

## St. James's Children's Center Playbook

---

### **Description of the Ministry:**

#### **Purpose:**

The Children's Center is an outreach organization supported and enveloped by the church. The Children's Center is a multi-dimensional educational program for children ages 2 through 8 from low to moderate income families in the metropolitan Richmond area, 30 percent of whom are identified as at-risk or with special needs. This program incorporates all academic disciplines, as well as cultural and behavior/social issues. The program is designed to help these children understand the relationship between literacy, math and the sciences to the world around them. Through the low one-to-five teacher to children ratio, each child's needs are addressed, including social skills and behaviors. Our goal is to teach children with disabilities and/or at-risk factors and their families that the path of their lives is not cast in stone. Rather, with the proper and solid foundation, there are untold opportunities available to them. They learn the tools and confidence to be successful in school, how to work with their challenges, in many instances continue on to college-level course work, and as adults, become productive citizens in the community.

#### **Activities/Events:**

The structured program is designed to develop strong skill sets in literacy, math and the sciences. The children travel each day to cultural institutions and parks, in addition to participating in activities which require physical coordination, such as skating. The program is designed to help this population of children focus on understanding the relationship between literacy, math, and the sciences to the world around them. The staff incorporates language, math and science in every activity as part of the structured lesson plans. Through the low teacher-to-child ratio (one teacher for five children), the teachers are able to address each child's specific needs. In addition, social skills and behaviors are addressed as needed. This program is noted for accepting children other programs turn away. Each day the children begin with an age-appropriate lesson incorporating a special project to develop their logic skills. That lesson is incorporated in a field trip activity. Upon return, the teachers work with the children to understand the relationship between what they have learned in class and the field trip activity. Woven throughout the lesson plans is the key message that each child is unique and that uniqueness is to be celebrated and accepted. The results of this program are increased language and math skills and improved connectivity to the world around them through appropriate behavior. Incorporated into the program is fostering the values of a quality education and the long-term benefits for the child to the parent/guardian. These values are fostered by:

- Continuing the educational process at home
- Effective discipline techniques
- Grandparents re-learning parenting role
- Positive empowerment strategies

To measure the success of the program, there is a quantitative pre- and post-tests, based on basic age-appropriate language and math skills. There is also the qualitative component which measures the behaviors of the children before and after the program. The qualitative component of the test is given to the parents, as well as observations by the staff. The lead teachers in each

class conduct the testing. The school director documents the assessment and collects the data. The data is evaluated and reviewed with the teachers and the parents/guardians and cross-referenced with targeted goals which are age and developmentally appropriate.

### **Impact Observations:**

The impact that the Children's Center is having on the lives of the children and families it serves is tremendous. In many cases, the children we serve would not be able to participate productively in other pre-school programs or their families would not be able to afford special programs that could meet the child's needs.

Two examples of the success of the program are:

1. One little boy was referred to the Children's Center from Association of Retarded Citizen's Infant Intervention Therapy Group for our summer program. The therapists believed that the Children's Center would be a great place for him to interact with children with a wide range of learning curves (some with varying levels of educational challenges and some who are "normal learners") as he was preparing to phase out of their program due to his age. They were also concerned with his unhealthy eating habits. Within the first week there was a significant improvement in his social and communication skills. By the end of the summer program, he was interacting with the other children, he showed an increase in his vocabulary, and was tasting foods that he had not tasted before and enjoying them. His foster mother was so delighted with the results, he returned the summer of 2010.
2. One of our little girls with a history of intermittent seizures was recommended to the Children's Center by a former parent. This former parent assured the mother that she would receive the best of care if she enrolled her. Her mother toured the Children's Center, spoke to the teacher, and was impressed with what she saw and heard. She was pleased to find a program where the teachers were not alarmed and/or apprehensive when she mentioned her daughter's medical condition. The child also exhibited aggressive behaviors and had limited vocabulary as a consequence of the seizures and an inadequate learning environment. The child enrolled in September and although she continues to have seizures, she is beginning to use words to communicate her needs, not only with her parents, but with the staff and her peers as well. She has made remarkable improvement in her social skills and has learned to manage her anger in a healthy way. She is making friends in the classroom

### **Roles in the Ministry:**

#### **Chairperson(s):**

Our Chairman of the Board is elected by the board of directors for a two-year term, with a maximum of two terms. The time commitment is approximately two or three hours per week. The chairman is responsible to the board for the administration of the organization, presides over board meetings, serves as the official representative and spokesperson of the Children's Center, approves all contracts the Children's Center enters into, communicates regularly with the School Director, Development Director, and the Rector of St. James's Episcopal Church.

The current chairman is Alex Slaughter. Contact information: McGuireWoods LLP, 901 East Cary Street, Richmond, VA 23219; (804) 775-4346; [aslaughter@mcguirewoods.com](mailto:aslaughter@mcguirewoods.com).

**Staff involvement:**

The school director works in partnership with the board and the development director to provide leadership, vision, and direction for the organization and to develop organizational strategy. The school director implements policies approved by the board, manages the organization's programs and operations, and represents the organization in the community.

The development director provides leadership, strategic initiative, and management of all fund-raising efforts. The development director creates and coordinates programs to increase the organization's support base among individuals, corporations, charitable foundations, and additional sources.

The school director and the development director work closely with all of the church staff and clergy regarding the space the church provides for the Children's Center, and any needs as they arise for the smooth running of the program and the church programs. The Rector is a member of the Children's Center board and is actively engaged in the administration of the program. The church bookkeeper provides bookkeeping services to the Children's Center.

**Committee members/Opportunities for Involvement:**

The Board of Directors is comprised of members of the church and members of the community. Currently there are 17 board members. They are chosen and elected by the Board of Directors for a three-year term, maximum of two terms. The Board of Directors has the responsibility to set the mission and purpose of the Children's Center, act as the fiduciary and guardian of the organizational assets, review and approve St. James's Children's Center budget, set policies for the overall management and operation of St. James's Children's Center.

There are also volunteer opportunities for parishioners that take the form of reading to the children, being in the classrooms helping with certain projects, throwing special events, etc.

**Time Commitment by Chair(s) and Committee Members:**

The chairman spends approximately one to two hours per week, the board members spend approximately three to five hours per month.

**Involvement by Other St. James's Groups:**

N/A

**Resources Required:**

**Financial:**

The church vestry provides \$20,000 annually for the operation of the Children's Center.

**Space:**

The church provides space for the Children's Center in the Gibson Hall wing, meeting rooms and Valentine Hall as needed, and shared use of the kitchen.

**Staff:**

The Children's Center relies on the facilities manager and the sextons at varying times for set up of rooms and tables and chairs for events held in Valentine Hall.

**Advertising/Publicity:**

The Children's Center has an article in the monthly Chimes. The Children's Center does publicize certain events such as ornament sales and any special events as they arise.

**Manpower:**

We have volunteers to help serve lunch to the children, read to the children and help with special art projects.

**Community Impact/Partners:**

The impact on the Richmond community of the work of the Children's Center is meaningful given the way that the Center touches areas of our community that might not be aware of St. James's otherwise.

(February 2011)