

# CHILD LEARNING CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

April 2007

## Foundations Support the Child Learning Center

The Child Learning Center is most grateful for the following foundations for their support of CLC programs in 2006-2007.

- The Denver Foundation (\$13,000), the Rose Foundation (\$10,000), and the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation (\$20,000), provided general operating support.
- The McDonnell Family Foundation (\$14,000) provided support to retain our family resource consultants and occupational therapist.

## The Role of the Occupational Therapist in the CLC

by Jocelyn Mounier



The Occupational Therapist (OT) serves as a consultant to the CLC providing support to the Preschool and Toddler group teams, children, and families. The OT acts as a member of the team by giving input on activity planning and environmental arrangement. Strategies to improve the motor development of children identified

with motor challenges and children with typical motor skills are explained and modeled for the CLC team and families.

Children benefit from this intervention by being provided with exposure to age appropriate activities and sensory experiences that challenge their gross, fine, and visual-perceptual skill development. Families receive feedback on their children's progress as well as suggested follow-up activities and strategies that can be used in the home and community. Additional consultation to SLH graduate students is imparted through trainings, individual meetings and participation in orientation activities.

As a member of the Pathways to Assessment of

Learning (PAL) team, the OT acts as part of the transdisciplinary team, which assesses a child's skills in all areas of development. The OT supports these families by offering strategies and resources to further support their child's growth in areas such as motor development, toileting, feeding and other self-help skills.



## On Being a Family Resource Consultant

By Beret Strong



As a parent of a child with special needs, I remember learning that my son had been identified as having a disability. It was upsetting news. Even now, years later, I identify with parents who feel sadness, anger, or worry when they are told that their beautiful baby or child is going to have extra struggles in life. When my son was two and we were just learning about the path that lay ahead, I received a lot of helpful support from fellow parents of children who had special needs. I have never forgotten their compassion and intuitive understanding of how I felt as I started advocating for my child and planning the therapy and support he needed. I am happy to report that thanks to early intervention and wonderful services, he is now doing great!

I first experienced the Pathways to Assessment of Learning (PAL) team as a parent seeking information about my son's development. My family took the PAL journey twice. Both times it was a very positive, helpful, future-oriented process. I especially loved that my son was seen as someone who would continue to grow and develop, not as someone with a deficit or defect. Years later, when an opportunity to support other parents arose, I was glad to help. When I was invited to be Family Resource Consultant on the (PAL) team at CU Boulder, I had the opportunity to get to know and collaborate with a wonderful range of families and PAL team members.

As a team member, I had several responsibilities. I gathered

information from and shared it with families, and I learned from families and fellow team members. We all benefited from the give and take of conversations where everyone's ideas and impressions were respected. As the one who went on home visits with graduate students, I helped students learn how to communicate sensitively with families and develop their skills in "ethnographic interviewing," a way of gathering information about a child and family through open-ended questions and respect for the family's language and self-expression. We viewed each family as a separate culture in a certain way, with unique values, experiences, dreams, and needs. Instead of taking notes in our own personal idioms, we used the families' words and phrases when we filled out the Pathways form we used to begin the PAL process. At the center of the Pathways form is a circle that parents fill with adjectives and other words that describe their child. Asked first of all to evoke their child – rather than to say what led them to choose to have their child's development assessed by an interdisciplinary team of professionals – parents reveal their love of and pride in their child. It is a great way to start a constructive conversation about a child and a family.

Our Pathways process began with a phone call and a home visit, went on to a play-based assessment in a toy-filled setting, and ended with a team and family information-sharing meeting. I learned a lot about child development from my fellow team members and am grateful for that knowledge. One of the pleasures of working with each family was learning about them and earning their trust. Sometimes the most sensitive information would be shared only at the end of the home visit,

when a parent felt it was safe to share a fear or information generally kept private. As a parent myself, I value highly the fact that the PAL team regards parents as the most knowledgeable members of the team that assembles to assess, discuss, and plan next steps and strategies for a child's development. Parents know their child better than anyone else does, but in the traditional medical model, our input is sometimes not highly valued.

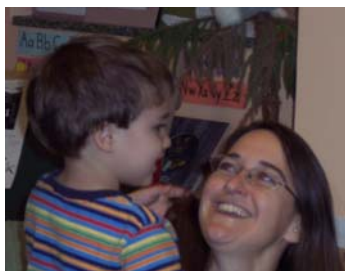
Mary Joe Weston is the current Family Resource Consultant for the Toddler and Preschool Programs.

Rosemary Mcknight is the current Family Resource Consultant for the Pathways to Assessment of Learning team.

I saw my role on the PAL team as one who supported and empathized with each parent's desires, questions, concerns, and needs. I considered myself a teacher of the graduate students, most of whom have not yet become parents themselves. I tried to model person-first parent-friendly language and to let other team members know how exquisitely sensitive the ears and feelings of parents can be. It was community service work of the best kind, and I was honored to have the opportunity to support other families in this way. I have done many kinds of work over the past twenty-five years, and this work has been among the most rewarding of all.

## Story of Friends

By Amy Thrasher



Speech-Language Supervisor Amy Thrasher shares a moment of joy with a child in Story of Friends.

Story of Friends was created at the Child Learning Center in response to the request of the Autism Society of Boulder County for increased opportunities for services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder with particular emphasis on social communication and peer interaction. While families with children with ASD seek out and may receive services in schools, through private providers, or in hospitals and clinics; many of these services are in one-on-one, isolated therapeutic settings or in social skills groups with other children with ASD. Interventions for children that support children with ASD in interaction with typical peers are difficult for families to find. In the summer of 2004, Susan Moore, Director of Clinical Education &

Services at the Speech Language and Hearing Center, and Amy Thrasher, Speech-Language Pathologist and Child Learning Center classroom teacher, designed Story of Friends to meet the social communication and peer interaction needs of young children with ASD.

The Child Learning Center's philosophy supports the Story of Friends intervention. Children are seen as individuals, regardless of diagnosis or label, and we seek to understand them within the context of their families and everyday lives through home visits, ongoing communication with families, and observations of other service providers. Children with needs benefit from the social communication modeled by their typical peers, while typical peers develop flexibility in their interactions with peers of varying communication and play abilities. Inter-reactive Learning Strategies (INREAL) used intentionally by service providers in



Story of Friends promote learning, language use and social interaction.

The Storybook Journey (McCord, 1995) approach to curriculum provides the basis for our environment, experiences, activities, and interactions.



Children's individual goals related to peer interaction in Story of Friends are based on their families priorities discussed at home visit. Through observation and ongoing communication with families we seek to understand what likes and interests motivate a child in order to incorporate them into the child's play and peer interactions. Strategies used in Story of Friends are derived from evidence-based practices from the research literature (Odom et al, 2003, National Research Council, 2001) including family involvement, visual supports, social stories/scripts, and peer-mediated intervention.

## Child Learning Center Outreach

### Early Learning Opportunities Act

The Child Learning Center, in collaboration with the Early Learning Opportunities Act with the Early Childhood Education Consortium of Boulder County, shared the work of the CLC with six early care and education sites in Lafayette, Louisville, and Nederland. CLC team members provided three workshops on early language and literacy for 126 early childhood pro-

viders and onsite coaching for 15 providers. More than 200 parents attended workshops on supporting early language and literacy in the home. El Grupo de Familias was offered in four locations over the course of the year for monolingual Spanish-speaking families.

### Local, State, and National Conferences

Members of the CLC team presented at several conferences

over the past year. Amy Thrasher, Susan Moore, Mark Guiberson, and Clara Perez-Mendez presented at the annual conference of the American Speech, Language, and Hearing Association in November 2006. Susan Moore and Clara Perez-Mendez presented at the Division of Early Childhood annual conference in October 2006.



## Child Learning Center

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## Mission Statement

The Child Learning Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder is an integral part of the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences and the Speech, Language, and Hearing Center. Our mission is to:

- Provide a nurturing, high-quality, developmentally appropriate educational program for young children which includes children with communication, cognitive, social, and/or motor needs and their same-age peers in a classroom together.
- Foster an environment where families are supported and valued as the primary decision makers for their child's education.
- Create an early childhood practicum experience for graduate and undergraduate students in speech-language pathology, early childhood special education, and other professionals in training, as we believe that excellence in education preparation is only accomplished through exposure to exemplary practices.

## Services Provided in 2006-2007

Program	Number Served	Students Participating
Toddler and Preschool	23 children and families	30 graduate students
Story of Friends	18 children and families	9 graduate students
El Grupo	20 families	9 graduate students
Pathways to Assessment of Learning	11 families	14 graduate students
Outreach workshops and consultation for providers	126 early childhood providers	1 graduate student
In-house and outreach workshops for families	203 parents	5 graduate students
Preschool screenings	150 children	5 graduate students

### The 2006-2007 CLC Team

- Amy Thrasher, Classroom Teacher
- Lynea Pearson, Speech-Language Supervisor
- Mark Guiberson, Speech-Language Supervisor
- Jocelyn Mounier, Occupational Therapist
- Mary Joe Weston, Family Resource Consultant
- Rosemary McKnight, Family Resource Consultant
- Barb Roscoe, Director and Outreach Coordinator
- Susan M. Moore, Director of Clinical Education and Services