

The Children's Center Celebrates 30 Years Of Preschool Education

by William F. Galvin

HARWICH – The Children's Center is the longest-running community-based preschool in town, and it will be holding a "30th Birthday Celebration" on June 11 at 204 Sisson, the cultural center.

"We've been around a long time and think we're a great little school. We hope we're around for a long time to come because we're helping to make great kids," said director Abby Newberry-West.

"Children learn through play," Newberry-West said of the center's philosophy. "We're play-based and get them ready for kindergarten and elementary school."

Its mission is to provide affordable preschool childcare and education for low- and moderate-income working families. The focus is on the child's social and emotional wellbeing, as well as intellectual, language and physical development. Children are encouraged to be independent and self-sufficient, which helps develop a positive self image, according to Newberry-West.

The preschool was founded by Harwich Ecumenical Council for Housing in 1993 when it became apparent that there was a need to care for children living in HECH housing units while their parents were contributing to the local workforce. Volunteers at the First Congregational Church of Harwich Center began the childcare program.

"Soon thereafter they realized the need was much greater for affordable childcare," Newberry-West said.

HECH President Robert Murray, First Congregational Church Pastor Terry Newberry, Georgia Dearborn, Tom Peterson and others came together to address the need. Rev. John Ericson was also instrumental in getting the preschool off the ground.

They started The Children's Center, which was soon relocated to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in East Harwich. It was run under the direction of Maggie Donahue for seven years.

In 2001, Newberry-West was named director, and four years later HECH purchased property to develop more housing units and established The Children's Center in a new home at 155 Sisson Rd.

The preschool now serves the children of 27 families ages 2.9 to 5, Mondays through Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or from 8 a.m. to noon, year round. The facility provides two classrooms with two lead teachers in preschool and one lead teacher and an assistant in a toddler room. There are also six volunteers helping out in the classrooms during the week. The center is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and the staff exceeds all requirements, according to Newberry-West.

Tuition costs are based on a sliding scale for income-eligible families. Families with different financial backgrounds from Wellfleet to Yarmouth participate. Some families need more assistance, she added.

The Children's Center is a self-supporting HECH program, but fundraising is an essential part of its operation. The center raises between \$80,000 and \$100,000 a year to offset expenses, according to Newberry-West. In July, a Mini-Walk For Love fundraiser will be held, and the popular Gingerbread House auction will be brought back in late November or early December this year after being postponed during the pandemic.

As younger families face exponential increases in the cost of homeownership on Cape Cod, more and more families are leaving the area, depleting the local workforce. Voters in the annual town meeting approved \$250,000 to assist families with preschool age children in paying childcare and preschool tuitions as a means of easing the financial burdens facing young families.



The Children's Center Director Abby Newberry-West in the center's playground with the children.
WILLIAM F. GALVIN PHOTO

Children's Center

“The town contribution will assist the families, but it doesn't boost our income,” Newberry-West said. “It's awesome for these families. It's really important for Cape Cod to keep these families here. That's what The Children's Center has been trying to do for 30 years. We have a pretty amazing community, helping kids and families stay here.”

The 30th birthday celebration will take place from noon to 2 p.m. on Sunday, June 11 at 204 Sisson Rd. There are plenty of activities planned, including a police and fire department touch-a-truck event, an antique car show, face painting, Crazy Dave The Magician, a bubble station, and raffles, including a 50/50 raffle.

The Squire food truck and Good Times Ice Cream truck will be on hand. The public is encouraged to come rain or shine as activities can be moved inside the cultural center in case of poor weather.

Containers will be scattered around the event for attendees to make a donation to offset the preschool expenses.

[Copyright © 2023 Cape Cod Chronicle, Inc. 6/1/2023](#)
[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)
