

In the Community

Make Music Philly at PIC: On June 21, over 165 people came out to PIC for a community concert organized as part of the city-wide *Make Music Philly Festival*.



This first-time event for PIC featured a live lineup of performers—from both inside and outside of PIC—performing a cappella, children's songs, folk, and more. We thank our great musicians and sound crew who volunteered their time and talents: **Angel Brice, Anthony Coppa, Katie Foley, Barbara Gettes, Kia Knight, The Larks, Sarah Motis, Dan**

Scholnick, David Stotz, Scott Weidman, and Brooks Wilson. We especially thank our friend and neighbor **Kathy O'Connell, host of WXPN's Kids Corner**, who graced our stage as the event's official emcee. PIC was pleased to open the newly-completed Magic Circle Nature Playground at this special open-to-the-community event.

Children and Nature Study Group: PIC is working on an exciting new project with our friends at the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children (DVAEYC). A Children and Nature Study Group, made up of early childhood professionals has been meeting monthly to share ideas about how to help children build sustained connections with nature, both in and outside the classroom. The group is facilitated by PIC Executive Director Debbie Green and hosted by DVAEYC Associate Director Peg Szcurek.

PIC Plant Sale Creates Community

In May, PIC's Plant Sale raised over \$42,000 for our tuition assistance program. Money raised by this annual event, helped PIC award tuition assistance to 31 children in our Early Learning, After School, and Summer Camp programs.



Special thanks to co-chairs and PIC moms, **Jill Shashaty and Marni Fogelson-Teel**, and to our committee members. We also thank the corporate volunteer crews from **Beneficial Bank and Reed Technology** whose tireless efforts helped us unload plants, prepare the chapel, and pack orders for the second year in a row!

Debbie Green shared these reflections of her first Plant Sale as Executive Director. "Yes, the Plant Sale is an important fundraiser, but it is about SO much more. Current families volunteer for the event, giving them an opportunity to meet and spend time with fellow parents. It helps us remain connected to our alumni families, whose daily lives no longer include PIC. It gives our neighbors the chance to learn

about PIC and the good work that we do. And for me, this year offered many opportunities to hear of PIC's roots and its growth through the years."

DIVERSITY MATTERS: PIC's Diversity Committee has produced a video on how diversity is experienced at PIC. Watch PIC Lead Teacher Jacob Kerner discuss how diversity matters in his classroom and to the healthy development of young children. This video is the first in a series of stories shared by PIC families, alumni, and friends about the importance of diversity in their lives. PIC thanks **PIC dad David Stotz** for sharing his time and talents by filming and editing this video.

Watch the video: parentinfantcenter.org/classroom-blog-pic-news/diversity-matters-video

Ways to support PIC: Designate PIC to receive your gift to the United Way or Penn's Way Campaigns by using our number: 02671. Ask if your company has a matching gift program. Kindly remember us in your estate planning.

PIC Acadia Woods Magic Circle Nature Playground

named after a beloved playspace of former PIC Executive Director Marni Sweet.



PIC is grateful for the generosity of the **Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Rebecca and Arthur Samberg**, and the **Germeshausen Foundation**, in addition to the many individual gifts that helped create the Magic Circle Nature Playground.

Calling all PIC ALUMNI: Have you seen the Alumni Monthly e-newsletter?

Recent stories include news of Philly's own Taney Dragons (two PIC alumni on the team!), former families giving back through the Plant Sale, updates on young alumni, and enduring PIC friendships! **Make sure you don't miss what's going on. Send your email address to risaacson@parentinfantcenter.org.**



news from our neighborhood



PIC's Magic Circle Nature Playground, which was completed in June, is leading the way in nature-based outdoor learning. Last month, we earned national certification from the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation and the Arbor Day Foundation. With this recognition PIC joins a network of organizations that have embraced nature-based learning in response to the growing disconnect between children and nature.

A Message from the Executive Director: Debbie Green

I am delighted that our *Magic Circle Nature Playground* has earned national certification as a Nature Explore Classroom from the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation and the Arbor Day Foundation. I am extremely proud to be the first such playground in Philadelphia, and one of only a few across the country created in an urban setting. But, what most excites me are the opportunities we now have to **enrich our curriculum, encourage children to play and learn in a natural setting, and inspire other professionals who work with young children.**

This past summer I attended the Children Learning with Nature Institute. As one of a few hundred educators in attendance, I was captivated by the speakers from throughout the world who shared their experiences connecting children and nature.

Johnny Holtom from New Zealand spoke about children in child care programs learning to whittle at age two with potato peelers as their first tool. A video image forever ingrained in my mind is of babies taking their daily naps outside in hammocks suspended from trees, with just the sounds of birds chirping and the quiet wind rustling of trees.

Claire Warden from Scotland shared wonderful slides of children in their programs wearing full rain suits (imagine lightweight snow suits) and rubber boots so that every rainy day could be spent fully engaged in playing outdoors. In Scotland, the national education curriculum for children from birth through age 18 includes examples of how ALL learning concepts should happen both indoors and outside.

Jan Young of England spoke of our "ecological identity." Children need to truly love being "part of" nature (as opposed to "looking at" or "visiting" nature) to cultivate a sense of environmental awareness. She also discussed research around bringing nature inside and creating calm environments that replicate the outdoor world. Imagine children counting small rocks rather than plastic counters, or creating an alphabet chart from twigs.



PIC is among a growing movement across this country (following one that has been in place throughout the world for some time) to transform playgrounds in early childhood programs and elementary schools from barren areas of grass, asphalt, and manufactured equipment, into natural environments. There are now thousands of schools in the U.S. involved in this concept. Rather than *building* playgrounds they are *planting* them—and using the landscape and its vegetation as both the play setting and the play materials.

Attending this institute was inspirational. I had the opportunity to share what we are doing at PIC. I was reminded of the importance of moving beyond our own (and sometimes insular) world and having the opportunity to be part of something bigger; in this instance, an exciting and growing movement where PIC is on the forefront. It is a wonderfully gratifying place to be.

See more photos and read about the Children and Nature Study Group on the back page of this newsletter.

Debbie

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A Message from the Board President: Carol Lerner



The news today is full of articles about renewed interest in the importance of early childhood education in child development and happiness. I am excited about the work that the Board has undertaken over the summer to make progress on our strategic plan and ensure PIC continues to provide the highest quality of care to our little learners.

The Board conducted a retreat in the spring that provided several initiatives around PIC's strategic plan objectives of quality and diversity. We looked at area and national statistics and trends around child care best practices, including teacher professional development and compensation.

We feel that investment in our teaching staff is among the most important ways to support our children and families. To that end, PIC is actively implementing the previously laid out plan to meet the criteria for educational requirements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Additionally, PIC's recent creation of Early Learning Program Coordinators positions (held by Tamara Clark and Kharna Hicks) and the improved schedule of in-service professional development trainings, will enable us to better support and mentor teacher talents.

This work will help lead the way in elevating the respect of the early childhood teaching profession, and further ensure PIC's status as a premier provider of child-centered, family-oriented early learning and school age programs.

On the Board

Carol

We are grateful to retiring Board members: **Monica Calkins Wagner, Kristen Feemster, and Kaitlin Gurney.** Thank you for your time, talents, and dedication.

We welcome the following new members to PIC's Board of Directors, elected in May 2014: **Marjorie Arendt** is an Assistant Project Manager for INTECH Contractors + Construction Managers. Her sons Rainer and Rowan are in the After School Center at PIC. **Angela Curry** works as an in-house compliance attorney at Burlington Stores, Inc. She has two sons at PIC. Finbarr is a Peanut and Desmond is a Wild Thing. **Hien Lu** is the Associate Director of the PROMISE Center, a national VA quality improvement center. Penelope is a Rainbow and her big sister Sylvia is a PIC alumna. **Vicki McGarvey** is Vice Provost for the University College at Temple University. Vicki's daughter Aislin is in the Fireflies classroom and son Finnian is a PIC alumnus. [Learn about all the members of PIC's Board of Directors at parentinfantcenter.org.](http://parentinfantcenter.org)

After School Center Improvements

In May, PIC's After School Center's Stucco Building received much-needed renovations. With its wonderful open floor plan, it is an ideal space for after school activities including a variety of clubs, games, reading, snack, homework, computers, and performances. This school year, our older after schoolers will enjoy brand new bathrooms, floors, air-conditioning, and a new drop ceiling.

Family Book Fest is Back!

Join us on Saturday, November 22 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm at West Philadelphia's Rotunda for read-aloud stories, music, and fun activities for families. The annual Family Book Fest is free and open to the public as a way to encourage literacy and pre-literacy as a family activity. [Learn more at our website and tell your friends!](http://parentinfantcenter.org)



ArtStart 2014: An Enchanted Garden on Oct. 16



This year ArtStart will be an *Enchanted Garden* as we celebrate our children's creativity and imagination. Come out to The Collegiate Chapel of St. Andrew (next to PIC) and see it transformed into a magnificent gallery exhibiting nature-inspired work from our young artists.

Enjoy a night out with friends for art, food, and fun while you help raise money to support tuition assistance at PIC.

ArtStart is one of two fundraisers held annually to support PIC's tuition assistance fund, which was established in 1986 for families with a household income too high for public funding, but who cannot manage the full cost of child care. It is the efforts and participation of many PIC families, teachers, alumni, and friends each year

that drive the success of this annual fundraiser.

Our committee of parents has been busy planning this special evening since July. A dinner buffet is once again being generously donated by Alex Yuen, PIC friend and owner of **Beijing**. Guests will also enjoy cocktails and treats from various West Philadelphia restaurants while bidding on nearly 100 silent auction packages. Weekend getaways, tickets to cultural events, hotel stays, and day trips for the family will be available to the highest bidder.

Mark your calendars for Thursday, October 16, and watch for your invitation in the mail! Tickets are \$30 per person, and \$50 per couple.



Sonja and Lailah: The Real Value of High Quality

PIC mom Sonja Claxton is grateful for the experience her daughter Lailah has had at PIC. Like all parents, Sonja wanted to give Lailah the best start in life, but as a single mom she could not afford the cost of a high quality child care program. She has shared her story, which shows the challenges that many families with young children face today.



"I graduated in 2008, during the Great Recession, and was expecting my first child two months later. Each night, I put my baby, Lailah, to bed and stayed up for hours looking for work. I had no job prospects and decided to focus on caring for my newborn. We spent most days between the park and the library. She got her first library card at six months old, and almost every day we stopped in for new books.

"The economic strains were too much to bear for my husband, so we split and my daughter and I would soon find ourselves homeless and penniless. After a year at home, I recognized my daughter needed something more—

to socialize with other children. I enrolled her in daycare, only to hear teachers screaming at children to go to the potty and watch children propped in front of the TV."

Sonja made connections with the Early Head Start program where she was encouraged to apply for several child care subsidy programs. She remembers when she found out that Lailah would be going to PIC.

"I received an email in the summer of 2011 that Lailah had been accepted into Pre-K Counts* at the Parent-Infant Center—an email I still have to this day."

"Lailah was quiet and timid at the time, but I would soon find pictures of her in the PIC newsletter engaged in activities. She became a voracious reader. On weekends, she would gather our family together for circle time to share her favorite books. She learned about countries around the world, how to manage her emotions, and even how to count in Mandarin. She was free to explore, examine and question the world around her, and I was able to go back to work with ease knowing that she was getting the education and care she needed.

"In just a few weeks, Lailah will enter the first grade and return to PIC's After School Center. I could not be more proud or excited to see my daughter blossom—thanks in large part to high-quality pre-k and the power of readying."

70% of all 3- and 4-year-olds in PA do not have access to high-quality pre-k. As an advocate for early childhood education, Sonja volunteers with the **Pre-K for PA** campaign, a coalition backed and led by major statewide and regional educational organizations. It began in January to use the 2014 election season to promote the need for greater access to high-quality preschool. Learn more and join their campaign at prekforpa.org or find them on [facebook.com/prekforpa](https://www.facebook.com/prekforpa).

* PA Pre-K Counts provides free pre-kindergarten for at-risk children throughout the Commonwealth.