

Children's Center responds to COVID-19

WOLFEBORO — “In less than 72 hours, the president issued a national emergency, the governor closed all New Hampshire schools, and businesses are also proactively closing their doors,” Teri Ann Cox, Executive Director at The Children’s Center in Wolfeboro, wrote in her communication to Center families on March 18.

The recent ramifications of COVID-19 to our local community were strong and swift, and so the Center’s response needed to match that. Beginning the prior Monday, March 15, the Center had decided to stay open while many

surrounding businesses closed their doors. The Children’s Center provides the critical service of child care to first responders and health care professions in the area. If they closed their doors during a high demand for healthcare, it would be equally devastating to the ecosystem of which they are a part.

Although doors remained open, the Center strongly urged those who were able to keep their children

home to do so. The CDC had started recommending social distancing and the Center encouraged everyone to take proactive steps to limit personal contact so that they could protect the Center community and the community-at-large. For weeks, the Center continued to do everything they could to manage this very difficult and unique situation. They reinforced health hygiene,

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required sick children and staff to stay at home, and intensified cleaning and disinfecting while adding an additional evening of sanitation measures to their weekly schedule. The Center continued to keep in constant contact with their board of directors, state and federal agencies, child care resources, as well as local leaders who offered guidance in maintaining what was in the best interest of local families and staff members.

To date, more than 300 child care centers across New Hampshire have closed due to COVID-19. After much deliberation and with so many unknowns, the Center needed time to regroup. After talking with the handful of families still in need of child care services and making sure they had alternate care, The Children’s Center decided to temporarily close beginning March 30. This pause would allow the administrative team to determine exactly who needed their services, what their restructured staffing model and programming would look like, and give them a better understanding of their financial position. They remained committed to the community’s critical workforce and applied to be an Emergency Child Care Program designated by NH Department of Health and Human Services for the duration of the stay-at-home-order. The Center was proud to receive their certification in early April.

During this interval

and for the continuation of social distancing, the Center has made it their priority to improvise and jump on the technology bandwagon. They continue to provide their children with love and support during a time when some may say they need it most. Children in their preschool special needs program continue to receive their speech and occupational therapy services virtually.

Sue Dexter, preschool special needs coordinator and teacher, and team helped to put in place a model where individual educational plans continued to be met and IEP meetings continued to occur via Google Meet. Heather Corriveau, the Center’s site counselor and social worker, has taken to social media to feature a series called “Ask Heather” where the community can write in to ask her questions focused on social-emotional, behavioral, and problem-solving ideas for their children and families. Heather posts the questions and her helpful responses weekly on the Center’s Instagram page, Facebook page, and home website. She hopes to shed light on a somewhat dark situation.

Bob Tuttle, who provides music programming for the Center’s preschool and toddler classrooms and is lovingly known as “Bobbie Bear” to everyone, has created a Bobbie Bear page on Facebook. He has started live streaming his music classes daily. With guitar strumming and creative props to boot, Tuttle takes the children (and adults) on a musical adventure

while also helping them feel grounded and normal again. Music provides a means of communication and expression while serving as an emotional release for these little ones. During Bobbie Bear’s Facebook Lives, he ends with a beautiful rendition of Louis Armstrong’s “What A Wonderful World.” Local parents joke about that being the part of the show that’s more for them as opposed to the children. As the kids settle down and parents relax for a moment, it’s this timeless classic song that can make the listeners feel hopeful for just a moment. With all the recent events happening in the world, moments like this we can still think to ourselves what a wonderful world we live in.

The Children’s Center has been serving the needs of children from ages 6 weeks to 12 years old since 1974. Its mission is to enhance the well-being of families in our community by meeting their needs through comprehensive, affordable, high quality child care and early education, and to collaborate with other agencies serving the needs of children. By working to provide each child and every family with the resources they need to thrive, The Children’s Center remains a pillar in the community for past, present, and future generations. To learn more about The Children’s Center or how to support them in their pursuit to provide childcare services to the local community, visit The Center’s Web site at thechildrenscenternh.org or call the Office at 569-1027.