the eyes of the naturalist, the environmentalist, the scientist, and the outdoor recreationist, choosing to study plants and animals in their natural surroundings, promote greener living, study the earth and space or pursue recreation in the great outdoors.

Through this year's exploration of the natural world, SACC teachers will encourage children to examine, analyze, experience, protect and enjoy nature. Other important program activities each day will include time for homework, friends, familiar games and favorite activities!

In addition to planning outdoor activities, SACC teachers will bring nature into the indoor spaces. Hands-on activities will take place in an investigation and action lab where children can learn stewardship of their community and the earth. Each SACC center will also have an area dedicated to displaying children's investigations and discoveries along with their collections, wildlife photos, artwork, investigative summaries and more.

SACC Program Administrator Beth Leggat noted that, "Encouraging children to engage with nature can encourage healthy choices that can last a lifetime." By connecting with nature at a young age, children will enjoy the benefits of exposure to the outdoors including increased physical fitness, enhanced positive attitude, reduced stress responses, and the increased ability to pay attention, think clearly and be more creative.

Sports



SACC Summer Program

Art



Performance



and More!



New Resources for Connecting Children to Nature

Despite the recognized emotional and physical benefits of spending time in nature, opportunities for children to spend free time exploring the outdoors have diminished drastically in recent years. Many activities and electronic devices vie for children's time and attention, so adults must be intentional to ensure that children have time in nature. With this in mind, many OFC programs have begun actively incorporating outdoor play and nature engagement into their programming for children and instruction for early childhood professionals.

To bring additional nature education resources back to OFC and the greater child care community, Julie Renne (in the center of above

picture), of OFC and the Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network, recently attended the three-day 2013 Nature Explore | The Outdoor Classroom Project Leadership Institute in Nebraska. The goal of the Leadership Institute is to connect children and their families to nature, especially through integrating outdoor environments and activities in early care and education programs.

Renne attended hands-on, nature-filled, outdoor sessions based on research from Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Sessions included "The Importance of Visual-Spatial Learning,"



"Documenting Children's Learning with Nature: Documenting, Observing and Analyzing," "Art in Nature," and "Moving to Learn."

Renne also observed children engaged in creative, unguided, unstructured play in the Nature Explore outdoor classroom which had distinct components such as: getting messy with materials for digging and building; art with natural materials to sculpt including pine cones, sticks, shells, pods; music and movement; pathways; and garden areas.

The Leadership Institute provided a wealth of information about nature engagement that ITSN staff will be able to share with early childhood educators and with other OFC staff, especially highlighting the learning that takes place in all areas of development when children experience nature and the natural world.



O F C Office for Children

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