

FROM THE DIRECTOR
WHAT MAKES ROOTS & WINGS DIFFERENT?

Every early childhood program wants to stand out as an exceptional program and Roots & Wings is no different. Rather than trying to compare apples to oranges we chose rather to explain what we are, and what we are not and let the reader use their own judgment. We hope that if you are searching for a program that you do set up a time to come and visit. Words do not always capture the emotional impact of a first-hand visit and tends to clarify any concerns and questions. We encourage you to bring your child along. Their impressions will be valuable.

Roots & Wings Child Development is a non-profit early childhood program serving children ages 3-5 with an occasional 6 year old. Non-profit simply means that we have jumped through a few hoops that allow us to seek funding from different sources to help support the school. We must still meet the same financial obligations as other businesses do. We are able to offer tuition assistance, provide on-going staff development and training, and find assistance with certain projects. We also work with different agencies around town helping to serve different populations of children.

Roots & Wings was founded over 13 years ago in the Rogue Valley by a group of concerned parents looking for a quality early childhood classroom experience. The philosophy is based on decades of research and evidence regarding how children grow and develop understanding by making important connections socially, emotionally and intellectually. Rebecca Tree, the founding Director, has over 20 years in the early childhood field with a bachelor's degree specific to early childhood education. She is dedicated to providing a well-rounded school experience for young children.

Roots & Wings is not driven by current educational trends or political pressure which leads many preschool programs to abandon what they know about very young children and utilize unproven and unchallenged methods and materials. Many of these 'new' educational systems appear colorful and fun initially but are nothing more than teacher-directed, performance oriented activities that do nothing to engage the child to think or make any meaningful connections. Although these trends are defended by well-meaning individuals whose intention it is to prepare children for the future, their reasoning is deplete of the deeper understanding of how young children grow and learn. Our nation has become pre-occupied with the future at the expense of children in the present. Roots & Wings is dedicated with 'staying the course' of what we know and understand to be good and healthy for young, developing children. Our staff is continually reflecting and learning on their own and as a team as to what is best for 'our kids' looking at each child individually and as a social being. Our humanistic approach honors and respects this very important time in a young child's life.

We understand that young children, especially between the ages of 2-8, are motivated in a very unique way to explore and discover. At this age children are full of wonder and curiosity. They seem to get into everything, ask a billion questions, and always want to know 'why'. There is a very good reason...they are wired to do that! It can be quite maddening for adults whose brains have matured and often cannot remember being that young. The curriculum, the classroom and outside environment, must reflect this difference. It must reflect back to the child that it is OK to explore, to ask a billion questions, to be actively engaged in activities that provide information and experiences to reflect on. When we coerce children to learn something, the element of interest is stolen from them and they will not make the effort to pursue knowledge on their own. Children are naturally motivated learners who, when supported by understanding adults in a carefully planned environment, will take every opportunity to figure things out on their own, build competence, and pursue their own interests and curiosities. We

must provide for them the basics which are; Wonder, Discovery, and Connections (human and environmental).

It may surprise you that we do not express the basics as Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Well, somewhere a long time ago someone made up a song about “ ‘readin’, writin’, and ‘rithmetic’ “ and I guess everyone thought that was the truth. But it was just a song! Those are the **by-products** of having been immersed in the basics of wonder, discovery and connections at the appropriate time in one’s development. Reading, writing and arithmetic are not the basics for a young child, especially before 7-8 years old, and especially if the instruction is teacher-directed and authoritarian. In the early years, children are in one of the most creative stages that they will ever be in...ever. It is at this stage, before age 8, that they will draw, sing, make up stories, move in lively and animated ways, and want to try new things uninhibited. If children have access to meaningful experiences then literacy skills, number skills and the discovery of the world of nature and of ones self emerge, **but only if they have had access to an environment and supportive adults that encourage self-initiated exploration and develops a foundation for life-long learning.**

We do not argue that children can learn high-level, performance based academic skills at a young age as is currently being stressed in many programs. However, evidence and research continues to shown us that this is not the time for this level of instruction. Roots & Wings develops its curriculum and prepares its environment in a careful manner that supports young children by providing activities, materials and tools that children can first, make choices over, determine their own creation, and find great satisfaction in their personal efforts. The curriculum which is developed because of the children, not in spite of the children builds awareness of literacy, number and science, and human relationships.

The Roots & Wings staff is dedicated to integrating our knowledge and experience into our classroom practice with children and professional development. By doing so we hope to provide children, first, the respect they deserve, and second, worthwhile experiences that provide meaning, self-awareness, and a foundation to build upon throughout their lives.

As this generation of children take their place as community leaders, they will at some time, and I hope they will, look over the landscape of their lives. How many will find themselves dissatisfied or without direction, because they were never allowed as children to pursue their dreams, interests and individual talents. I wonder. I truly, truly wonder.

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