



The Growing Tree News

A Publication of the E. John Gavras Center

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"The purpose of learning is growth; and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as long as we live." -Mortimer Adler



The Growing Tree News Special Edition

In recognition of Employee Learning Week
December 5-9, 2011

This special addition to our Agency Newsletter "The Growing Tree" is to celebrate Employee Learning Week. Employee Learning Week is an awareness campaign highlighting the important connection between learning and achieving organizational results. We are very proud of the accomplishments all of our staff has earned. Your efforts to continue learning help all of us and those we serve to thrive here at the Gavras Center.

We are highlighting two endeavors in this edition and encourage you to share with us stories and experiences of lifelong learning experiences of your own..



The E. John Gavras Center preschool earned a distinguished level rating from its most recent UPK site review visit.



The staff of the preschool gathered to celebrate on Wednesday Nov 9th with a special luncheon and banner created by their leader Cathy Barrigar. I had a chance to sit down with Cathy and talk about this special recognition that the preschool has earned and discuss what this recognition means to the preschool.

A distinguished rating is described as programming that goes above and beyond requirements. Receiving this rating helps the preschool teams feel valued and recognized for their hard work and commitment to each other and the children that they serve. The staff is thrilled about the rating and appreciates the acknowledgement that the Gavras Center has given them.

How does the preschool achieve this rating with so many different needs within the classroom? A key element of the Gavras Center Preschool is their ability to work so successfully in teams. The teams consist of professionals and paraprofessionals from varying fields of expertise and levels of experience. A large component of the team work is shared team planning. There are 4 types of meetings that happen regularly in the school; the first two meet monthly, the latter two meet weekly. The **team of teachers** meets monthly to create a theme which they can incorporate their learning activities and strategies into the curriculum. The **team planning** meeting is where the teachers come together the following week and presents the theme to their team and further working together on classroom planning and sharing of ideas continues. All of the members know what the goals are and understand the themes and how the activities will support the mastering of pieces of the curriculum. The **Education Department** meets on a weekly basis to do short term organizational planning, communicate with other departments within the agency, case management, and review policies and procedures. The **Paraprofessional** weekly group meetings can be trainings or peer support work to assist one another. Each team member is responsible for an area of learning in the classroom and the success of the classroom depends on each member being able to fulfill their part. This increases their sense of being invested in the success of their classroom and the children assigned to them. The continued training and support made

available by the Education Director and Education Supervisor is critical to maintain the skill level of the team and support its success.

To maintain a knowledgeable and skilled team in the preschool both Cathy Barrigar and Diane deRoos have pursued additional certifications to better serve, support and lead their staff to achieve success in the classroom. The bar is raised high for the teams and receiving a distinguished rating for their work is validation of their accomplishments. But each of them would agree the real validation occurs when the children in their classrooms reach or achieve a success.

What does this rating mean to our preschool?

Well here are a few comments from the team members which all have a similar underlying theme:

“It is nice to get praised”

“We are very proud and excited about the recognition for our hard work”

“This has been a process that we continually tweak. We are proud of our work”

“We love working with the kids”

“I feel this rating shows how much work the teachers have put into revamping the UPK curriculum and classroom schedule to fit the needs of all types of learners”.

Preschool teams below



Congratulations are in order to Aaron Clark who recently completed his Doctor of Physical Therapy degree at SUNY health Sciences Center in Syracuse.

He agreed to be interviewed for this article on employee learning on November 7.

Aaron noted that after finishing high school in Pennsylvania he went to Robert Morris College with the goal of becoming a business person. While at the college, Aaron worked with the sports teams of the College as a trainer. This exposed him to the field of physical therapy. He knew, once he was exposed to the field that this is what he really wanted for a career.

After graduating from Robert Morris, Aaron decided to go back to college for a physical therapy degree. He had found his passion in life! He completed an undergraduate degree and a master's degree in physical therapy at SUNY Health Sciences Center in Syracuse. These classes were done in the evenings and on weekends. IN addition, he held a full time job and started a family. Aaron pointed out that many times the classes were not easy to do with his other commitments. However, he was determined to do all the learning he could do to be an accomplished Physical therapist.

Aaron told this writer that he loves working at The Gavras Center and loves watching people accomplish their goals in Physical Therapy. He noted that he likes the family friendly environment at the Gavras Center and he has the flexibility needed to raise his family and meet the needs of our consumers/students.

Aaron told me that the Gavras Center values learning and has been supportive of his learning efforts since he started with the agency. Between his coursework, staff development days, continuing education events, and other educational opportunities he has been able to learn and grow in the work environment and as a person.

When asked what advice he would give to others in regard to learning Aaron said that everyone should embrace lifelong learning. Furthermore, you should never give up on your goals. Aaron noted that sometimes it is helpful to break down a goal and to just keep working on smaller pieces of the goal. For instance, don't worry about getting a degree; just take a class. One class at a time can eventually lead to a degree. In this way, Aaron notes, you can keep learning and find your niche.



Aaron Clark