



## *Rita O'Brien Dee*

*Fifty-six years ago, Tewksbury resident Rita O'Brien Dee was a single parent raising five children on her own. Rita faced difficult struggles trying to work, put food on the table, and keep a roof over the heads of her family. Much like today's young families, one of the biggest struggles was finding affordable childcare.*

*In 1965, Head Start was introduced as a brand new anti-poverty initiative and was a cornerstone of Community Action. It started as a seven-week summer program for low-income children and transitioned into a school year program. Head Start provided a quality early learning experience for the two youngest of Rita's five children. It also provided her with the opportunity to get involved from the very beginning of the program.*

*Rita started her Head Start career as a Teacher Aide. She became a Teacher after attending Wheelock College and UMass Lowell to earn her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She also earned her Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) from the National Credential Office in Washington, D.C. This required a portfolio of proof that an applicant is competent in fourteen areas of a child's growth and development. For one of the twenty-seven years she was in the classroom, she left to become a C.D.A Professional Development Advisor, bringing mentoring and coaching skills to five Teacher Aides. She guided them while they earned their CDAs. She encouraged them to build their competencies and complete their portfolios so they would be able to launch their own careers as Head Start teachers.*

*Rita's love for children is unparalleled as is her passion for giving back to the community. Since retiring, Rita has served on the Head Start Policy Council and Community Teamwork's Board of Directors for nearly twenty years and has also served as Vice President of the Board. Rita still serves as a member of many of Community Teamwork's committees (i.e., Program Evaluation, Strategic Development, Governance, Merrimack Valley Housing, and Fund-raising). Rita is a regular at all Community Teamwork functions and is always willing to serve in any capacity when necessary.*

*In 1998, Rita was named a Community Teamwork Local Hero and presented with the prestigious Marjorie McDermott award for her dedication and commitment to the Greater Lowell community. Today, Rita is still a hero in the eyes of many at Community Teamwork. She remains very active in her hometown of Tewksbury, serving on the Executive Boards of The Friends of the Library and the Historical Society. She is an active member of the Senior Center, the Garden Club, the Democratic Town Committee, and a former long-time election worker. In 2017, Community Teamwork presented Rita with a "Key Player" award for her roles as a former Head Start parent, teacher and advocate.*

*Rita O'Brien Dee, a more than half-century legacy  
of Community Action and still going strong.*



# The Rita O'Brien Dee Center for Behavioral Health & Development (at the James Houlares Center)

## Children's Mental Health Data:

*1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2–8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.\**

*Among children living below 100% of the federal poverty level, more than 1 in 5 (22%) had a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.\**

*Studies have shown that COVID is not affecting children's physical health but it is impacting their mental health – social isolation, stressed parents, financial instability, etc.*

## The Concept:

*The Rita O'Brien Dee Center for Behavioral Health and Development will be a resource for Community Teamwork and providers across the community who are working with children with behavioral, emotional and developmental challenges or who may have experienced trauma. The center will be the headquarters for programs and services that will promote healthy social-emotional development, increase children's success in school, strengthen children and families and mitigate adversity through trauma-informed care.*

Key Offerings	Service Delivery Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports for Children at Risk who may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ be experiencing or have experienced abuse or neglect</li> <li>○ be in foster care</li> <li>○ be experiencing homelessness</li> <li>○ be impacted by trauma</li> <li>○ experience toxic stress</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Behavior and Development Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Relationship Building</li> <li>○ Nurturing Secure Attachments</li> <li>○ Responsive Classrooms</li> <li>○ Problem Solving</li> <li>○ Social Skill Development</li> <li>○ Self-Regulation Skills</li> <li>○ Transition Planning</li> <li>○ Behavioral Health Plans</li> <li>○ Working with Families</li> <li>○ Maternal Mental Health</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Addressing Challenging Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Anxiety</li> <li>○ ADHD</li> <li>○ PTSD</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Services (Case Mgt.)</li> <li>• Consultation for Program Staff</li> <li>• Workforce Training</li> <li>• Staff Wellness</li> <li>• Resource and Referral for families</li> <li>• Play Groups</li> <li>• Clinical Services</li> <li>• Therapeutic Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Art Therapy</li> <li>○ Music and Movement</li> <li>○ Play Therapy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><small>*Cree RA, Bitsko RH, Robinson LR, Holbrook JR, Danielson ML, Smith DS, Kaminski JW, Kenney MK, Peacock G. Health care, family, and community factors associated with mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders and poverty among children aged 2–8 years — United States, 2016. MMWR, 2018;67(5):1377-1383.</small></p>

*If you would like to make a contribution to help support the new Rita O'Brien Dee Center for Behavioral Health & Development, please donate:*

### By Mail:

**Greater Lowell Community Foundation**  
c/o The Rita O'Brien Dee Center For  
Behavioral Health and Development Fund  
100 Merrimack Street #202  
Lowell, MA 01852

### Online:

<https://www.glcfoundation.org/donate>

**Your support is greatly appreciated!**