



## Making a Difference for Children & Families in Niagara

NEWSLETTER - Winter 2011



## OEYC – Part of Our Daily Lives

Over the years, we have kept coming in regularly, because we both really enjoy and learn a lot from your program. If we hadn't taken part in so many toddler and pre-school classes,

Faith LOVES coming to the Early Years! I love playing with her, watching her make friends, talking with other adults, and having such easy and comfortable access to information and resources. You have given us support, fun, education, and most of all the personal investment of the staff.

It really does take a community to raise a child...and I am VERY grateful that you have been part of the community that is raising Faith. We are so much better off that I am truly going to miss spending time at the OEYC in Smithville. You have been such a big part of our lives for years now, and will always be remembered as the people who got Faith and I off to such a great start together.

THANK YOU!

*Amanda*

*Written to Karen & Nancy, June 2011*

Ontario Early Years has been a very big part of life for Faith and I. We started coming when Faith was just 3 months old, and now she is a "big" girl going off to school.

My first experience was baby massage and then infant movement. Not only did I learn songs, games and massage techniques that Faith enjoyed, it gave me time with other adults, and a friendly, safe place to ask my million and one questions about baby and motherhood.

I doubt we would have jello-painted, made foot-murals, explored guck, or made a cardboard "treehouse". Faith tried out many fantastic activities at your site and enjoyed them so much that we went home and tried them there too. You have given us so many different experiences to share, that not only prepared her for school, but also made our lives together much more fun and engaging.

## What is an OEYC?

Ontario Early Years Centres are places where:

*Children (birth to age 6)*

- Play and learn with their parents / caregivers
- Explore and experience activities to stimulate brain development
- Interact and play with other children

Everyone welcome

Variety of locations – Flexible hours

NO fees for programs

*Parents, Grandparents, Caregivers*

- Participate in activities with the children in your care and enjoy play-based early learning together
- Drop in with your child to participate in play-based learning activities
- Interact with your child and program staff
- Attend workshops and learn parenting tips
- Understand child development
- Receive answers to questions
- Obtain support and guidance related to concerns
- Meet other parents and caregivers
- Borrow resources from the Resource Room / Library
- Learn about other early years services

# Playful Learning

Sometimes, in our busy lives of work and extracurricular activities children do not have time for “free play”. The value of play is often questioned. Are the children just playing?

Recent research suggests that children are not getting enough play. In the last two decades children have lost 8 hours of free play per week (Greater Good, Elkind, 2008). Everyone needs to value the importance of children playing with blocks, painting a picture, and playing make believe. During the experiences of play, children are learning to try new things, problem solve, invent, create, test ideas and explore. Play is not wasted time but rather time spent building new knowledge from previous experience (Thinking It Through, ETFO, 2010).

The challenge is to strike a balance between the desire to enrich our children’s lives and the need to foster play as a foundation for learning skills like collaboration, communication, content, critical thinking, creative innovation and confidence. (Hirsh-Paskek, 2011). The goal here is to create an environment of child-directed activity that mobilizes the child’s interests and imagination (Every Child, Every Opportunity, Shanker p. iii).

What do we mean by playful learning? It includes time for free and guided play. Guided play is a planned play environment, enriched with objects/toys that provide experiential learning opportunities, infused with curricular content (Berger, 2008).

Ryan, Jake and Susan begin to build a village with the blocks. They collect materials to add to their village such as cars, people from the doll house, hard hats and play food from the dramatic play area. The play continues and they take on various roles in the village such

as the construction worker, the police officer, and the grocery store owner. A parent joins in the play, helps with the props, and invites the children to share with others. Later in the morning when the village play was complete Ryan says “Let’s make a space ship the next time we are here!”

Although the children, the time and the materials may change, this type of play could happen during any play session. Clearly the children in the above scenario are considering scientific principles of constructing the buildings, roads and bridges. They are using their imagination and discovering the village jobs through role playing. The children are focused and engaged.

OEYC staff utilizes a variety of instructional methods, strategies and materials to meet the needs, interests and capabilities of the children. We know that children learn best with support from a knowledgeable and trusted adult who is actively involved and interested in the play. “The level of children’s play rises when adults play with them. The variety of play

children engage in also increases when adults join in” (Hirsh-Pasek., Einstein Never Used Flash Cards, 2003).

Within Niagara, as part of our OEYC effective practices, we recognize “children’s play supports their learning and adults have a key role in children’s play” (OEYC Guide of Effective Practices, p. 20). The OEYC staff establishes an invitational learning environment of modeling and supporting the play. As well, our goal is to engage and empower parents in their parenting role.

The OEYCs of Niagara have aligned our programs with the Ontario Early Learning Framework. It is an excellent tool to demonstrate the developmental continuum and explain the benefits of play-based learning with parents.

Come and visit your local Ontario Early Years Centre and take time to play. The benefits will last a lifetime!

Submitted By Donna Dalglish  
Coordinator,  
OEYC Niagara Falls



# Praise for the OEYC

*Written to: Hon. Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services and Hon. Jim Bradley, M.P.P. (St. Catharines)*

I am writing to inform you of the wonderful programs put on by staff at the St. Catharines and Thorold Ontario Early Years Centres. My daughter, Hope, and I have thoroughly enjoyed approximately 12 organized workshops (ranging from Infant Massage, to homemade baby food, Wee Wiggles, and Infant Mother Goose) and regular open swim sessions since her birth in September.

As a high school educator, I have been constantly impressed with the range of curriculum offered and

passion of each staff member at both the main and mobile sites. I have chosen not to single out any one staff member as they have all been outstanding. We have utilized resources, enjoyed interacting with others, and learned a great deal about child development over the past nine months. The breadth of program (such as health and nutrition, language development, movement, arts and crafts, music and rhymes) offered for infants must be commended.

The Ontario government and YMCA of Niagara should be extremely proud of this program and their superb staff. It is wonderful to know that government resources are dedicated toward child development by providing such a diverse range of programs.

My daughter and I look forward to further workshops in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,  
Kimberly Becken

## Working Together with Community Partners to Serve ALL Families

The tremendous success of the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program's Healthy from the Start depends greatly on our partnership with Ontario Early Years Centres.

A baby is dependant on its mother for its well being both before and after birth. Our participants need information on ways of having a healthy birth outcome. Healthy eating is a fundamental requirement for a healthy pregnancy. Ontario Early Years Centres provide a welcoming, informative and supportive place for expectant moms (and families) to attend each week and connect to services and resources that are available to them in the community, as well as having social and emotional support.

We know that parents, families, communities, business service clubs, health professionals and government, working together in a collaborative fashion can be expected to make a greater difference than any single group working alone. Together, we can make that difference!



*Susan Kirkham, CPNP  
Coordinator  
Healthy from the Start*



A quality OEYC responds to the needs of the community in which it is located. It establishes and maintains links with various community agencies working collaboratively towards an integrated system.

*- The OEYC Provincial Network Guide of Effective Practices, 2011, page 7*

## Welland/Pelham Family Literacy Day

The Welland/Pelham Family Literacy Event was held October 1, 2011, at the Welland OEYC. This free community event is an opportunity for children 0-8 and their families to spend time together and have fun with a variety of activities focussed on literacy.

Our featured guest - Ronald McDonald - read the 2010 Regional Chair Early Years Niagara Literacy Award-winning book "Rhyming Dust Bunnies", as well as the French book "Le chef d'oeuvre de Chester" to an excited group of children, parents and grandparents.



The children and families were able to join Ronald when he stopped at the voting station for the new 2011 book set and everyone cheered when he placed his vote for his favorite book!

Ronald worked with the children at each of the numerous literacy activities, chatting with the children about their creative work. Before leaving, he reminded everyone to vote and to come back next year.

## Upcoming Events at OEYCs in Niagara

### Port Colborne/Wainfleet Family Literacy Event

Saturday, February 4, 2012, 12-4 pm  
At the Centre for Community Living in Port Colborne

Theme: "Out of this World and Into this Place"

### St. Catharines Family Literacy Event

Saturday, April 14, 2012, 9:30am - 12:30pm

At the Walker Family YMCA

Theme: "Tune in to Literacy"

## 2012 Marks the 10th Anniversary of our Niagara OEYCS!

### Regional OEYC Anniversary Celebration

April 28th, 2012 at the MacBain Community Centre, Niagara Falls

Free entertainment, storytelling, creative activities and games, special guest and presentations, refreshments

Contact your local OEYC for further information about other events and open houses in honour of our anniversary.

[www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca)

**OEYC Erie Lincoln**  
Serving: Port Colborne,  
Fort Erie, Smithville and  
Beamsville



**Port Cares**  
92 Charlotte Street  
Port Colborne L3K 3E1  
Tel: 905 834 9071  
Toll Free: 1 866 933 9633  
[www.portcares.ca/  
ontarioearlyyears.html](http://www.portcares.ca/ontarioearlyyears.html)

**OEYC Niagara Centre**  
Serving: Welland,  
Pelham and Grimsby



**Family and Children Services**  
12 Young Street  
Welland L3B 4C4  
Tel: 905 734 3563  
Toll Free: 1 800 937 7731 x 2217  
[www.facsniagara.on.ca/  
community\\_programs/  
ontario\\_early\\_years.html](http://www.facsniagara.on.ca/community_programs/ontario_early_years.html)

**OEYC Niagara Falls**  
Serving: Niagara Falls  
and Niagara-on-the-Lake



**Niagara Catholic District  
School Board**  
2999 Dorchester Road  
Niagara Falls L2J 4J4  
Tel: 905 357 2398  
Like our Facebook page @  
Ontario Early Years Centre  
Niagara Falls

**OEYC St. Catharines**  
Serving: St. Catharines  
and Thorold



YMCA  
We build strong kids,  
strong families, strong communities.

**YMCA of Niagara**  
25 YMCA Drive  
St. Catharines L2N 7P9  
Tel: 905 938 9392  
Alt: 905 934 9622 x 265  
[www.ymcaofniagara.org/  
childcare\\_childrens\\_programs-  
early\\_years\\_centres.php](http://www.ymcaofniagara.org/childcare_childrens_programs-early_years_centres.php)