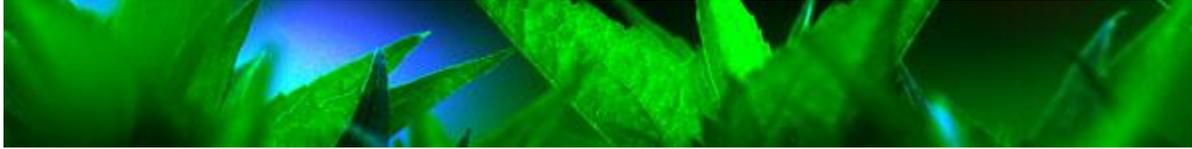


FORZA VITALE!

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Montessori In-Home Programs

By Jude Foster

Montessori in-home programs are thriving here in our fair city! Our *casas* can now be found dotted throughout the Portland metro area – from Gresham to Hillsboro, from Vancouver to Milwaukie. We form a vital part of the larger OMA community, and we offer a valuable option to parents who are seeking a wonderful Montessori experience for their children. But our programs are pretty much invisible to those in established schools. *So we want you to know we are out here doing the work with commitment and heart.*

Two years ago Mercedes Castle and I started a Montessori In-Home group under the OMA umbrella. Mercedes was a ground-breaker with **All Roads**, a home-based toddler program. Speaking for myself, when I left **Harmony** and started **Chickadee**, I knew I wanted to network. So we contacted those programs and people we knew about, and held a well-attended first meeting at All Roads in January 2011. Since then, we have watched for new programs starting up, and Jennifer Ryznar lets me know of any who have contacted the OMA. We add them to our list, and the group grows larger. At the present time we know that more than twenty of us are running in-home programs. I suspect that a few are still under our collective radar, and several are currently in development.

So prepare to be amazed! Here are the names of our home-based programs, in alphabetical order, with the repetitive “Montessori” left off just to make it easier to read:

A Peaceful Path
Chestnut Grove
Chickadee
Clover
Community
Concordia
Earth Tortoise
Laurelhurst
Lily Garden
Little Fruit Farm
Matatena
Merry
Mother Nurture’s

Mt Hood
New Farm
North Portland
One Tribe
Redland
Roots
Silk Road
Sun Fern
Toddler House PDX
Urban Bambini
Woodward

So, what led all of us to start such programs in our homes? There are surely as many stories as there are people, but a few patterns stand out:

- A Montessori guide becomes a mother, and decides to do a small program so that she can remain with her child or children at home.
- A newly trained Montessorian decides to start out small, and has a home with the space to do it.
- A Montessori teacher can't find a position in one of the established schools, and realizes she can do it on her own.
- A Montessorian can't find the right program in her area for her own child, and so becomes an entrepreneur.
- A couple decides to do this work together as a team.
- An experienced Montessorian decides to leave a larger school and do something small and different.

Just like the children in our care, our programs evolve naturally. Inevitably we begin with just a few children. Some have started with infants or toddlers, or with a few 3-year-olds, because those were the natural points for enrollment. Then some programs do grow and change, more materials and furniture are added, and staff hired, as more children come and the first ones get older; others choose to keep their group small and stable. A few are distinct toddler programs; a few combine infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers. Some of us have had fully equipped primary programs from the start, and are even managing to keep kindergartners.

CCD has several certification levels for in-home daycare, and we negotiate that relationship as best we can. At the top end are the certified in-home programs. These adhere to the same square footage and ratio requirements as certified centers, with a limit of 12 children (or 16 after the first year, if the square footage allows). A certified program can also operate more than one home, which is what Amy Gard is doing now with **Concordia Montessori**; she moved the primary to a new house a couple blocks away, and opened her new toddler program in the original location. Hilary Smith used to do that with **Cedar Montessori** too.

The registered programs have simpler requirements and a limit of 10 children. The third CCD level is a new, optional "reported" status for small programs that take care of children 4 or less hours a day. Our in-home programs in the metro area fall into all three of these categories, depending on the needs and choices of the owners. Some may be so small, part-time, or new that they are operating without getting involved with CCD at all. (I am speaking for Oregon here; Washington's rules are probably somewhat different.)

A few successful programs have recently moved out of their homes and into separate spaces, because they were growing and the timing was right. Megan Eskander moved her **Montessori House of St John's** out of her home and into a church in November 2011; this allowed her to enlarge her primary classroom and add an infant/toddler group. Most notably and visibly, **All Roads** and **Cedar Montessori** were both very successful home programs for some years; Mercedes and Hilary made the unusual decision to combine their two home programs into the new **Portland Montessori Collaborative**. They worked toward this goal for months, told their enrolled families, moved into the old Sunstone elementary location in August, and opened last

September. Their homes have become their own again!

That was all factual information, but what is happening for us “on the ground,” day by day? Most of our experiences and challenges are familiar to every Montessori school, but some are uniquely ours. For instance:

- negotiating the boundary between one’s home life and one’s work.
- “getting away” from work without getting away; how to take care of ourselves
- managing every part of the business, from cleaning bathrooms to planning curriculum to financial recordkeeping, not to mention the children themselves
- keeping the children’s activities vital with fewer peers around them to model options
- missing the example of 5-6 year olds in small, younger groups
- cultivating intimacy without dependency
- setting professional expectations with parents who want a comfy home experience
- connecting successfully with the larger Montessori community

Our in-home group met in January, and we set some new goals and intentions. We plan to organize a materials-sharing-and-lending arrangement, for the supplementary and cultural materials that aren’t constantly in use, because it’s hard to own everything when you have a small program. We talked about sponsoring some training opportunities in tandem with our meetings. We are going to start a shared in-home Montessori Facebook page to connect and inspire one another. And we want to encourage and support those who are considering starting new programs.

Last May our meeting was out at Tamara Kuraspediani’s **Mt Hood Montessori**, and I stayed and talked with her for quite a while. Even then I had promised to write this article, and I took notes that have waited all this time. Tamara was on fire with passion for what she was doing, at that time focused on completing a beautiful and varied natural playscape. She said something that I found quite visionary:

“Imagine America if there were a Casa in every neighborhood.”

That is a dream we should cultivate! And with that, I hope to inspire more of you to consider opening your own programs. The children are out there waiting for you!



About Jude Foster: Jude was the founding Head of **Harmony Montessori School** from 1994 to 2010. When she “retired,” she opened **Chickadee Montessori LLC**, an all-day Children’s House for 14 children, on ¾ acre with forest, chickens, and gardens. It’s a dream come true – and as much work as Harmony ever was. Her wonderful co-teacher, Erin Nicklos, and dedicated assistant Noriko Gaudreault make it all possible.

Jude reports that she gets calls and emails every week from parents looking for a quality Montessori program in her area of NW Portland/Cedar Mill/Beaverton; she hopes others will follow in her footsteps.

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