

Casa Connections

Issue #2 2015-16

Building a Caring Community

By Wanda Whitehead, Head of School

Remember your first day in a new school or new classroom? What kind of thoughts went through your head? You may have wondered if you would make friends, if you would like your teacher, if you would be successful, or if others would be accepting of you or not.

We all have a strong psychological need to belong. We need to feel connected to others, to feel emotionally and physically safe, to feel capable, and to be seen for the unique individuals we are. These fundamental needs shape human motivation and have major implications for learning and development.

It is so important that our children go to school in an environment that satisfies their needs for safety, nurturing and belonging. It is essential for optimum learning. When a school meets its students' basic psychological needs, students are much more likely to be committed to the school's values and goals, which include taking responsibility for their own learning and good citizenship. By involving students and parents in maintaining a strong sense of community, the school provides opportunities for students to develop skills and habits that will serve them for a lifetime.

A tremendous body of research confirms the benefits of a strong sense of community created by teachers, parents and students in schools. (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps and Lewis, 2000). Students in such schools are more likely to be academically motivated, to demonstrate more altruism, and to develop social and emotional competence.

So, how do we build community at Casa di Mir? We use a number of community building approaches, some of which I will detail in the following paragraphs. These fall under the following broad categories:

We actively cultivate respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers and parents. The child's relationship with his or her friends, teachers, and other adults in the school are central to the child's well being and sense of safety. They are the very heart of our school!

We make it a point to create welcoming classroom/prepared environment set up for success for a huge range of unique individuals. Our classroom cultures are based on cooperation rather than competition.

Teachers work in teams and model this. We invite meaningful parent participation in reading support, the sharing of cultural diversity, and the sharing of areas of expertise. Our three-way conferences from first grade on make way for the essential teamwork of parent, teacher and student. Our morning circles acknowledge community and our afternoon circles handle the business of the classroom in which all voices matter. Our teachers make themselves available to parents around questions or concerns and the classroom is a place that parents can visit at almost any time. Students share in the care of their classroom and the school environment as do parents. Our buddy program

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How is your classroom like a family?

Avani – Primary
"We do jobs together."



Nicholas & Tanvi – LE

"We like talking with friends while working."

Zachary T. & Lavinia – UE
"We work together in groups to solve problems no matter what it takes. We have responsibilities."



8th grade girls (asked as a group)



"We are close and comfortable with each other."

How do students in your classroom help each other?

George –Primary
"I helped Ms. Tara with the Trinomial Cube."



Brianna—LE
"I help the 1st years with their work."

Heerod—Primary
"I help the teachers and Alex."



How is your classroom like a family?

Colin – MS
"We help and respect each other."



Isaiah—Primary
"I am happy when I do my Kinder work."

How do students in your classroom help each other?

Danny—Primary
"I help to clean the whole classroom!"



Adi – LE
"I like to help with math, creative writing, and skyscrapers."

Nathan – LE
"I help to sort the supplies in the supply cabinets."



8th grade girls (asked as a group)
"We answer questions that our peers might feel more comfortable asking us rather than the teachers. We give each other perspective."

Colin—MS
"We give moral support, and help with tough subjects such as math."



Explore. Learn. Lead.

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encourages connections among students at different levels. Our sing-a-longs bring all the students and parents who can attend together for the celebration of song and community.

We emphasize common purposes and ideals. You know this as "character development" or "values education." When everyone shares an understanding of the schools values, this shapes daily interactions. Each classroom establishes a Code of Living, a set of values which guide their choices of behavior. The practice of mindfulness and centering encourages a focus on these values throughout each day. Our practices around our common values, positive character traits, and compassionate communication are the foundation of our work in building community. This common language creates a deeper understanding of our connections and supports positive problem solving.

We provide students regular opportunities for service and cooperation. These activities encourage our students to think beyond their selves and their immediate school environment, promote empathy, global understanding and citizenship.

Because students in a Montessori classroom are encouraged to work with each other, students find many ways of helping and supporting each other. The third year in the three year cycles, provides additional opportunity to show leadership by providing through example strong work ethic and proactive choice-making around learning and conflict resolution. Older students can give lessons to younger students modeling the role of a teacher or guide.

Students are involved in tasks to support the school- doing dishes, taking out recycling, composting- as well as developing projects for our community beyond Casa. Examples of these outreach projects are the third year food drive and the sixth year Service Learning Projects. Each 6th year Service Learning Project is on a topic of personal interest or concern that he/she feels passionate about. It becomes a year-long study with community service experience required. Our Middle School students help maintain the urban farm, Veggielution and attend the Montessori Model UN where they represent the needs of different nations after researching the specific issues that the country faces.

We support our parents in building connections with each other and provide you opportunities for service and cooperation in the Casa community. We adults benefit from the social opportunities in the child's school and can find support in each other in the extraordinary job of parenting.

Our community activities such as our picnics, Grandparents Day, our Winter Holiday gathering, many student events and Family Fun Night bring us all together. We provide parenting nights with guest speakers who can give us knowledge about the developing child and insight into positive practices of parenting that we want to learn and implement. Sharing about our Montessori practices allows parents an inside view into what makes Casa unique. Parents enjoy participating in our Kids Night Outs, driving on field trips, finding many ways to interact with students, and supporting our staff.

I hope that you experience the elements of what makes the Casa Community a strong, welcoming learning environment for your child as well as for yourself!

Grandfriends Day 2015

By Kathy Cordova, Development Director

Tuesday November 24th marked Casa di Mir's 4th annual Grandfriends Day. While the weather was gloomy, the day was very cheery with more than 68 grandfriends. Our elementary and Middle School students performed musical numbers including *Perdido*, *Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar* and *Family Is*. One of the favorite parts of the day was the opportunity for the students to show the grandparents and guests their classrooms and school work. After sharing lunch, everyone was ready to go home in preparation of celebrating Thanksgiving. At this time of year, our hearts are filled with gratitude, for love and experiences shared and passed down between generations.



3rd Year's Second Harvest Food Drive, Making a Difference in Our Community

By Kristin Schwartz, Resource Teacher, LE2 Teacher Assistant, LE Extended care

Of all the things we could possibly hope for is to see our children grow to be responsible, courageous, confident, and compassionate citizens of the world. We hope for our youth to mature into mindful, self-aware adults, who are capable of recognizing potential for personal, community and global change. We wish for every child to be their personal best in whatever they choose to do, and become strong leaders so their actions inspire a more peaceful world.

Our students are learning that we don't have to be born "perfect" or start out as super heroes. Making a difference requires only the desire to make something a little better.

So where does this begin? One place is Casa, where we learn by doing. After discovering that 1 in 10 people in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties depend on food from the Second Harvest Food Bank, the 3rd year students were motivated to help their community. With giving hearts, in late October the 3rd years planned, marketed, and managed a two-week long food drive. They set a goal to collect 450 pounds of donations from the Casa community with great results.

"We raised almost 100 pounds over our goal of 450 pounds! I believe this is because we worked as a team. Not to mention we had fun!" said 3rd year student, Emily Nagao. This kind of momentum is infectious! The students celebrated with smiles, high fives, and finished with a pressing drive to continue working on service projects in the future.

Helping others helps counter the strain of the world's unrest with hopeful activities. Children embrace attitudes, values, and develop formative leadership skills as they do "good." The hope is that these values and skills will guide their behaviors and choices going forward.



Daily acts of giving can be shown anywhere, anytime and at any age.

CDM Board Retreat Summary 12-2015

By Jessica Lee-Messer, Casa di Mir Board Vice President

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations." –

George Bernard Shaw

Thus inspired by facilitator Sharon Clark, Ph.D., the Casa Board of Directors met on Saturday, December 5, 2015 for their annual board retreat and training. Our topic for the day was how we make decisions together, and we worked with Dr. Clark to learn a specific model for doing so, from the initial commitment to solve a problem together, to gathering necessary information, to developing and evaluating options, to reaching agreed-upon solutions.

We discussed the importance of listening to one another with empathy and attention, as well as the importance of letting go of any hindrances to reaching solutions, such as being apathetic, not being open to the ideas or opinions of others, or feeling a need to just get the process over with.

As we move forward in the development of our next Strategic Plan, we are hopeful that these processes and skills will help us to work together even better for our community.

2015-2016

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Meet Barbara Roether, Casa Middle School Teacher

By Barbara Roether

Books and literature have always been at the center of my life. As a child I spent days and weeks enmeshed in the worlds of *Wind in the Willows*, *the Borrowers*, *Oliver Twist*. As a teenager I was torn between wanting to live like Thoreau in Walden, or like Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*. In my twenties poetry (Whitman, Stevens, Rumi) became the vehicle of understanding the mysteries of the world. I began publishing poems and stories in my 20's and this month I am celebrating the publication of my first novel *This Earth You'll Come Back To* (McPherson & Co. Publishers) available at your local independent bookstore or on Amazon. When not working as a teacher I work as a writer. I also spend some time dancing, running on the beach by my house and watching my very handsome son play soccer.



Winter Fun Run, Success!

By Jillian Tkach, Casa PE teacher

On Wednesday, December 9th we held our 4th annual Winter Fun Run! The Winter Fun Run is a practice run for the Jog-A-Thon in April. All of the students set individual lap goals in their PE class prior to the run. Many of the students challenged their goals achieved in past fun runs and others set brand new goals. Everyone did wonderfully! Students ran together with friends and parents ran with their students; all encouraging one-another. The lap trackers were seen at the bleachers encouraging all of the students to strive for even more tally marks; while other teachers and parents were seen around the track cheering as students passed. It was great to see everyone out at the track working together and striving for healthy bodies!

The students goals combined set a total goal of 1,389 laps.

All of the students together did 1,512 laps! That is 378 miles!

Thank you to all of the parents and family members that came out to help support the students! Together, let's strive for another great run at the track in April!



Primary Halloween Celebration and the Great Masquerade

By Wanda Whitehead, Head of School

We want to thank so many of you for joining us for the Great Masquerade and the Primary Halloween celebration. It is one of our favorite days of the year! How did The Great Masquerade become a tradition at Casa di Mir? Why do we celebrate Halloween in this way?

In the early days of Casa, elementary staff and parents imagined that a Masquerade would be a perfect event for Halloween. It allows us to focus on real heroes and people our students could admire. It opens the way for simple research and writing. And, most importantly, it is a venue for public speaking. The Great Masquerade aligns easily with the values we express in our school Mission Statement. Important people and their real examples of empowerment are our focus. So how did this translate to the Primary program? The magic, mystery and beauty of the natural world calls to all children. We know this age group has such a fascination with animals, plants, water, oceans, weather and the Earth itself. The natural world has given humanity inspiration for inventions, medicines, not to mention supporting our life on Earth. What a great thing on which to focus our children's attentions. Our cultural studies and the diversity of our community lends itself to traditional costumes from around the world. By focusing on these areas, we continue to stay aligned with our values and mission. Empowerment comes from our connection to life on this planet. We want our children to find that connection in their studies and preparation for Halloween and the Great Masquerade.



Re-enrollment Process

By Tara Padget, Admissions Director

In January you will receive materials related to the re-enrollment of your child for the 2016/17 school year. It is so important that the school receives a timely response from you, including the signing of the Enrollment Agreement and the payment of the enrollment fee, which is applied to next year's tuition. As we plan for the next school year, our priority is attracting and retaining talented faculty and staff, and you make that possible by meeting the enrollment deadline. This allows you to secure your child's spot and it allows the school to budget and plan effectively for the next school year. Please look for more information in mid-January. If you have questions about re-enrollment, please contact the school office.

Casa di Mir Community Newsletter

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Mission Statement:

Our mission is to provide an authentic Montessori education in a nurturing school community. With a strong emphasis on academics, creativity and peace education, we provide a learning experience that promotes confidence, individual responsibility, and a strong sense of global citizenship.

Non-Discrimination Statement:

Casa di Mir values a diverse community and does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, national or ethnic origin.

