



May 2011

In This Issue:

Celebrating Growth 1
 Reflections on Growth 2
 The Cardinal Sings 2
 COMET® Reports 3
 Bringing the Lessons Home 4, 5
 Primary Project Restored
 in the NYS Budget6
 Nationally Certified Schools6

From the Playroom

Celebrating Growth

Spring has arrived! It is a time of growth, when we witness flowers sprouting once again, windows remaining open for longer periods of time, and people—both young and old—spending more time outside. Spring is a time of renewal. So with that framework, please enjoy this edition of *From the Playroom* as we celebrate growth. We often think of growth in children, and yet there is also growth in adults and in our teams and services.

Enjoy the words of three seasoned Child Associates from Boys Town South Florida elementary schools as they share how Primary Project has deepened their professional lives. Additionally, enjoy a school social worker’s first year reflections as a Primary Project supervisor. Certainly, helping children through play, their natural way of communicating, benefits adults as well.

Our parent handout serves as a wonderful reminder to get outside and play! The Cardinal Sings message from Deborah Johnson reminds us that at times growing, while well worth it, can sometimes be difficult.

And finally, enjoy new growth possibilities in Primary Project through reports and opportunities for continuous learning with COMET®, our web-based data collection and management system. Your evaluation reports have never been easier.



Reflections on Growth

Growth can be measured in many different ways. I have always said that in every aspect of life, there is something new to learn and there is always room for improvement. We work so diligently to embrace and support the growth of our students that sometimes we need to “get back to basics” and use the art of reflection as a tool for ourselves. Take the time to look inside yourself and see your own personal potential for growth. As a Child Associate, every day is an opportunity to learn something new, experience something new, appreciate someone, and grow. I have had the opportunity over the years to experience growth on a personal level that, had I not been fortunate enough to be a member of the Primary Project family, I would otherwise not have had. Each child that enters the playroom brings with them their own version of their life, complete with ups and downs, family, and friends. If you are lucky enough to be invited to share in their life through play, you cannot help but feel personal growth as the child touches your heart. Since the role of Child Associate has graced my life, I have learned to listen not only with my ears, but with my eyes and my heart as well. With the Primary Project values as a driving force behind my work, here in sunny South Florida, “My future’s so bright...I gotta wear shades!” Thanks Primary Project...from the bottom of my heart.

*—Stephanie Schmidt, Child Associate
Boys Town South Florida at Golden Grove Elementary*



Primary Project is a phenomenal program and I wish it had been available when I was in school, as it would have made a tremendous impact in my life. As it is, on a personal level as I work with students, I have learned to be a better listener and to be more aware of feelings. I feel needed when giving that one-on-one attention that so many children crave. There’s a sense of trust and understanding as a bond begins to develop. The children are excited when the time comes to visit the playroom. Some of the children have literally thanked me for selecting them for the program. It’s a great feeling!

On a professional level, Primary Project has built and strengthened relationships between the Child Associate, administration, teachers, and parents. Overall, everyone is very supportive of the program and see the impact it has on students. Teachers brag about how students have improved socially, emotionally, and academically. Parents tell me how their son or daughter now shares with them about their school day and their time in the playroom, whereas before they wouldn’t say much. All in all, it’s a team effort in helping children and making the program a success. I feel proud to be part of this awesome program!

*—Maura Hernandez, Child Associate
Boys Town South Florida at Egret Lake Elementary*

The Cardinal Sings



Growing is hard work. I remember a good friend of mine once telling me that all her son, Brian, seemed to want to do is sleep. When he got home from school, he would sleep, wake up, have dinner, do homework, and then go back to sleep. She was so worried, that she called Brian’s doctor. The doctor said, “Brian’s tired. His body is growing, he needs to rest.” Brian grew a lot that spring, maybe even six inches. His body was tired and growing was hard work.

Growing can be fun too. Growing takes place when one plays. That’s why its important to play more. Children grow when they play. Daniel Elkonin, a psychologist who studied play (wouldn’t you like that job?!), identified four ways that children grow and develop through play.

1) Motivation. Through play, children develop systems of short and long term goals. “If I do this, then this happens, which leads to this.” We know children don’t use these exact words, but we see it in their play. They stop and start, returning to the old to make it new. A block becomes house, which becomes a building, which becomes a neighborhood, which becomes a town. Perseverance!

2) Empathy or cognitive decentering. When I am the chef, I learn to cook and serve others. When I am invited to a tea party, I learn what it is like to be served. Today, I will use a different puppet than yesterday, and eventually understand different points of view. Perspective!

3) Mental representations. A toy block becomes a car and can zoom along a pretend street. Something abstract becomes real and imagination grows. What wasn’t, is. What is, will be. Pretending and imagining!

4) Intentional or deliberate. Play has rules, often unspoken. We learn that physical movement can replicate what we see. Arms are outstretched and we become a bird. We interact with others and learn the dance of social interaction. This grows into later relationships and memories. The world!

Yes, pretend play helps both children and adults grow. We may call it role playing. We may call it brainstorming. We may play Sudoku Puzzles to keep our brains growing.

Whatever we call it, let’s play and grow.

*—Deborah Johnson
Primary Project, National Director*



I have been a Primary Project Child Associate for 11 years. This program has not only helped students grow, but it has helped me grow as well. My belief in Primary Project is so strong and powerful that I want to tell the entire world about it! The program is so successful and has proven itself time and time again. Past students stop by the playroom and state how they would love to be in the program again. Just yesterday, a student with whom I had worked with three years ago came by and raved about how much she loved her time in the playroom and that I was her best friend. Another student swings by everyday and gives me a hug— sometimes she brings her twin sister, who gives me a hug as well. It is heartwarming that students become so attached and want to stay connected.

There is no other job that I know of that gives you the love and emotional high I receive from my work in Primary Project.

I have learned to face challenges on my own and my fear of overcoming obstacles has escaped me. I never used to speak up for myself or be assertive. Now, I'm not afraid to say what needs to be expressed. I feel much more confident and at ease in all that I do. Thanks to Primary Project, I have grown tremendously in many ways.

*—Barbara Ryder, Child Associate
Boys Town South Florida at Jupiter Elementary*



I have been a social worker with the Rochester City School District for 11 years. A move to a new building this past September introduced me to Primary Project. From the moment I learned about Primary Project and everything it had to offer, I felt it was the perfect answer for something new in my career. The workshops helped me connect with other Primary Project staff who would soon be my colleagues. Their support, along with the invaluable guidance from Children's Institute, helped me grow as a supervisor and professional much faster than I had imagined. The conferences throughout the year went hand-in-hand with what we were experiencing in supervision and with other staff. The mentoring, coaching, and support I received as a first year supervisor has relieved any stress or pressure I may have felt. I feel proud to be a part of this program.

*—Anissa Libardi, School Social Worker
Henry Hudson School #28*

*"We don't stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing."*

—George Bernard Shaw



As the end of the school year approaches, your team may already be asking, "Has Primary Project had an impact on children who have participated?" There's no better time than now to answer that question. For programs using COMET®, the sky is the limit for the types of reports that can be accessed once all your data have been submitted.

The choice is yours in whether you view demographics as pie charts or bar graphs. Look to see whether program students represent the larger school population with data collected from the Background Information Form.

Choose to view a side-by-side comparison of answers provided from the Teacher-Child Rating Scale, from pre to post. Demonstrate growth reported through the Professional Summary Report at an individual level or for a group of students specifically selected by you.

Quickly peek at the total number of sessions students attended over the course of the year with results from the Child Log. Select a range of time and which students to include.

None of these seem to fit your reporting needs? Download your data using a grid report, save it as an Microsoft Excel document, and create your own custom reports.

No matter how you decide to use your data, you can be confident in knowing that your data will help shape decisions about the program.

With help from COMET, adhering to three of the six key structural components—early screening and selection, ongoing program evaluation, and integration into the school—has been made easier. Screening and selection processes happen instantaneously and flexible reporting features allow for continual program evaluation and the ability to share data with stakeholders.

Let COMET take some of the weight off of your shoulders so that you can focus on what's important—strengthening the social and emotional health of children!

Please contact your Children's Institute account manager for COMET support or for more information, visit us online at www.childrensinstitute.net/comet.

Bringing the Lessons Home

Benefits of outdoor play...

Children's desire to play outdoors greatly increases with the arrival of warmer weather and longer days. I don't think it is any surprise to adults that the benefits of children playing outdoors are great. We know all too well that indoor play, although fun, is limited.

Benefits of outdoor play are both physical and emotional. Physically, benefits of outdoor play are building strength, endurance, and fine tuning coordination. Outdoor play time also allows children to move freely and make noise, forms of self-expression that are often restricted indoors. Emotionally, playing outside helps reduce children's stress level. Children express and work out every day experiences during unstructured and free play. Of course, outdoor play for many brings along safety concerns, so closer parental supervision may be required.


This spring and summer think of ways you can increase your child's outdoor play time. Follow these helpful tips:

- Walk to your favorite playground and enjoy lunch or a snack at the park. While there you can explore your surroundings.
- Plant something together this spring (vegetable plant, flowers, or a tree) and continue to water and take care of it throughout the summer. Or, work in the yard together picking up sticks or digging in the dirt.
- Toss a ball back and forth with each other. Or, partake in one of many outdoor games.
- Take part in community recreation center and activities that are offered.
- Go for a walk in your neighborhood. Or, drive to an area park with trails and go for a hike.

Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.



Playing outside helps reduce children's stress level.



Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Beneficios del juego al aire libre...

El deseo de los niños de jugar al aire libre aumenta grandemente con la llegada del clima más cálido y los días más largos. No creo que los adultos se sorprenderán al saber que los beneficios del juego al aire libre son muchos. Todos sabemos que el juego dentro, aunque sea divertido, es limitado.

Los beneficios del juego al aire libre son físicos y emocionales. Físicamente, los beneficios del juego al aire libre son el desarrollo de fuerza, resistencia y afinar la coordinación. El tiempo de juego al aire libre permite a los niños moverse libremente y hacer ruido, formas de expresión propia que a menudo se restringen en el juego dentro. Emocionalmente, el juego al aire libre ayuda a reducir el nivel de estrés en los niños. Los niños expresan y resuelven las experiencias de la vida diaria durante el juego libre, no estructurado. Desde luego, el juego al aire libre presenta preocupaciones respecto a la seguridad para muchos, y por eso se podría necesitar que los padres supervisaran más de cerca.

Esta primavera y verano, piense acerca de las maneras como puede aumentar el tiempo de juego al aire libre de su niño(a). Siga estos consejitos útiles:

- Camine hasta su área de juego favorita y disfrute de un almuerzo o merienda en el parque. Mientras está allí, usted puede explorar los alrededores.
- Planten algo juntos esta primavera (planta de vegetales, flores o un árbol) y siga regándole agua y cuidando de esto durante el verano. O, trabajen en el patio juntos recogiendo astillas o cavando en la tierra.
- Tiren una pelota uno al otro repetidamente. O, participen en uno de los muchos juegos al aire libre.
- Tome parte en el centro de recreación de la comunidad y de las actividades que ofrece.
- Camine por su vecindario. O, vaya en auto hasta un parque del área que tenga sendas para caminar y haga una caminata.

Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.

El juego al aire libre ayuda a reducir el nivel de estrés en los niños.



Thank You!

Primary Project Restored in the NYS Budget

Thank you to our friends and elected officials who have been working with us to reinstate Primary Project in the New York State 2011-2012 Budget. **Your efforts have resulted in full restoration of funding for Primary Project throughout the state.** Currently, over 3,000 New York Children in 140 schools benefit from the program, which provides needed early intervention services to children and saves taxpayers dollars by reducing the need for costly remediation services. Primary Project is very much part of the solution for an economically healthy and viable New York.

Congratulations...

Nationally Certified Schools

Egret Lake Elementary School
West Palm Beach, Florida

Golden Grove Community Elementary School
West Palm Beach, Florida

Jupiter Elementary School
Jupiter, Florida

Lantana Elementary School
Lantana, Florida

Seminole Trails Elementary School
West Palm Beach, Florida

South Olive Elementary School
West Palm Beach, Florida

Westmoreland Elementary School
Westmoreland, New York

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