

Birth to Three Update

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We continue to share the responsibilities as the WECAN Birth to Three Co-coordinators, meeting weekly to carry out the work of our mandate. Please feel welcome to contact us with any thoughts or questions you have regarding the work with the youngest children in Waldorf Education.

On January 10th, we gathered via Zoom with many of our colleagues (mostly administrators) in the US and Canada who work in WECAN recognized child care programs. This meeting was a wonderful beginning to what we hope can be a series of collegial opportunities for connection and support. It is our intention as co-coordinators to create a space for these colleagues to gather every other month or so to share the work they carry. Waldorf childcare centers are few in these two countries and the work they do is essential.

Challenges facing childcare programs that were spoken included:

- Staffing crisis
- Substitution and emergency staffing issues
- The need for innovative training opportunities to help new colleagues deepen their understanding of the needs of the young child through the lens of Waldorf pedagogy
- The need for creative scheduling to allow for caregivers to meet together
- Ways to support parent education so that it can be inclusive and welcoming
- Teacher burnout due to the long hours and low pay
- The need to change the cultural stereotypes about this work - the need to see caring for children from birth to three valued for the important work that it is

Victories of the childcare programs:

- Adjusting the days and hours offered for care to support the wellbeing of the caregivers
- Strong and healthy collegial relationships - it was noted that this is very supportive to the wellbeing of the children
- Cultivating professional development opportunities to support ongoing learning for the caregivers
- Government support in Canada manifesting as financial resources
- Creative scheduling to allow for collegial meetings
- Finding ways to keep staff which allows for continuity for the children and for the program
- Creative response to provide Waldorf teacher training by bringing the training to the center
- There is real joy expressed by the children!
- Finding ways to share 'golden moments' with parents so they feel connected to their children

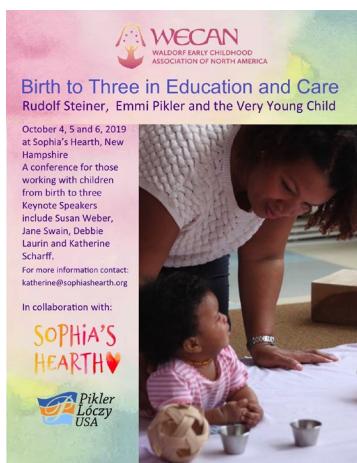
The Birth to Three Advisory Circle met in December. Our conversation created a picture of the needs of the youngest children and those who care for them, what is working well, and what questions are arising.

- We all feel a longing to gather in person once again for a conference. Are there ways we could begin to gather together for online conversations, and find new ways to connect kindred spirits in birth to three.

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- Many are observing delayed and complicated language development in the children.
- What are the effects of masks on the children and on the teachers capacity to care?
- What can we do to support parents? Observing a greater tendency towards anxiety and worry due to extraordinary circumstances.
- Observing the effect and importance of the physical environment around the young child.
- Understanding what it is to be with young children birth to three. Can we get to the essence, really see the children, deepen our understanding as teachers and develop skills to support the children, do less and be with more.

There is a new *Birth to Three Conference in Education and Care* conference publication in the works. A book with the keynote lectures from the Birth to Three in Education and Care Conference that took place in October 2019 is in process. Contributions from Debbie Laurin, Jane Swain, Susan Weber and Katherine Scharff will be a rich support for all those working with the youngest children. Stay tuned for more.



Ruth Ker, the Teacher Education Coordinator, has worked steadfastly for the last year to support the WECAN Member Teacher Education Institutes as they grow and strengthen their Birth to Three training programs. At the same time the institute colleagues and birth to three coordinators are working with schools and centres to understand the needs of those seeking training in Birth to Three. They are nearing the end of the review process and proposing supportive changes to the training guidelines which will be presented to the Board for approval in the near future.

A survey was sent this fall to WECAN Member programs working with children from 0-3. This information will allow us to track those working with children from birth to three, so that colleagues who are doing similar work can be brought together to create communities of support. This information will also help the training programs know where students can be placed for practicums.

As always, we welcome all of you to reach out and connect with us at any time if you have questions or are seeking support in your work with the youngest children in our care. How can we support those courageous individuals who work with the children in the first three years of life? They need our support now more than ever.