

## OFC Staff Serve on Transition Team

### to Develop New Vision, Mission and Core Values for Neighborhood and Community Services

In July 2019, the Office for Children became part of the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services. The goal of this merger was to ensure a continuum of quality, affordable, equitable child and youth development programs and services (birth-21) where children, families and communities thrive. To support a successful transition, a team comprised of NCS and OFC staff at all levels and across every department was charged with identifying opportunities to create a more unified and collaborative agency.

From among the staff who volunteered to serve on the transition team, 20 were selected, including nine OFC employees representing a cross section of divisions and levels. Staff were motivated to volunteer for the team for a variety of reasons: to learn more about NCS; to meet and network with their colleagues; and to contribute to building a more cohesive agency. Other reasons included wanting to understand how the move would affect their own work and a desire to make sure OFC was well represented.

Said Rajean Ford, SACC Center Supervisor, "I have worked for SACC for 15 years, so it was important for me to have a real understanding of what this transition would mean to the program and how it might impact our day-to-day operations. I felt this would be a good opportunity to represent SACC and give insight about our role in the county to my new NCS teammates who may not be familiar with the program."

In the year and a half following the merger, the transition team met

periodically, initially in person and then virtually. In February 2020, members met with their own teams to gather feedback and get a clearer picture of the culture that staff envisioned for the agency. Although working on the transition team is demanding, members feel it has been a worthwhile experience.

"My experience was a very positive one," said Elke Trick, Human Services Assistant, School Readiness. "I was highly impressed by the passion and commitment of all members of the

***"... I liked the different perspectives shared by all levels of the organization and the respect we showed each other ..."***

transition team to public service. I liked the different perspectives shared by all levels of the organization and the respect we showed each other in doing so. Everyone's voice was heard, the team worked diligently on finding consensus, and most of all, we had some fun along the way."

This fall, the Transition Team drafted Vision, Mission and Core Values representative of the new NCS and asked for feedback from staff across the agency. OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie shared that she "appreciates how everyone on the transition team worked creatively to ensure the voices of their colleagues throughout the agency were included in the

development of the new Vision, Mission and Values."

While the team's work continues, members express optimism that their work will yield positive results for NCS and Fairfax County residents.

Megan McClafferty of the School Readiness team said, "My hope is that the work we have done will inspire staff in NCS. We have a unique opportunity to be part of an agency that offers so much to the communities, families and individuals of Fairfax County. I hope this work helps NCS and OFC join together to learn more about the programs we collectively share and offer robust resources and assistance to those in need."

#### OFC staff serving on the Transition Team:

**Sydney Citron**, ITC Service Coordinator  
Infant and Toddler Connection

**Melissa Fabian**, Head Teacher  
Vienna SACC

**Rajean Ford**, SACC Center Supervisor  
Oak View SACC

**Tony Humphrey**, Assistant Director  
Child Care Services

**Megan McClafferty**, School Readiness

**Josh McQuiston**, SACC Regional  
Supervisor, Child Care Services

**Elke Trick**, Human Services Assistant  
School Readiness

**Andrea Wilson**, Center Supervisor  
Child Care Services Coates SACC

**Jody Withrow**, Child Care Specialist I  
Child Care Assistance & Referral



Follow us on facebook.

Scan QR code here  
Facebook.com/FairfaxCountyOfficeforChildren



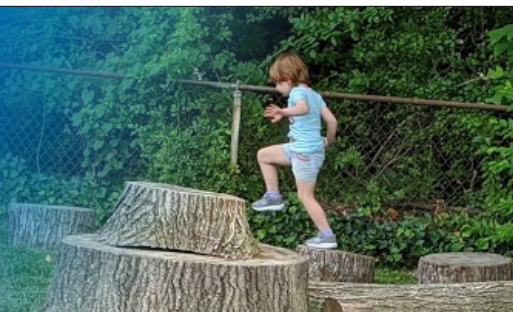
# Early Childhood Educators Explore the Benefits of Outdoor Play During Virtual Book Chats

On October 17, Fairfax Futures hosted its 16th Annual School Readiness Symposium, bringing together nearly 500 early childhood educators. The virtual event featured keynote speaker Angela Hanscom, author of *Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children*. Hanscom spoke about the physical, emotional and psychological benefits that can be achieved by allowing children to freely play and explore outdoors.

Recognizing that the one-day symposium would only allow participants to scratch the surface

of this fascinating topic, Fairfax Futures teamed up with the OFC School Readiness team to offer a four-week virtual series. Held in November and December, the hour-long “Book Chats” were based on Hanscom’s book, with each of the 100+ participants receiving a copy of the book and other materials to support their learning. Participants included a wide cross section of early childhood educators, including staff from community early childhood programs including centers and family child care homes, FCPS Pre-K programs, kindergarten classrooms, and early childhood special education.

Participants were placed in eight cohorts that addressed these key topics from the book: The Benefits of Active Free Play; Re-thinking Traditional Classroom Design; The Therapeutic Value of Outdoor Play; and one group conducted entirely in Spanish that focused on a variety of themes from Ms. Hanscom’s book. OFC staff served as facilitators and collaborated on the curriculum design for each topic. The sessions were unstructured learning opportunities with facilitators encouraging participants to share ideas, best practices, and experiences.



## Did you know that Fairfax County has many available resources to further support children’s exploration?

Whether you are an educator or a parent, here are some ideas to get you started:

### **Clemyjontri Park**

6317 Georgetown Pike  
McLean, VA 22101  
[Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/clemyjontri](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/clemyjontri)

### **The Sensory Room**

Providence Community Center  
3001 Vaden Drive  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
[Fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/therapeutic-recreation/sensory-room](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/therapeutic-recreation/sensory-room)

### **Frying Pan Farm Park**

Fairfax County Park Authority  
Farm: 2709 West Ox Road  
Visitor Center:  
2739 West Ox Road  
Herndon, VA 20171  
[Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/frying-pan-park](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/frying-pan-park)

### **Hidden Oaks Nature Center**

7701 Royce Street  
Annandale, VA 22003  
[Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hidden-oaks](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hidden-oaks)





## Early Childhood Educators Explore the Benefits of Outdoor Play During Virtual Book Chats

*continued from previous page*

“Working through the logistics required to host the sessions virtually over four weeks was challenging but well worth the effort. The topics struck a chord with educators, resulting in conversations and ideas that I believe will have a lasting and positive impact on early childhood educators in our region and on the children in their care. The expertise and experience of the diverse group of educators led to rich conversations on how to incorporate unstructured outdoor play with young children, especially amidst the challenges of working through the constraints of a global pandemic,” said Sallyann Bergh, Executive Director of Fairfax Futures.

In addition to attending the weekly sessions, participants completed homework assignments – often reading portions of Hanscom’s book, conducting exercises to explore a topic, or making observations to report back to the group. Facilitators shared resources, such as books, websites and videos, on the benefits of outdoor play. Angela Hanscom joined a kickoff session for the series to answer questions and share her insight.

At the conclusion of the Book Chats, feedback was universally positive, with many asking for the sessions to be offered again. Participants also were eager to share what they learned with colleagues and the parents of children in their care. OFC staff who led the sessions also enjoyed the experience, which provided the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues outside their immediate teams. They also enjoyed the flexibility to modify the curriculum to meet the needs and requests of participants.

Facilitator Cecie Boggs with OFC’s Institute for Early Learning shared,

“Angela Hanscom’s book and experiences were huge influences in our session planning. Our discussions focused on the spirit of exploration and discovery while looking for ways to increase movement opportunities for young learners. It was a wonderful opportunity for all of us to learn and grow together.”

### Reading Resources

***Mindset: The New Psychology of Success***  
by Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

***Free to Learn***  
by Peter Gray

***The Importance of Being Little: What Young Children Really Need from Grownups***  
by Erika Christakis

***Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder***  
by Richard Louv

***The Call of the Wild and Free: Reclaiming Wonder in Your Child’s Education***  
by Ainsley Arment

## Look for Us!



**Office for Children’s Head Start/Early Head Start** program has kicked off a new marketing campaign by placing ads at 30 bus shelters throughout Fairfax County. The goal is to raise awareness of the program among eligible families. Openings are available for virtual, in person and hybrid programs throughout the county. For more information, visit [Fairfaxcounty.gov](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov) and search for “Head Start” or call 703-324-8290.



# CLASS Goes Virtual to Support Positive Educator-Child Interactions



Positive adult-child interactions increase positive outcomes for children and are an essential hallmark of quality early childhood education.

The Office for Children's Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program is a comprehensive pre-K program serving 3 and 4-year-olds who are at risk. VPI services are provided for over 1,500 children in partnership with community early childhood programs and Fairfax County Public Schools – in center-based programs, family child care homes and FCPS Pre-K classrooms. For several years, VPI has been using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to assess adult-child interactions in early childhood programs throughout Fairfax County.

CLASS provides an opportunity for programs to evaluate the quality of adult-child interactions and support ongoing quality improvement. Interactions between children and adults are the primary way of supporting children's development and learning, as well as social and emotional development, and

CLASS provides concrete feedback on these important interactions and how they can best be supported.

When the COVID-19 pandemic required early childhood programs to enact strict health and safety protocols to prevent the spread of the virus, OFC staff working to support VPI early childhood programs were no longer able to conduct in-person CLASS observations. For some programs, their own staff who were certified observers conducted CLASS observations. For other community programs located in centers and family child care homes, VPI staff worked with educators to conduct the observations virtually. Early childhood educators positioned laptops or iPads so their entire classroom could be observed and heard by an observer using Microsoft Teams. Since Fairfax County Public School classrooms participating in VPI have been instructing children virtually, CLASS observations were not held but will resume when the classrooms return to in-person instruction.

Although not ideal, virtual observations proved to be a valid

method to evaluate classrooms and allowed OFC to complete all the state required fall 2020 observations for community early childhood programs participating in VPI.

What comes next for CLASS? In January, VPI staff began analyzing the strengths-based reports from the fall observations to develop professional learning opportunities for educators. Offered virtually, these opportunities will address both the individual needs of educators as well as high need areas identified in data collected from the reports.

OFC's Virginia Quality and Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 programs will also begin conducting their own CLASS observations virtually, employing the same methods and best practices developed by VPI staff. OFC will continue to offer an Introduction to CLASS professional learning opportunity virtually so that teachers will understand the importance of adult-child interactions and develop an understanding of the CLASS assessment tool.

Fairfax County

**O F C** Office for Children

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services. If you have any questions, contact Gwen Jones at 703-324-7137 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. [Fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc).



A Fairfax County, VA Publication



Where a TTY number is not indicated, use 711/Virginia Relay. Reasonable accommodations made upon request; call 703-324-8000.