



Good deeds win praise, and maybe even a treat, in Betsy Billie's classroom. She held Maxwell Duffy while the children danced.

A program that helps put the 'kind' in kindergarten

KINDNESS from H1 years, there are immediate benefits. Smith noted that the children learn to be more thoughtful, to help wipe up spilled juice. And they are more confident; they speak up when someone does something hurtful. They also learn to walk away from trouble.

The children can use these lessons at home and in their neighborhoods, the teachers said.

"When they're on the street," said Billie, "they have some defenses against the toughest, biggest, baddest kids."

Parent Cathie O'Donnell has a 4-year-old daughter at the center and a son, Shane, in first grade at a public elementary school.

"Shane shares, he's kind toward others. He gets praised for his behavior by his teachers. I think it will stay with him," said his mother. "I see it with him and his sister — they are just wonderful to each other."

O'Donnell said the center reinforced what she taught at home. "I've seen the meanness in other children. If they're not getting [such training] at home, they need to get it somewhere."

Sometimes, she said, her children turn the tables and offer her some

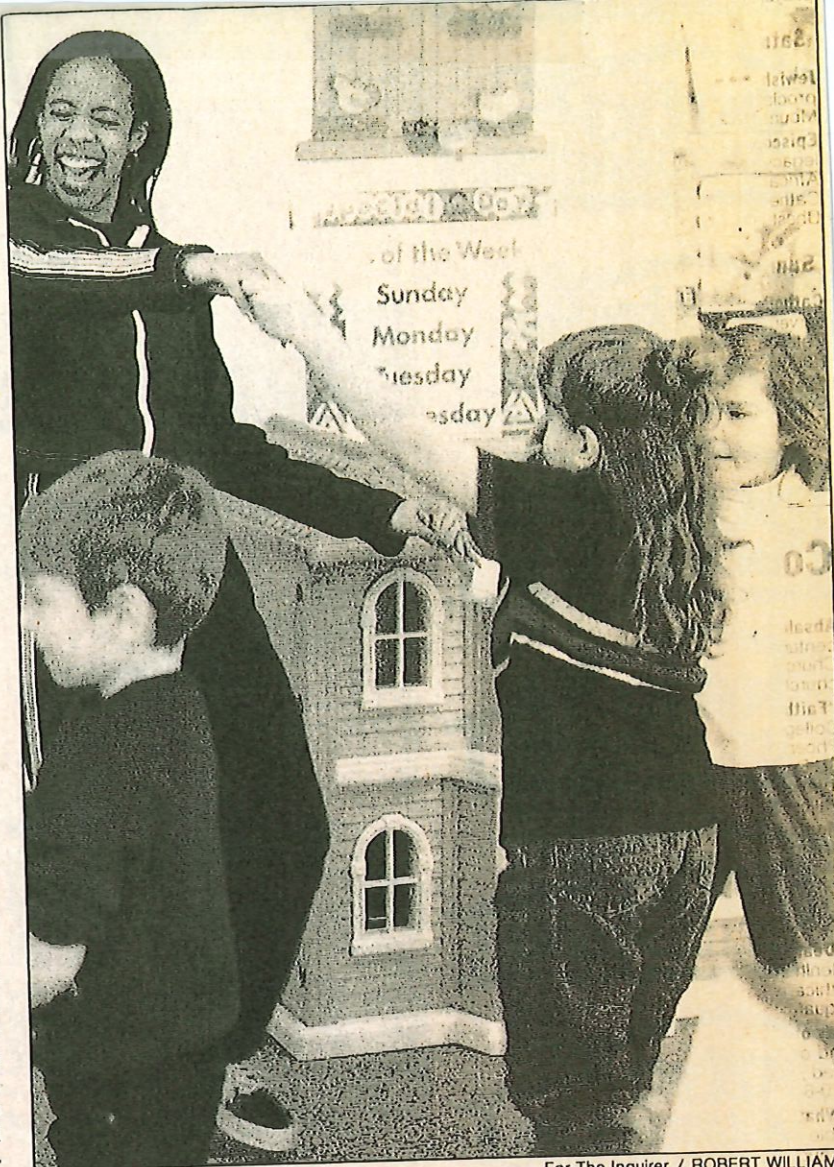
tips. "They are good little reminders to have around," she said, laughing.

The center's emphasis on kindness caught the attention of Jerry McMullen, a behavior-management specialist with the Chester County Intermediate Unit, a state-run agency in Exton. He has been running workshops on social skills in a program known as Stop and Think. Dozens of elementary and middle schools in the region have adopted Stop and Think to teach children social skills and personal responsibility. The children learn about "good choice/bad choice" and that misbehavior brings consequences.

McMullen said that the issues he deals with are of concern in parochial and private schools as well. But he has seen a stronger "sense of community" in Quaker and Catholic schools than in many of the public schools.

"Really, the thing that we're lacking in public education is a sense of community, of people pulling together — school, and home, and neighborhood," said McMullen.

"With all the laws and regulations and demands put on people, we've lost track of what it takes to get along. One of the fundamental things is kindness, practicing the Golden Rule, if you will. A simple



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Teacher Keya Smith dances with Angelina Green at the West Chester center. Others are Maxwell Duffy and Dilys Hall.

message like this can be the cornerstone to building community."

"Everything we are doing," said Carol Henson, director of the center, "is just common sense. The idea of teaching children about caring and sharing, teaching them to take responsibility for the things they choose to do — it's all common sense, but it still has to be taught."

The West Chester Area Day Care Center has an enrollment of about 100 children. The center gets 85 percent of its funding from subsidies for serving children in need.

"What we've told parents," said Henson, "is that these ideas about

kindness, sharing and caring will help protect their children from getting caught up in the bad behavior, even the violence, that is reaching down into the elementary schools."

Ron Gallimore, the center's cook has observed the children on a daily basis.

"I see a difference from the children on the street. I live in the neighborhood. These children are always waving, saying hello. They're happy-go-lucky. ... Fifteen 20 years from now, you'll see the difference, not in every case, but eight of 10 at least."