



# Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

September 2024

Dear Families,

Welcome to our monthly newsletter! Each month we will share some tidbits from the classrooms, updates from the Montessori Center of Minnesota and the Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School Board of Directors, and other community notes. Many months I will also ramble on for a bit about a Montessori topic. Please bear with me!

I'm writing this the morning after our first Parent Partnership event, focusing on Montessori in the home and supporting children's independence. This was always my favorite parent night when I was in the classroom; I still remember one year a parent's eyes grew wide at the idea of her 3-year-old pouring milk for her cereal in the morning. A more experienced caregiver gently explained, "What's the worst that can happen? A spill is the perfect opportunity for Lexi to practice cleaning up." Lexi's mom was overwhelmed at the idea of giving her child a gallon of milk, and reasonably so. It's an art to give a child the right amount of help. Too much and you make a child feel untrusted or instill learned helplessness; too little and a child becomes frustrated and reluctant to try a new skill on their own.

At my house, we walk that line between too much and too little help daily. Ellie likes to tell us, "I do it myself, with you." It's extra hard to find balance when your child simultaneously demands independence and assistance! We've learned how to break down tasks into tiny components, so that we're giving just enough help to get her to the next hard part. Lexi's mom, way back at that parent night many years ago, became much more comfortable with the idea of Lexi pouring her milk when it was suggested that she prepare the environment by pouring a little milk into a pitcher ahead of time, not that Lexi get a gallon of milk out of the fridge by herself.

It's easy for me to think about ways to scaffold younger children in building independence. For those of you with older children, how do you prepare your environment to provide just the right amount of help? Let me know and I will include some tips in October's newsletter!

And, if you'd like to feel old with me, Lexi is at least 19 years old now. I'm pretty sure she can handle a gallon of milk all by herself!

Enjoy the rest of this month's news,  
Alyssa

## Toddler Community



As we settle into the school year, our toddlers are diving into a variety of daily activities! They are learning to take off their shoes and put them away in their lockers, practicing independence. We're also focusing on social skills, with children getting to know each other's names and building connections through name songs, games and the family photos you have sent your child.

Mealtime is a wonderful opportunity for learning new "practical life" skills, as our youngest ones practice setting the table and cleaning up afterward. This not only teaches independence but the awareness of many steps to complete one activity and the joy of sharing the process with their peers.

With the beautiful fall weather still upon us, we're taking full advantage of our outdoor space. Our days are filled with outdoor activities, and joyful walks to the large elementary front yard. These activities promote physical development and give our toddlers a chance to explore and connect with nature. They also spend a lot of physical energy making it easier for them to rest at nap time:)



Thank you for your continued support as we start this new school year!

If you have any questions please feel free to email us. For any arrival or dismissal changes please contact the front desk.

## Children's House 1

In Children's House One we've been enjoying getting to know all the new faces and settling into our routine. It's been amazing to see how all our different personalities mesh together. This week our class welcomed a Guinea pig from CH2: please welcome Café to our Guinea pig bunch! We've been busy learning different works, including bracelet work, map making, and spindle boxes, just to name a few. In the afternoon we are reading a chapter book (*The Wild Robot*) with the children that don't nap. This has been a great start to a great year already! We can't wait to continue to grow and learn together.



## Children's House 2

With so many new families in Children's House 2, we wanted to share how our schedule shifts and flows in response to the children's needs. As the children learn more activities and routines in the Children's House, and as the weather gets colder, the daily schedule will change again to meet the children where they are.

In these early, warm months, the children arrive between 8:30 and 8:45 and go straight to breakfast outside. We will move breakfast inside when it gets colder.

We are building up to a 3-hour morning work cycle, which will include breakfast and lunch set-up. Right now we have a 2-hour work cycle, until about 11:10 in the morning. Maria Montessori

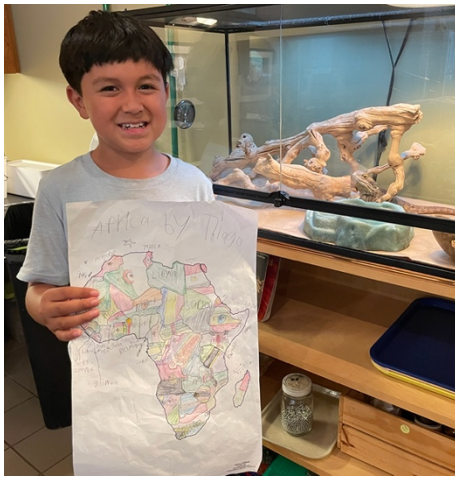


recommended children move before lunch, and so while our work cycle is shorter, we have a group-wide simple gymnastics period.

Children eat lunch, clean up, and have outdoor recess between 11:45 and 1:30. Children who nap come inside closer to 12:45 to prepare for sleep. During our afternoon work cycle, we start with “Kindergarten Academy,” providing science of literacy instruction, allow for free work choices, eat snack, and prepare the environment for the next day.

It’s been wonderful to spend so much time outside with the children and to see their capacity for work grow as they have gotten more used to being in the environment!

## Lower Elementary Garden



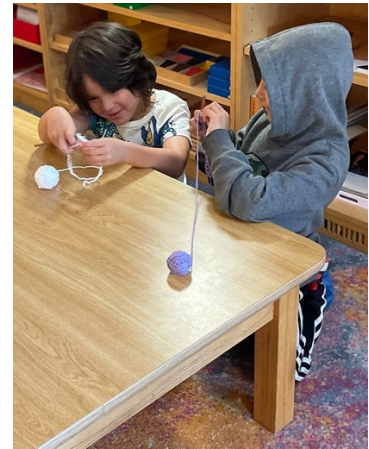
We have had a busy and exciting start to the year in Garden! Children have been beautifully collaborating with their classmates on all sorts of different work in math, reading, writing, geometry, geography, biology, and art. There has especially been a keen interest among the children in making books, posters and stories to share their creative and incredible ideas. As a class community, we have been learning about and discussing our reading brain with a short compelling video series from Amplify Education, which aligns with the Science of Reading. Children will be taking part in small reading groups this year to further develop their reading skills and deepen their knowledge of how the English language works!

In the past few weeks, children heard the first Great Story from Maria Montessori about the creation of the universe and the nature of the elements. Children also were introduced to the many amazing creatures that developed across different eras of time - from the Cambrian to the Pliocene – before humans arrived on our earth. We will continue to discover more great stories in the weeks to come about human beings and their remarkable ability to create, think, and love.

We have already finished two classic books during our read-aloud this month! We started with a series of little

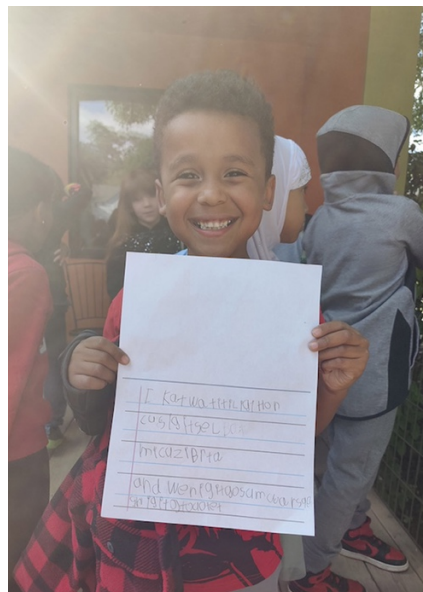


stories about parents seeking advice from a whimsical but very wise woman in *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle* by Betty MacDonald. Then we read about the clever Mr. Popper, who acquired a dozen birds from Antarctica, in *Mr. Popper's Penguins* by Florence and Richard Atwater. We will soon embark on a fun adventure into the Dimwood Forest series with a tiny deer mouse in *Poppy* by Avi.



## Lower Elementary Pond

In Pond we begin with singing. We start each day singing songs like *Down by the Bay*, *If I Had a Hammer*, and, of course, *Wavin' Flag*. From our musical starting point we've also worked on rhythm and note value. The most popular works so far have been types of triangles, land and water forms, congruence and similarity, biome maps, phoneme go fish, drawing emotions, expressive reading, bal-a-vis-x, factors, and anything outdoors. We just finished our first short chapter book for read aloud, the first book of the *Dyamonde Daniel* series by Nikki Grimes. We voted to continue with fiction for our next book, before switching to a non-fiction book after that.

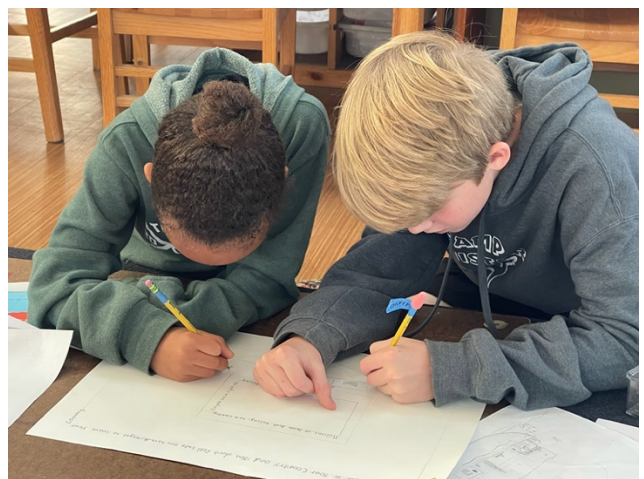


## Upper Elementary Forest



This month has just flown by! Forest children have been busy building an inclusive and supportive community, preparing for the UN Day of Peace celebration, learning our guiding beliefs & community expectations. The New-to-Forest children are learning about the daily work of the Upper Elementary child and have been getting lots of presentations. Children have heard many stories this month including: the Story of the Universe, the Story of the Coming of Life, the Story of the Seven Council Fires of the Oceti Sakowin and the Three Council Fires of the Ojibwe, Odowa, and Potawatomi, and the Story of the Two Mountain

Climbers. Ask your child what they can recall about any of these stories, what we believe about children, making mistakes, and comparing ourselves to others.



## Upper Elementary Marsh



Marsh in the month of September has been a busy environment! Children have been learning about the United Nations and Peace Day, kinetic and potential energy, equinoxes, the beginning of the universe, math operations, algebra, and just right books - in addition to all kinds of other lessons. Handwork has been popular, and children are learning to finger knit, crochet, sketch, and knit with needles. All this is happening as we have also been developing habits and routines that set us up for balanced, challenging, and purposeful work every day. We've been talking about developing a growth mindset (the belief that we all can learn and get better with practice) instead of a fixed mindset (the

belief that sometimes we just can't learn something). A growth mindset helps us learn more, be curious about mistakes, and support ourselves and others more. We started our first read aloud novel: *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper. We have been enjoying the warm weather of this September while it lasts!



## Get to Know a 1611 Ames Ave Employee!

Each month we will introduce you to someone who supports the children at Cornerstone, whether directly in the classroom or indirectly through supporting the facility or the staff. This month, meet Chris McGrath, the Facilities Manager for the Montessori Center of Minnesota:

Chris McGrath was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and raised on the East Side just blocks from MCM. Chris worked as a journeyman carpenter for over 20 years before coming to MCM in 2020 where he has put to use his vast knowledge of construction. His attention to detail and ability to creatively and quickly solve facilities issues has been put to use



fixing everything from tables, chairs, and Montessori materials, to locks, security systems, and broken appliances. In his free time Chris enjoys boating on the St. Croix, concerts, motorcycles, and woodworking. He has created multiple wood pieces for the auction at Montessori All Stars, MCM's annual fundraising event. When asked about his time working at MCM, he noted that his favorite days are those that involve children helping him complete a task; because while 6 children fixing one sink is not at all effective, it sure can be fun.

*(Ed. note: It is not uncommon to hear, "oh, no!" followed by, "don't worry, Chris can fix it," in our environments. Everyone, from toddler to teacher, knows that Chris is the most important person on campus!)*

## Exciting News from the Montessori Center of Minnesota



Earlier this month, the Board of Directors at the Montessori Center of Minnesota named Liza Davis the Interim Executive Director. Liza has been a dedicated leader at MCM for 16 years, in roles ranging from Director of Special Programs to co-Director of Primary Training. Liza was the first Head of School at Cornerstone and saw her two children through Cornerstone, from

the Toddler Community through graduation from 6<sup>th</sup> grade. A Montessori child herself, Liza holds a Master of Arts with an emphasis on Trauma and Resilience, as well as a Bachelor's degree from St. Olaf College in Northfield. Liza shared with the MCM community, "In a world that can feel unpredictable, MCM's vision is clear. We envision a world where each child and family is offered an education that honors and serves their humanity." We are thrilled to have Liza's leadership in support of Cornerstone!



## Meet the CMES Board



Julaine Roffers-Agarwal has served on the CMES Board since 2018, first as a parent member, and now as a community member. Julaine was a Montessori child in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area from the age of 2 ½, beginning Children's House at Family Montessori for one year and then attended New World Montessori through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. From 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she attended Milwaukee Montessori School, and graduated from their Junior High program. Her Montessori education strongly instilled in her a sense of curiosity and love of learning and while she considered earning an AMI elementary certification at one point, she went on to earn Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees in biological sciences. Julaine continues to use her critical thinking skills as a lab manager in a craniofacial development research lab at the University of Minnesota.

Her son, Rajan Agarwal, began his Montessori education at Mineapple Montessori in Minneapolis at 3 and transitioned to CMES for Kindergarten where he continued through his graduation from 6<sup>th</sup> grade in June 2024. Julaine feels strongly that being in a Montessori positively shaped both her and Rajan and wants to ensure that all children have access to an educational environment that cherishes and supports the whole child. Julaine was elected to her third three-year term on the CMES Board in May 2024 and served first as the Board Vice Chair from 2018-2022 and now as Board Chair since 2022. Outside of her CMES Board work, Julaine enjoys cooking and baking, and Julaine, her husband Sumit, and Rajan enjoy playing board games as well as the outdoors and have been working towards their goal of visiting every Minnesota State Park.

