

April is Month of the Young Child

By SARAH DiNICOLA

The Month of the Young Child, celebrated across the country in April, is an opportunity for us to celebrate young children and the caregivers who lay the foundation for their future success. It's a time to turn our attention to the many people, places and programs that support the healthy development of our next generation.

Organizations who plan and support Month of the Young Child (MOYC) activities include: The Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development, Early Education Services, Windham Early Childhood Educators Co-op, Hilltop Montessori, Green Street Promise Community, and Parent Express. Over a dozen other local organizations participate by offering free and fun events to families throughout the month.

But the festivities aren't only about fun — they're also about learning! We now know that about 90 percent of the brain is developed by age 5. That means that all activities young children engage in, from mundane daily routines like brushing their teeth, to exciting adventures like watching a live puppet performance, can have a lasting impact on their growth. The opportunities presented by MOYC touch upon all aspects of a young child's development.

Music provides many benefits for the developing brain, including increasing sensory development, introducing patterns and rhythmic concepts which are the foundation to literacy and numeracy, and building coordination when music is mixed with movement. There are many MOYC events planned that provide children a chance to enjoy interactive musical experiences. Local musicians Andy Davis, Peter Seigel, Sobo Studios and Robin Morgan all host engaging singalongs at various locations throughout the month.

It's important that children have ample time to practice their gross motor skills. Activities that allow children to practice balance and coordination, strength and endurance, attention and alertness and body awareness are essential for their growing bodies. They can practice these skills at a Brattleboro School of Dance class or get their energy out with free play at the Brattleboro Rec. Department's open gym or Kid-SPRAYce. There are many outdoor

activities planned too, including family-friendly hikes at the Retreat Farm, the Winston Prouty Center forest, and Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center.

When children are provided with the chance to create open-ended art projects, they're doing more than just making something pretty to look at. They are expressing themselves; they're practicing their fine-motor skills and, with engagement from adults, they can learn math concepts, practice their observation skills like noticing colors, lines, shapes, and so much more. Children will become artists at The River Gallery School's "Making Art with Found Materials" class, while the works of hundreds of young artists will be on display at the River Garden and Moore Free Library throughout the month.

Families will also delight in the performance by the Early Learning Express Bookmobile Librarian, Sueño LeBlond, who mixes her captivating storytelling and imaginative artwork in a puppet variety show that audiences love.

Perhaps your child is drawn to animals. Exposing young children to creatures big and small expands their understanding of the world around them and provides opportunities to introduce science concepts. Hilltop Montessori School invites visitors to meet animals awaking for spring in a presentation by Teaching Creatures and Wild Carrot Farm will give families a chance to see a working farm in action.

The Month of the Young Child activities are planned with not only the children in mind, but their parents and caregivers as well. Parents can learn about how stressful events affect early development and ways we can work together as a community to build our individual and collective resilience at a presentation at the Winston Prouty Center; learn about available resources to support their family at the 14th Annual Young Children's Art Exhibit opening or build connections with other families at Early Education Services' Family Fun event.

To find out more details about these events and more, including dates, times and whether pre-registration is required, visit www.wisntonprouty.org/moyc.

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