

Shaping the Next Generation

Serving residents in need and winning local accolades for their attention to students, West Chester Area Day Care Center celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2022. Executive Director Betsy Billie explains what sets them apart.

BY RESIDENT BILL BUCK

Now in its 61st year as a top-rated local center supporting lower-income families, West Chester Area Day Center (WCADCC) is so well-loved by kids, they enroll their own children when the time comes. “We have a different vibe here, the kids have fun while learning in a loving and supportive environment,” says Betsy Billie, Executive Director. She currently has five parents she taught as kids that now have their children in the center. They want their children to have the same positive experience they had as youngsters and are just the latest in WCADCC’s history of multi-generational enrollment. “There’s a real community connection, and many of the families know each other; you do not often find that in other centers,” adds long-time governing board member and area resident Mary Libutti.

Its nurturing environment has also helped students who have had difficulties fitting in elsewhere. Betsy relayed a recent story about a student who tried three other centers before WCADCC and is now happy and doing very well. It’s stories like these that prompted *The Daily Local* to name WCADCC the best day care center in the region for 2022, which they have also done numerous times in the past.

The center first opened its doors in 1962 with five students in rented space in a local Friends school. Since that time, the center has grown, with over 100 students, many of them from lower-income families, attending a sprawling facility on East Niels Avenue in West Chester borough. Unlike other centers, WCADCC does not limit the number of subsidized students they accept. As a nonprofit, they are affiliated with a number of charitable organizations including the United Way of Chester County, Chester County Community Foundation, and others. They also

accept individual donations to help defray costs and provide services. Betsy says that donors are often eager to provide donations for physical site improvements, but funding is also needed to support program activities.

One of the keys to success at the center is the long-term commitment of everyone involved. Betsy has been there for over 30 years. She indicated that most of the teaching staff has also been there for many years. Mary noted that the center is guided by a dedicated board of volunteer directors, many of whom have been serving for extended periods. Mary, who herself has been on the board for 30 years, says she and the board have a real heartfelt commitment to the center and the good work that is done. Similar to many other organizations in the post-pandemic world, Betsy described the current challenge of hiring sufficient numbers of newly trained staff to take full- and part-time teaching positions. The parents are also engaged and usually more than willing to volunteer for special events that bring additional richness to the center.

The center has been able to do physical upgrades over the years, most recently a remodel of the front entrance, office areas, and outdoor play areas. They have several well-equipped and spacious outdoor play areas, each dedicated to specific age groups, that can also be used as outdoor classrooms.

The center also provides for students with special needs. They work closely with the parents, the Chester County Intermediate Unit, and local therapists to ensure that special needs are documented early and appropriate support is available, including most of the therapy. Free nutritious meals for every child are also provided including breakfast, lunch, and snack throughout the day. In addition, formula is also provided to infants free of charge.

WCADCC participates in the Pennsylvania Keystone STARS program that promotes quality improvement in early learning and development for programs and school-age child care. They have achieved the Keystone Star 4 level assessment, which is the highest rating for early learning standards for child care centers in Pennsylvania.



Centers have to meet certain quality standards in four key areas of staff education, learning environment, leadership/management, and family/community partnerships to meet this level. These elevated, quality learning programs give students a stimulating, nurturing environment that prepares them for school and helps them reach their full potential. The center has a hands-on approach to learning. They currently have a "creative curriculum" utilizing intentional teaching and learning through play. In the future, they are evaluating a move to a high-scope curriculum.

Betsy explains that since the center does not advertise, they are one of the best-kept secrets in the area. However, once folks learn about WCADCC and its mission and goals and how they have helped so many children and families in the area, they fully embrace it and are happy to help spread the word and support its continued success.



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