

The Tot Lot Times

The Cambridgeport Children's Center
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Director's Note

Dear Tot Lot Community and Friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your ongoing support and commitment to Tot Lot! As the new director and member of the Tot Lot Community, I am continuously impressed by the involvement of families, both current and past, to the vision and mission of Tot Lot. I am excited to be a part of such an amazing community.

This is a very exciting year at Tot Lot, with a great deal of enthusiasm and momentum moving us as a community toward our vision of being "Reggio Inspired." One of our goals for this year is to assess and enhance our environment to ensure that we are holding true to the Reggio philosophy, which views "the learning environment as the child's *third* teacher." We must also ensure that we are continuously maintaining our NAEYC Accreditation, which also involves rich, child-centered learning environments.

Indeed, an enriching learning environment is essential to quality education and care. The environment stimulates children's interests and provides for opportunities to explore. It is through this exploration that learning happens; that children learn through play! The teachers' role is to develop and implement an emergent curriculum based on their observations of children's interests and developmental needs.

We are asking that as members and friends of our community you will contribute to our fundraising efforts. In order to sustain our distinctive educational commitment, we need your help. Any contribution makes a difference.

Our fundraising goal for this school year is \$24,000.00. We plan to raise these funds through individual and corporate donations, a revamped silent auction in the spring, a family-community event, and grant writing. We know from past experience that friends of Tot Lot have consistently supported this community.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to Tot Lot!

Carolyn Canina
Executive Director



Welcome Carolyn!

Tell us about your educational philosophy and how you implement it. Children learn through play and exploration in an enriching learning environment. My own educational philosophy incorporates an Emergent Curriculum, Creative Curriculum and a Reggio Inspired Philosophy. Emilia Reggio is a philosophy that guides how we talk to children, our relationship with families, and the way we respect families as the child's first teacher. An emergent Curriculum is part of my teaching style. For example, when I walk through leaves in Autumn I like to bring the leaves into the classroom for children to explore, and then see what happens. It is a combination of sparking children's interests and observing children playing and exploring. Through observation, we can understand best how children learn.

How do you incorporate this into your plans for improving the children's environment? We look at the environment through the eyes of the children, and we ask ourselves important questions: Is the environment accessible and interesting to children? Does the environment inspire exploration? Does the environment reflect the children's interests? Is the environment child focused? It is through the reflection of these and other questions that we as a community will enhance our learning environment.

Is there any one personal experience that helped shape your purpose and passion in the early childhood field? I was part of a three-year-long mental health study group that focused on supporting resiliency in young children. It was a community-wide early childhood study group that began out of an increase in challenging behaviors in programs. We evaluated how the environment (which included the daily schedule and transitions) impacted children's behaviors. I then took a course, *Environments--Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of Children*, which validated for me my belief that the environment is essential to children's social and emotional development. As educators it is our responsibility to provide an environment that supports positive social and emotional skills that foster resiliency in our children. (continued on page 2)

Good bye Julie!

Recent Director Julie Viens is moving along—as far away as China! Though she still lives here, she has become the Managing Director of the Multiple Intelligences Institute and will be helping to implement programming in urban areas such as Shanghai. Julie will develop the program, including curriculum, environment, and assessment for classrooms serving 2-6 year olds. Eventually the MI Institute will be an international organization serving those interested in creating or enhancing MI-driven programs (which Julie tells us are very "Reggio" philosophically!)

She is still a member of our Tot Lot community, though, and her son Sammy is still here in the Toddler room. We are so grateful to Julie for all she has done for Tot Lot parents, children, and the whole community. We will miss you, Julie!

—Rebecca Lavine

What are three things you hope to improve or develop at Tot Lot this year?

1. To create a more enriching, child focused learning environment that supports the Reggio Philosophy of the environment as the child's third teacher.
2. Intentional teaching based on ongoing observations and documentation of children's development—building a format for observing, assessing, reflecting and planning!
3. A strategic focus for our vision starting with reflecting on our educational philosophy, mission and vision.

Since joining us as our new Director, what strikes you most about this extraordinary community?

What strikes me most is the partnership between families and professionals working together, the sense of community and commitment to the children and to Tot Lot!

—Whitney Waddell



Toddler Update

Changes, changes changes! This Fall the toddler room is almost all new—from the new Tot Lotters to our new Director, new assistants and a changing room layout. Teachers and kids and parents are all getting to know each other. To help facilitate that process and as part of the toddler curriculum, teacher Andrew Doolittle has renewed the family-poster project. Parents bring in photos of their families, which the toddlers get to comment on. The whole project is laminated and posted on the wall for friends to view and learn about the diversity in our community, helping everyone get to know each other better!

The physical layout of the toddler room will be undergoing changes too. Teachers will clean out and reorganize the toddler room so that Toddlers can have their own dramatic play area which will be available to them all day long. New shelving will ensure that their manipulatives and other equipment are more accessible and safe. Carolyn has been facilitating our Reggio commitment to making the classroom environment the toddlers' third teacher, enabling them to make choices in their own learning process.

The toddlers have been engaged in art making, reading, singing, using manipulatives, learning signs, and playing at the water table, to learn all about animals! Teachers observed that many of the toddlers brought in stuffed animals for comfort and play and naptime. So toddlers are learning about what animals say, do and what they look like. Teacher Corinne Charpentier is teaching toddlers yoga animal poses, which incorporates inside gross motor play into the curriculum. It is a very exciting time as toddlers who once were nervous leaving their parents are now running into the toddler room with delight to greet their teachers.

—Whitney Waddell and Rebecca Lavine



Preschool Update

Changes are afoot in the preschool classroom too! The classroom has undergone big changes as staff update the learning environment. The biggest changes include the dramatic play area and the library. The old dramatic play room now contains "Learning Centers" for quiet, focused learning. This room offers a space for children who need some time to recharge from all of the excitement in the other rooms. It contains materials for science exploration, writing, reading and math experiences. The larger room is now our creative play room with dramatic play, and unit and hollow blocks for building and creating. Teachers say it is still a work in progress as staff looks for better shelving so that the educational materials are accessible to everyone.

The changes have been part of a collaborative effort between staff and teachers to help make the classroom easier to use and more connected to Reggio-Emilio inspired goals. Reggio philosophy considers the parents the first learning resources for children, teachers the second. The third important learning resource for children is their environment. So it has been important to reorganize along those principals, and these changes have teachers excited and pleased. They are also working hard, coming in on weekends, and, with parents, engaging in a "deep clean" of the center so that everything—from blocks to

toys to floors and walls—get cleaned in ways that Tot Lot has not seen in years!

In other news, the preschoolers have started swimming lessons this fall. There are enough teachers and volunteer parents along that almost all the children have a chance to be in the water all the time. Preschoolers also took a trip to Honeypot Orchards, along with the Toddlers, to pick apples. A good time was had by all and even though each child took home a bag of apples, there were still enough left over to make apple crisp in the classroom! Yum!

—Rebecca Lavine

Apple Picking Moments

Munira: When we went on the hayride I thought the apples were in the sky.

Karina: I had fun picking.

Ben D: We went on the bus and a hayride and it was fun.

Tselha: We saw rabbits and sheep and chickens and piggies.

August: I filled up my whole bag. I went back on the hayride and then back to school.

Emma: I picked apples and I twist them and put them in my bag and then I eat one.

Jason: The tractor bringed us and we took the bus to school.

Thea: We have to twist the apples.

Satchel: There was a hayride and we had to wait our turn and then we had lunch.

Senia: When I twist the apple they fall in my hand. Then when I walked I saw a mountain.



We Need You Alums!

For our next issue of Tot Lot Times we are starting a new feature: "Where Are They Now?" Please contact us with your stories and photos about what you've been doing since your days at Tot Lot : Carolyn@totlot.org