

# OSSINING CHILDREN'S CENTER

Fall 2024 Newsletter



## World Breastfeeding Awareness Support Conference

**Claudia Tillis Berk, OCC's Assistant Executive Director**, served as a panelist at the World Breastfeeding Awareness Support Conference, sponsored by Open Door Family Medical Center and held at Neighbors Link. Our Children's Center holds a Department of Health certificate, recognizing our exemplary breastfeeding care and practices. We are dedicated to supporting all parents in their feeding choices, ensuring that every family feels confident in their journey.



*OCC's Assistant Executive Director, Claudia Tillis Berk (second from left) with her fellow Breastfeeding Awareness Conference panelists. L to R: Mercedes Figueroa, MVP Healthcare; OCC's Claudia; Ana Guzman, President, Ossining Padres Hispanos; Ana Restrepo, Operations Manager, Neighbors Link; Gina Devito, WIC Program Director (Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children), Open Door Family Medical Center; Marilyn Pacheco, Director of Marketing and Community Relations, Open Door Family Medical Center.*

## From Museums to Nature Centers: A Summer of Discovery

Thanks to your generous support, our children had an unforgettable summer filled with exciting field trips! From exploring the wonders at the Natural History Museum to discovering the beauty of nature at Hunter Brook Preserve, each adventure was a chance for our kids to learn and create lasting memories. Children experienced the joy of new places and the thrill of discovering the world around them.

### Swimming in Style

Our children enjoyed refreshing days at the Ossining Aquatic Center and Stillwater Lake. A huge thank you to our community partners at the Ossining Recreation Department and to the Stillwater Lake Community Association for providing these wonderful experiences.



*Ossining Aquatic Center*



*Stillwater Lake*

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### Science Exploration

Our budding scientists were thrilled to explore the Natural History Museum and the Liberty Science Center, sparking their curiosity and a love for discovery.



Liberty Science Center



Museum of Natural History

### Animal Adventures

Our children had an amazing time discovering the wonders of the animal kingdom.



Central Park Zoo



Bronx Zoo

### Fun in the Sun

While the big kids were out and about, our tiniest tots embarked on their own delightful adventures.



*Butterfly Magic: Our infants were overjoyed to release butterflies they nurtured from caterpillars in their classroom!*



*Tiny Tots' Car Wash: Our little ones had a blast soaping up and scrubbing down their ride-on cars!*

## Melodic Adventures: Giving the Gift of Music

Thanks to the generosity of the Blair family, our school-age children recently participated in the Philharmonic Alive! program through the Westchester Philharmonic. Jim and Elaine Blair's gift memorializes their son, Jonathan Blair – an avid musician, singer and songwriter who passed away from cancer at the age of 54. The Blair Family's heartfelt gift leaves an indelible mark, nurturing and inspiring our youngsters' passion for music. These engaging workshops introduced students to different instrument families while exposing them to music from around the world. From percussion to strings, our youngsters have been immersed in a vibrant musical experience. Their smiles create their own symphony as they clap and sing along.



Designed for grades pre-k through 5<sup>th</sup>, Philharmonic Alive! brings the magic of music directly to classrooms all over Westchester. We can't wait to see what these talented musicians have in store for us next time!



## In Memoriam: Elaine Blair

We were so sad to learn that Elaine Blair, a former board member of OCC, passed away on August 11 after a long, courageous battle with leukemia. Elaine and her husband, Jim, were supporters of the Ossining Children's Center for more than 30 years. Most recently, Elaine and Jim chose to memorialize their son, Jonathan, by sponsoring the aforementioned music program for our school-age youngsters. (Jonathan was an avid musician and died in 2023.)

Elaine was an accomplished artist, graphic designer, and photographer, and became a sculptor while pursuing her MA in art at the College of New Rochelle. Her works were exhibited in a national juried show and are held in several private collections. She was a community activist, having served in leadership roles with IFCA (Interfaith Council for Action), the vestry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the Open Door Family Medical Centers, the Ossining Public Library, the PTAs of Roosevelt School and Claremont School, the Ossining School Board, and, of course, the Ossining Children's Center. A consummate hostess and an amazing cook, Elaine loved to entertain; She hosted several OCC benefit events in her home.

She is survived by her husband of 59 years, James, her daughter Juliet (David Klein), granddaughter Helena, sister Maureen Schnieder (Michael), sister-in-law Deborah Kamins (Mitchell) and many cousins, nieces and nephews.



*Elaine Blair*

## Community Reading Program Brings Joy to Our Youngsters

At OCC, we are thrilled to have a program that encourages community members to volunteer their time to read to our youngsters. The children absolutely love meeting and talking to new people.

Building children's relationships with their community is a crucial part of their holistic experience at OCC. We believe these interactions enrich the children's lives and foster a sense of belonging and connection.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all our wonderful neighbors who have come in to read to our children. A special shout-out goes to our good friend **Mirla Morrison**, who not only volunteers her time, but also helps recruit others to do the same. Her dedication and effort have been invaluable to the success of this program.

If you are interested in participating and making a difference in the lives of our children, please give us a call at 914-941-0230. We would love to have you join our community of volunteers!



## Growing Together with OCC

One thing we pride ourselves on is the rapport we build with families and the Ossining Community. The Lojanos joined our OCC family many years ago. Brian, their oldest, is a sophomore at Ossining High School. Now, over eight years later, we are honored and grateful to have the family's newest addition in our care. Nine-month-old Enrique is thriving in our infant classroom while mom and dad work with peace of mind, knowing he is with the amazing teachers who once cared for their oldest child. And it doesn't hurt to have big sister Emily and big brother Frank just a few doors down.



*Enrique, Emily and Frank*

## We love our community partners!

A few weeks ago, our little ones had a delightful surprise during a community meet and greet with Rosie, the Ossining Police Department's very own K9 Goodwill Ambassador! Rosie brought joy and laughter as she wagged her way into the hearts of our children. The kids couldn't stop smiling as they petted and played with their new furry friend. A huge thank you to the Ossining Police Department for making this special visit possible. Your support and dedication to our community mean the world to us!



*Rosie the French Bulldog*

## Nurturing Curiosity, from Early Exploration to National Recognition

From the moment children begin exploring the world around them, they exhibit curiosity, ask questions, and experiment with cause and effect. Just like scientists, they observe, hypothesize, and test their ideas. Whether they are investigating how a toy works, observing insects, or mixing colors, children engage in hands-on exploration, learning, and discovery. Their innate wonder and their drive to understand “why” and “how” mirrors the scientific process.

By encouraging children’s natural curiosity, OCC caregivers, teachers, and staff are helping to lay the foundation for critical thinking skills and lifelong learning.

**At this year’s Spring Gala, we had the pleasure of honoring the Ossining High School Science Research Program.** This recognition was driven by the remarkable achievements of two of our alumni, Anabel Reed and Shae Shandroff, who participated in the program. Both students placed among the top 300 scholars nationally in the Regeneration Science Talent Search. The Ossining Science Research Program, co-directed by Angelo Piccirillo and Valerie Holmes, has been instrumental in fostering a love for science and research. Anabel and Shae’s success is a testament to the importance of nurturing curiosity from a young age.

These high school students’ impressive accomplishments highlight the long-term impact of fostering a love for learning and exploration. The curiosity and critical thinking skills they developed as children at OCC have blossomed into a passion for scientific inquiry and discovery.

By supporting programs that encourage curiosity and hands-on learning, we are not only enriching the lives of our young children, but also paving the way for future scientists and innovators.

We are incredibly proud of our alumni and grateful to the Ossining High School Research Program for providing them with opportunities to excel. Together, we are building a community that values and nurtures the inquisitive minds of our children, ensuring they have the tools to achieve great things.



*Our infant teachers created a homemade game for our babies to match the colors and fit the balls into the circles. The activity introduced the infants to object permanence as the balls disappeared into the box only to reappear seconds later. In addition, the activity helped to develop the children’s hand-eye coordination and gross motor skills as they reached across the box to the appropriate hole.*



*OCC honored the Ossining High School Science Research Program at our annual gala in June. Science Research Program co-director Angelo Piccirillo accepted OCC’s award on behalf of the Program. Pictured here, Assemblywoman Dana Levenberg presents a citation to Mr. Piccirillo, beloved teacher and founder of the program.*

## Scholarships for OCC Alumni

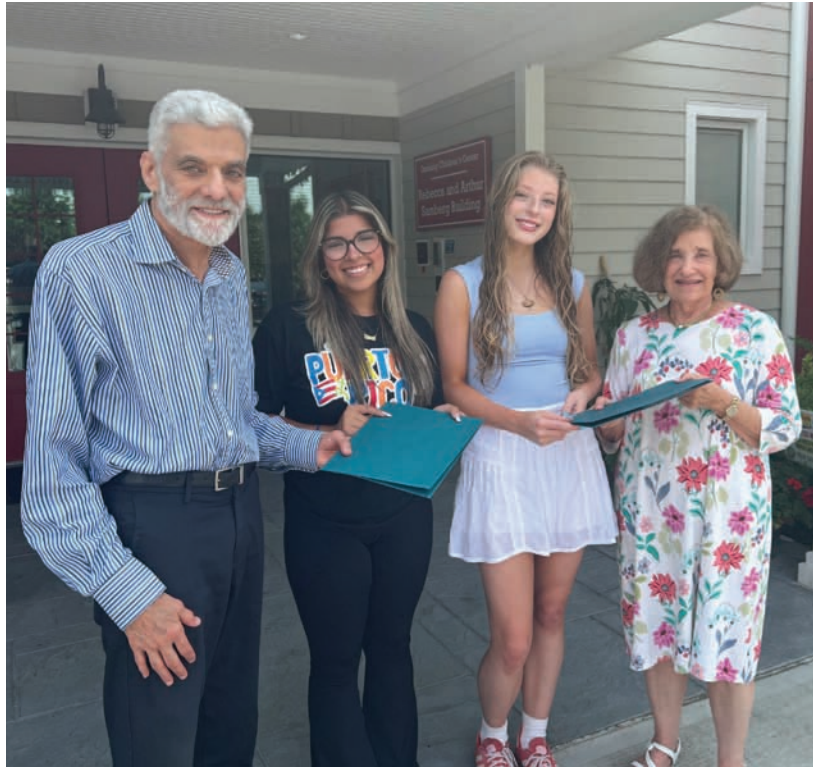
OCC has awarded college scholarships to two of our alumni for their outstanding academic performance. Jianna Vanegas and Anabel Reed, both June graduates of Ossining High School, were selected for the awards based on their perfect grade point averages.

Anabel and “Jiji” were friends from the time they were three years old through their elementary school years at the Children’s Center.

Jianna has worked after school as a classroom assistant at the Ossining Children’s Center for the past two years. She plans to study criminal justice at the University at Albany in the fall.

Anabel is an avid musician and a participant in the renowned Ossining High School Science Research Program. She was a semifinalist in Regeneron’s National Science Talent Search. She plans to attend Princeton University in the fall.

Mirla Morrison, a former Ossining Children’s Center president, and a beloved retired teacher at Ossining High School, originated the scholarship. Any high school senior who attended the Ossining Children’s Center for a minimum of one year is eligible to apply for the scholarship.



*OCC Scholarship winners Jianna Vanegas and Anabel Reed, flanked by OCC Executive Director Howard Milbert and Honorary Board member Mirla Morrison.*

## Where there’s a will, there’s a way – to leave your mark on the future.

After you have taken care of your loved ones in your will or estate plan, you can help ensure that the **Ossining Children’s Center** is here for future generations of children and families.

### Ways to give through wills and trusts:

**Outright bequest.** Leave a specific dollar amount

**Give a percentage of your estate** through your will or living trust.

**Give the remainder, or residue, of your estate** – that which remains after bequests to loved ones have been made.

**Contingent bequest.** It is advisable that every will contain a contingent bequest in case your beneficiaries don’t survive you. (Without this provision, your property might pass to beneficiaries in whom you have little or no interest.)

**No amount is too small** or too large to leave to the Ossining Children’s Center.



For more information, contact Shawn Cribari, Director of Development, 914-941-0230, ext. 313.

## Building Bonds and Making Memories at OCC!

Greetings from the OCC parent committee! Ossining Children's Center has been a "home away from home" for our kids and we love the sense of community it has provided them. As a group, we wanted to take it a step further to provide opportunities for all OCC families to connect meaningfully through various events and activities throughout the year – it can be hard making new friends as a parent! In May 2024, we had a great turnout with our "Playdate on the Playground" event, where parents chatted with one another while the kids played outside, and families had their professional photos taken for free. We look forward to another fun-filled year of bringing families together!



Moms and Dads enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with other parents, a luxury they don't have during the rushed drop-off and pick-up times during the week.



A huge thank you to Greg Perry for donating his time and talent to take professional quality family photos.

## Hope sends Charity to OCC

Charity Schultz came to intern at OCC through the Hope Volunteer Community, a ministry of Mariandale Center in Ossining. "Three-year-olds need a lot of guidance and support to help them develop social-emotional skills," says Charity, who worked in our "Young Threes" class this past academic year.

Trish Zaccardi, head teacher in the "Young Threes" class says, "Three-year-olds can be challenging to work with because they are emerging from toddlerhood to begin working on social skills they will need for the rest of their lives."

### "Another professional in the classroom."

"With Charity, it was like we had another professional in the classroom. She knew, intuitively, how to intervene and coach the children when they were having a hard time getting along."

Charity earned her BA in Early Childhood Education at Stone Hill College in Easton, Massachusetts. She wanted to do a year of service after graduating from college. The Hope Volunteer program placed Charity at OCC. It turned out to be a match made in heaven.

Charity worked daily from 9 am to 1 pm. She enjoyed being on the playground with the children – where there were lots of opportunities to practice social skills. Reading to the children was another favorite activity. Often, she would start reading to one child, and gradually other children would sit around her to listen, and eventually almost the whole class would be listening.

"It was hard to say good-bye to Charity at the end of the school year," says Trish. "But we are happy that she is pursuing a graduate degree in special education at the University of Southern Maine. She will be an awesome teacher."



L to R: Sister Connie Koch, Dominican Sister of Hope; Leeana Varga, Executive Director for Mission, Dominican Sisters of Hope; Intern Charity Schultz; Trish Zaccardi, Head Teacher, Young Three-year-olds Class.

## Back to School with OCC

We are excited to kick off the new school year with our wonderful partner, the Ossining Union Free School District. Our universal prekindergarten (UPK) classrooms follow the same curriculum as the UPK classrooms at Park School, ensuring the children will have a seamless transition to public school kindergarten.

Our UPK students just had their first day of school, and it was filled with joy and enthusiasm. Check out these adorable photos of our little ones enjoying their time on the playground and getting on the bus after a day of fun and discovery.

We look forward to a fantastic year of growth and learning!



## Ossining Children's Center



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*Executive Director*

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