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## Play Never Goes Out of Style

In the world of prevention, Primary Project is one program that has longevity. While many programs have come and gone, Primary Project is 54 years young. Its focus is to help children cope with the challenges of school adjustment. Today, this evidence-based program, developed by Children's Institute, operates in 2,100 schools in 17 states and has helped over one million children adjust to their classroom environments.



## A Note from Our Director



Each year, child advocates around the country celebrate April as the Month of the Young Child. This celebration brings awareness and serves as a reminder that the early childhood years lay the foundation for children's success in school and later life.

There is some cause for celebration this April in the field of early education and care. At a time when it could be most vulnerable to funding cuts, Universal Pre-kindergarten remains intact within the Governor's Budget in New York State. Distinguished business professionals like economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman and national organizations such as the Committee for Economic Development now stress the importance of investing in quality early childhood experiences for young children.

The public conversation over the past decade has shifted to acknowledge that supporting the cognitive development of children should not wait until they enter school. Children must receive quality education and care experiences early in life; it is financially prudent to invest early, increasing children's chances of academic success and saving tax payers in societal costs later in life.

While funding for the academic development of young children has garnered much public attention, budgetary decisions across the country do not reflect that support for other areas of children's development, such as their social emotional health. In fact, social and emotional services, early intervention programs, speech and language services, and home visitation parent programs are being reduced or eliminated from state and federal budgets. Many schools struggle to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of their students because of funding constraints. These services are all part of a child's quality early childhood experience and equally contribute to academic success.

This issue of *News & Views* highlights our efforts to enhance early childhood experiences that nurture all areas of a young child's development: from accrediting child care centers and mentoring family child care providers in their homes, to providing technology solutions that help professionals who work with children harness the power of information so that they can become more effective in their work with children.

We look forward to working with our many partners to offer high quality programs that support young children. We also embrace the task of elevating, in public conversation and policy, the importance of social and emotional health to children's early development. During this year's Month of the Young Child, there is much to celebrate. In future months and years, we hope for even greater successes for children.

—A. Dirk Hightower, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

## Children's Institute is Pleased to Recognize Two New Legacy Society Members

### Connie Valk



Working through The Community Foundation, Connie Valk, M.Ed., CAS, has created a Designated Endowment Fund which will provide annual income to Children's Institute beginning June 2012. Connie says, "I have a stake in the future of children. Before I became a Children's Institute staff member, I worked in the Rochester City Schools where I was the recipient of Children's Institute's services. I've seen the good work that the organization accomplishes from the outside in as well as inside out. With this Designated Endowment Fund, I am ready to leave a lasting legacy that will help Children's Institute accomplish its mission for generations to come."

Connie recently retired from Children's Institute where her latest responsibilities included developing Pathways: National Early Education and Care Accreditation, an accreditation system for child care facilities.

### Mary Lewis Consler



Give Mary Consler an opportunity, and she will tell you of her strong belief that "every child has the right to be well adjusted in family, in school, and in life." Mary gained an appreciation and respect for the people and programs of Children's Institute through her 25 years of service on the Board of Directors.

As a fundraiser, currently serving as Director of Agency Advancement at the Mental Health Association of Rochester, Mary knows how important planned gifts are in providing sustainability for an agency's mission and efforts. Through a bequest in her will, Mary is helping to ensure that Children's Institute will have the resources it needs to continue its work of addressing the current and future needs of children.

Both Connie and Mary will be recognized as founding members of the Legacy Society at the agency's Community Update Breakfast In October.

For information on how you can make a planned gift to benefit Children's Institute, please visit [www.childreinsinstitute.net](http://www.childreinsinstitute.net) or call Jane Passamonte, Senior Development Associate at (585) 295-1000, Ext. 245.

### Save the Date!

Be sure to mark your calendars and save the date for our Community Update Breakfast at The Strathallan Hotel. This year's event is being planned for Thursday, October 27, at 8:00 a.m. Come and hear about the work of Children's Institute and help us honor the founding members of our Legacy Society. We look forward to seeing you there.



# Pathways Welcomes More Centers

Twenty-one child care centers in New York state have chosen to achieve their accreditation goal with Pathways: National Early Education and Care Accreditation. Created by Children's Institute and a team of experts in the field of early education and care, Pathways is an efficient and affordable way for centers to improve quality.

According to Kim Avery, MS, an early education and care specialist at Children's Institute, 4 of 19 participating centers in the Rochester region have achieved accreditation. A center in Utica and another in Steuben County are also in process, which typically takes 12–18 months to complete.

Rochester Childfirst Network (RCN) received its three-year accreditation in July 2010. Executive Director Marsha Dumka chose to forgo NAEYC re-accreditation in favor of Pathways. "The requirements are just as rigorous, but the process was much easier," she explained. "We very much want to update our progress on an ongoing basis instead of at three-year intervals, and appreciate that Pathways allows us to do this online."

Parents and staff can now go online to complete Pathway's stakeholder surveys that provide valuable feedback to the center for planning and evaluation purposes. For parents who do not have easy access to the Internet, Children's Institute provides paper surveys and tallies them so that centers can spend more time on their program.

Informational materials will be available this spring to help centers promote the value of their accreditation. "Only 10 percent of child care centers in the country are accredited," Avery said. "We want parents to understand that the center has been put to the test and passed with flying colors, so that they can feel comfortable about their child care choice. We also want the staff to embrace Pathways, talk it up with parents, and implement it on a daily basis."

Dumka added that the staff of Children's Institute have always been accessible, responsive, and helpful.

As one pilot center approaches its second year of accreditation, Avery looks forward to reviewing its goals, progress, and sustained commitment to quality. This will be her first opportunity to apply and verify this portion of the Pathways system.

# Family Child Care Program Helps Children Reach Literacy Goal

Partners in Family Child Care, a home visiting program in which group family child care providers receive individualized professional development services, has good news to share! The recently released two-year report from Children's Institute shows that children in participating group family child care programs have made gains above developmental expectations in literacy, problem solving, and communication for a second year in a row.

Although originally funded for three years through a lead gift from The Brush Family Fund of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, Children's Institute hopes that other funding sources will come forward to continue the program for a fourth year. "We want to sustain the benefits to children we have seen with those providers who've already had one year of in-home professional development services on early literacy and social and emotional development through the program," said Shira Peterson, Ph.D., research associate at Children's Institute. "We feel it is the best use of investment dollars right now."



Research has shown that the Partners program is especially beneficial for the providers who are ready to make changes. These providers can impact 200–300 children during their careers. "We want to focus additional resources on providers to bolster their ability and commitment to continue to implement the curricula, and to do so in ways that are individualized

to maximize their children's developmental outcomes," Peterson added.

For those providers not yet ready to embrace the changes necessary to improve their child care practices, Peterson proposes group discussions—a low cost solution—to assess their needs and what can be done to increase their readiness.

Providers who are ready to change can apply for home visits through the Educational Incentive Program (EIP), a State University of New York scholarship program. "Our current home visitors will continue to deliver training and support to family providers who qualify for EIP dollars," Peterson said.

## **EIP Scholarships are Available**

*If you are a group family child care provider ready to improve your child care practices, learn more about EIP scholarship opportunities by contacting SUNY at [www.tsg.suny.edu](http://www.tsg.suny.edu) / (800) 295-9616 or our partnering agency Rochester Childfirst Network at [www.rcn4kids.org](http://www.rcn4kids.org) / (585) 473-2858.*



## Play Never Goes Out of Style

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To identify children in need of Primary Project, routine screenings are done in preschool through third-grade. With their parent's consent, Primary Project gives a child the opportunity to meet weekly with a trained and supervised child associate in a playroom setting. The child sets the pace, and the child associate supports and reflects on what the child says and does to reinforce and build on the child's strengths.

Kay Leary worked as a Primary Project child associate in the Rush Henrietta School District in the 1970s. "I was impressed with Primary Project because it helped parents, teachers, and principals look at the bigger picture and ask what was going on in a child's life that could be contributing to their adjustment challenges," she said "Everyone had the children's best interests at heart."

Given the host of issues at work in these children's lives, Leary stressed that the confidentiality component of Primary Project made it comfortable and safe for children to open up and trust. "The child knew you would be there for them, regardless of what was happening with them," said Leary.

One of Primary Project's newest child associates, Stephanie Widrick, enjoys making a difference in children's lives. "It doesn't take long!" said the former teacher and mother of triplets. "Making them feel like they're the only person in the world for 30 minutes makes a difference. These children really need that."

Many of Widrick's students at Carthage Elementary School near Watertown, New York, are from military families stationed at Fort Drum. "They benefit the most," she said, thinking of an ESL (English as a Second Language) student who would easily get lost due to language barriers. "I don't know if he'd normally be a shy boy if he had different language skills, but after 10 play sessions he is comfortable enough to speak with me, and his teacher reports that he is coming out of his shell in the classroom," she said.

In addition to caring adults, child-directed play is what makes Primary Project effective. "I see these children developing better coping skills through play," Widrick added. "As they become more assertive and self-confident, their anxiety and issues dissipate."

While Primary Project remains rooted in imaginative, expressive child-led play, its child associate training has adapted to address new school adjustment challenges. "Kindergarten is no longer as play-based as it once was, and some children are not ready to do what is now asked of them," explained Mary Anne Peabody, LCSW, deputy director of national services at Children's Institute. "Also, electronics dominate the world of play today."

Ongoing research by Children's Institute is another reason why Primary Project has longevity, especially in this age of accountability. "We have always been able to prove the effectiveness of our program for children, parents, and funders, as well as preserve its integrity through continuous improvement." Peabody added.

With school funding cuts putting even the best prevention programs at risk, Peabody has seen an increase in schools turning to community behavioral health agencies as a way to secure their Primary Project programs.

Although she is pleased that Primary Project has a presence in 17 states, Peabody and her associates at Children's Institute would love for it to be in every school in all 50 states. "Regardless of the times, children still need to have one-on-one attention from a special adult," she added.

Armed with research, Leary often travelled to Albany in the 1990s to lobby on behalf of Children's Institute and Primary Project in New York State. "If you have a program you really value, you have to push it and remind people that you're there and have proof that it's a valuable program," she said.

Now retired from Primary Project and the Children's Institute Board of Directors, Leary remains an ardent supporter of both through her charitable giving.

With less than a year in the playroom, Widrick already appreciates that Children's Institute believes in the importance of play and keeps investing in it. "I really wish every child had the opportunity to experience this," she said.

Award-winning Primary Project is one of over 40 programs and services offered by Children's Institute that are grounded in research and offer new and innovative solutions for challenges facing our children.

### Children's Institute Programs Help Schools Meet Response to Intervention (RtI) Mandates

Many states across the country mandate that screening and evidence-based early intervention approaches and programs be used as part of the evaluation process to determine if a student has a disability. The use of evaluations and programs is called Response to Intervention (RtI) and Children's Institute is proud to be part of the RtI solution, which supports children's social, emotional, and academic success.

"We are using Primary Project in our Response to Intervention initiative," said Barbara Craft-Reiss, Principal of Nassau Elementary School in Poughkeepsie, NY. "We are currently in our third year of Primary Project at Nassau School and our students are thriving with the support of this program. "Primary Project has been part of our school culture and totally supported by staff, parents, and students. All children in kindergarten, first, and second grade are benchmarked and then a small number of children are selected, based on assessments, observations, and recommendations, for inclusion in the program. Our success has been measured by the decreasing numbers of students in first and second grade who fit the profile of a student being recommended (for additional services)."

In addition to using Primary Project, schools are adding assessment tools and COMET® to their RtI initiatives. Student assessments can be completed on-line and results are reported immediately by COMET, the web-based data collection and management system developed by Children's Institute and its IT partner, SophiTEC. "By using COMET, educators get a timely and comprehensive picture of children's needs and strengths," said A. Dirk Hightower, Ph.D., executive director of Children's Institute. "Timely data presented in a useful way helps teachers adjust their strategies in supporting student learning and identifying problems early, which is what the RtI effort is designed to accomplish."

Even in these tough fiscal times, educators value the portfolio of assessments, programs, and technology offered by Children's Institute. "Through word of mouth as well as hard data that we've made public, our district is supportive of Primary Project and will likely fiscally support the continuation, even though these are challenging budgetary times," commented Craft-Reiss.





## Guest Author



“W

hat’s going to happen to me?” is a universal reaction that children have when faced with the news of their parents’ separation. Children around the world are benefiting from the support and coping skills that help them deal with family changes. The Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP) was developed in 1982 by JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, Ph.D., former director of program development at Children’s Institute, and author of *Putting children first: Proven parenting strategies for helping children thrive after divorce*. CODIP’s support is reaching children in the Netherlands in an adaptation of the program called Dappere Dinos – “Courageous Dinosaurs.” The prevention program uses dinosaur puppets as a playful way for young children to express their feelings, correct damaging misconceptions of self blame, and learn skills to increase their capacity to cope with the challenges they face.



Mariska Klein Velderman and Fieke Pannebakker

Dutch Psychologists Mariska Klein Velderman, Fieke Pannebakker, Marianne DeWolff, and their team from TNO prevention research institute ([www.tno.nl/codip](http://www.tno.nl/codip)) obtained a 3 year grant to assess the feasibility of adapting CODIP for children in the Netherlands. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll is a consultant and trainer for the pilot program, which serves 6- to 8-year-old children in child health centers in The Hague and Gouda.

The children meet in weekly small groups that are co-led by mental health professionals who create a safe, supportive atmosphere for children to share experiences and discover they are not alone with their circumstances. A variety of play activities are part of the program. Puppet play and a “Feelings Grab Bag” game are used as engaging, child-centered ways of helping children to develop an “emotional vocabulary” and express the many feelings they have about their changing families. A board game, “The Daring Dinosaurs” is used to promote program objectives, enhance coping skills, and help children identify their strengths and positive aspects of their family.

Results of the pilot study are quite promising. Preliminary results show significant improvements in children’s adjustment, replicating the positive results of CODIP research with children in the US.

We will be presenting our work on CODIP at conferences in Montreal and the Netherlands this spring. The collaboration with the Dutch team has been a match made in heaven. Our Dutch colleagues have successfully overcome numerous challenges and have effectively extended evidence-based prevention services to children in the Netherlands. Their passion for promoting children’s well-being and resilience is an inspiration!

– JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, Ph.D.  
Author, *Putting Children First: Proven parenting strategies to help children thrive after divorce*  
Clinical Psychologist and Child Specialist  
[www.pedro-carroll.com](http://www.pedro-carroll.com)

## Thank You!

### Primary Project Restored in the NYS Budget

Thank you to our friends and elected officials who have been working with us to reinstate Primary Project in the New York State 2011-2012 Budget. **Your efforts have resulted in full restoration of funding for Primary Project throughout the state.** Currently, over 3,000 New York Children in 140 schools benefit from the program, which provides needed early intervention services to children and saves taxpayers dollars by reducing the need for costly remediation services. Primary Project is very much part of the solution for an economically healthy and viable New York.

## Announcements...

### Recently Published

Guillermo Montes, Ph.D. and Jill S. Halterman, MD, MPH have authored an article in *Academic Pediatrics*, *The Impact of Child Care Problems on Employment: Findings From a National Survey of US Parents*. The article addresses issues surrounding child care-related employment problems common among families with a child with chronic illness or behavior problems. Findings support the need for pediatricians and policy makers to strive for the implementation of more parent-friendly labor conditions.

The article abstract can be viewed at:

[www.childrensinstitute.net/sites/default/files/documents/academic-pediatrics\\_Jan%202011.pdf](http://www.childrensinstitute.net/sites/default/files/documents/academic-pediatrics_Jan%202011.pdf)

### Stay Informed - Keep in Touch

We want to be sure you know how our work is helping the children in our community and across the nation. If you wish to receive information by e-mail, please send your e-mail address to Jane Passamonte, senior development associate, at [jpassamonte@childrensinstitute.net](mailto:jpassamonte@childrensinstitute.net). Be sure to include your full name, mailing address, and telephone number to ensure that we have your correct information.

### New Staff Member



**Paul McAfee**, MBA, joins Children’s Institute as a research associate and director of sales and marketing for COMET®, our web-based data collection and management system that helps to improve outcomes for children. He comes to the organization with more than 35 years of global, executive-level management, sales, and marketing experience. McAfee has held senior level positions in consumer and business sales and marketing at Kodak, Sprint, and Danaher.

# News & Views

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## Discovering the Power of COMET®

As a non-profit organization, EnCompass: Resources for Learning of Rochester continues to discover new ways to use the power of COMET®, the web-based data collection and management system developed by Children's Institute and its IT partner, SophiTEC.

EnCompass develops and provides innovative educational services to students and school districts in the Rochester area. At the Hillside Work Scholarship Center on Mustard Street, EnCompass tutors use COMET to complete the Associate-Child Rating Scale (A-CRS) electronically. The immediate payoff is that tutors receive information that offers insight into how to increase the student's level of engagement and academic skills. "When we can establish good relationships with students, especially the 7th and 8th graders, their transition to high school is often much smoother, and they are more likely to stay in school," Amy Scaramuzzino, director of academic centers and outreach tutoring at EnCompass, explained.

Soon, Scaramuzzino hopes to have the 7th–12th grade students at Hillside, as well as students at the Northeast and Northwest College Preparatory Schools in the Rochester City School District (RCSD), completing the Student Engagement Inventory (SEI) on COMET.

"COMET's power is greater than its usage here right now," said Lisa Hiley, director of research and evaluation at EnCompass. She plans to use COMET for after-school programs in two city elementary schools and to track students' attendance in schools.

As administrators, Scaramuzzino has run numbers to verify that every student at her outreach sites has been tested, and Hiley has produced monthly reports for the EnCompass board of directors on student numbers and testing in support of funding for its programs.

Hiley admits that she was a bit skeptical about COMET at first, but she is now a believer: "I am intrigued by its ability to track data over time and influence policy. Children's Institute has been very responsive to our needs and in making the technology work for educators."

In fact, school districts are finding that the power of COMET can also help them meet state-mandated screening programs for new entrants.