


#HereLikeThere

SUMMER ISSUE 2024
VOLUME 2



Excellence in Education

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven - *Matthew 6:10*

Bold and Holistic Education for a bright Future



By *Patti Phillips-Best*

Bible Center's mission is simple yet profound: we love God, we love people, and we live like Jesus.

The vision extends beyond merely existing within the community; we are dedicated to serving and uplifting it. Through a powerful combination of faith and action, Bible Center has worked since 1956 to transform the community of Homewood, with the goal being to make it a reflection of God's grace and love.

We believe in the power of education, employment, entrepreneurship, and the renewal of the environment (in our case the adaptive reuse of vacant and abandoned buildings) to create positive change. We are committed to actively working towards improving lives, fostering hope, and building a stronger community.

The Oasis Project is the community outreach and economic development division of Bible Center Church. Through our various programs, we work to create bright spots of opportunity and growth to help change the life trajectory of people who live, work, learn, worship, or play in the community of Homewood.

Our approach to education is holistic and genera-



tional. The core education programs include Maker's Clubhouse (TMC) out-of-school time, TMC Early Learning Center, Oasis Farm and Fishery, and Oasis Transportation. Serving children ages three to seventeen, the programs and services are designed to foster a positive self-identity, instill a lifelong love for learning, and cultivate a sense of care and responsibility for the community.

Many children in our community enter kindergarten without prior exposure to structured learning environments. This lack of early educational experiences often leaves them unaware of their own potential and can make it difficult for them to view learning as an exciting and rewarding activity. TMC Early Learning Center's goal is to bridge this gap, inspire a love for learning, and develop children who are problem solvers, world changers and compassionate people.

Out-of-school time and early learning programming offer exciting STEAM (science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and math) enrichment activities to encourage 'big' dreams of being innovators, builders, and creators. These programs help children develop strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

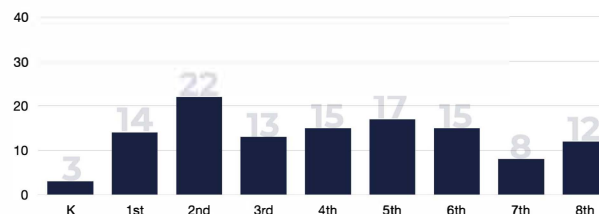
A key component of TMC's STEAM curriculum is the agriculture and nutrition education provided by Oasis Farm and Fishery. Understanding where food comes from and how the various ingredients and nutritional values affect how we learn, think, feel, and behave is central to a person's well-being.

In recent years, The Maker's Clubhouse has built on its core value of creating a safe space for learning by offering enhanced social and emotional learning (SEL) daily. Through age-appropriate activities and mentorship, we aim to nurture well-rounded individuals who are confident, curious, and compassionate.

Bible Center identified early on that great programs and resources in a vibrant region like Pittsburgh mean little when children or youth cannot get to the opportunities. Children in communities with low-income households, budget-restricted schools, and safety concerns find it more

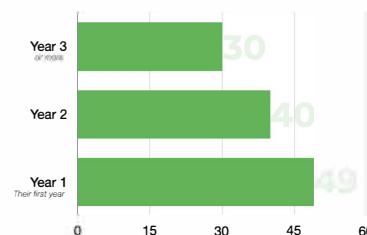
TMC's Green STEAM & Play Summer Camp 2024 By The Numbers

Number of Children at Camp



Total: 119

Number of Children That Have Attended



86.82%

Average Daily Attendance

[▶ Summer Camp 2024](#)

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difficult to access opportunities. Oasis Transportation was developed in response to this critical need. The program serves over 1,000 children and youth each year, transporting them to school or after-school, and enrichment activities like museums, theater, sports, or college tours.

From early childhood development to teen leadership initiatives, The Oasis Project education programs provide a supportive environment where children can grow, explore, and discover their potential. The guiding principle is to lay a strong foundation for the children's and youths' future success, both personally and within the broader community.

The Maker's Clubhouse Green, STEAM & Play Camp provided engaging summer learning for 119 children from 28 different schools, offering a mix of academic enrichment and physical activity. Campers participated in weekly field trips, swimming outings, and activities from 10 community partners focused on STEAM and outdoor education. These hands-on experiences helped campers strengthen their academic skills and return to school with confidence and a positive mindset.

More About Green STEAM & Play Summer 2024



Building Strong Foundations for an Exceptional Future:

The Importance of Quality Early Childhood Education



By *Dr. Cynthia M. Wallace, EdD*

The beginning of the school year is always very exciting! Even though my children are long past needing back-to-school supplies, I love to see all that parents put into getting their children ready for school. New clothes, fresh braids, and backpacks filled with all the tools needed to have a great school year! As an educator, my heart fills with joy as I think about all that these children will become but I also know succeeding in life takes much more. A high-quality early childhood education has a profound impact on how children perform in kindergarten but also sets the stage for lifelong learning and success. This is the reason The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center was founded.

In the earliest years of life, children's brains develop at a phenomenal rate—forming more than one million neural connections each second. This period of intense growth is influenced significantly by their interactions with the world around them. Enrolling a child in a high-quality preschool program is an investment in that child's future. The early learning environment encourages exploration, into kindergarten and



expression, which all lead to academic, social, and emotional growth.

The educators at The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center understand that preschool-aged children are extremely receptive to learning, so they strive to expose them to many learning experiences each day. Through those experiences, the children begin to understand their likes, interests, and strengths. Our teachers spend time daily observing and assessing each child so learning experiences are developed that engage and maximize the learning potential of each child. Early exposure to dynamic learning environments can spark curiosity and instill a love of learning that children carry into kindergarten and throughout their lives.

The Importance of Child-Centered Early Educational Experiences

We know that children who develop strong reading and math skills in early childhood are better equipped for academic and life success. A Montessori-inspired, child-centered approach to teaching reading and

math to young learners is showing significant improvements in a child's readiness for kindergarten and beyond. Hands-on and self-directed lessons with a focus on using concrete materials and exploration to build a deep understanding of concepts nurture academic skills in fun and interactive ways that engage the young learners in their success.

Fostering a Positive Racial Identity

It is essential for children, especially Black children, to grow up with a positive sense of their racial identity. This fosters confidence and an understanding of their unique heritage and potential. Celebrating the students' diversity and incorporating materials and stories that reflect their backgrounds, ensures that every child sees themselves as an exceptional learner. By affirming their identity, students are empowered to embrace their capabilities and strive for excellence. The explorative nature of an early learning environment is ideal for instilling a positive racial identity in young learners before they enter a more structured and systematic learning environment.

Social Skills and Emotional Intelligence

Beyond academics, a preschool experience offers children their first community outside of family. In these settings, children learn invaluable social skills such as sharing, cooperation, and empathy. These skills are essential as they navigate school life and beyond, impacting their ability to communicate, collaborate, and understand others' perspectives.

The Role of Environmental Engagement

Engaging with the environment plays a crucial role in a child's development. Going beyond the obvious need for physical activity and exploration in playground and field games and engaging children in gardening and cooking classes fosters a sense of responsibility for

the environment, provides an understanding of where their food comes from, and encourages them to think deeply about how they care for their bodies. This holistic approach to outdoor learning promotes cognitive

and physical development and encourages children to become observant and inquisitive about the world around them.

Conclusion

Investing in early childhood education is one of the most impactful decisions you can make for your child's future. I invite you to join us at The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center, where we are dedicated to nurturing young minds and hearts

for the challenges and opportunities ahead. Together, we can ensure that our children begin kindergarten confidently, knowing that they are destined to do great things and achieve their fullest potential.

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Better Food, Better Me



By *Brandon Pinnix*

In Homewood, "Better Food, Better Me" addresses food insecurity by teaching children about healthy eating. Part of The Oasis Project's Maker's Clubhouse and Oasis Farm & Fishery, the program includes activities like gardening, cooking, and nutrition education. Children learn to grow food, read nutrition labels, and appreciate diverse cultures. By involving children in every step of food preparation, the program brings a better understanding of nutrition and encourages support for healthy food access in the community.

Better Food, Better Me aims to empower young minds with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed food choices. Daily activities include a mix of farm-based learning and hands-on kitchen activities. Children engage in planting and gardening, gaining practical experience growing their food. They also learn to read nutrition labels, understand

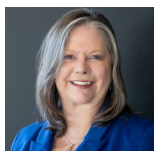


cultural food practices, and explore the origins of their meals.

Better Food, Better Me stands out due to its holistic approach to food education. Children participate in every step of the food journey, from planting seeds to cooking meals, which fosters a deep understanding and appreciation for healthy food. The program also highlights various cultural food practices, enriching children's knowledge of diverse dietary traditions. By educating the younger generation, this initiative is sowing the seeds for a healthier community and encouraging children to advocate for better access to nutritious foods.

In conclusion, Better Food, Better Me is more than just a food education program; it is a beacon of hope for a healthier future in Homewood. Through practical learning and community engagement, it aims to create a ripple effect that will benefit the entire community for years to come.

Developing a Child's Resilience: How social and Emotional Learning Can Prevent Violence



By *Patti Phillips-Best*

The Maker's Clubhouse is helping children build true resilience, not just superficial toughness, through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in its out-of-school time programs.

The more than 175 children who participate in The Maker's Clubhouse afterschool program live, learn, and play in and near Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, which sees a disproportionate amount of community violence. Despair, fear, and anger are reasonable emotions for one to have when witnessing or hearing violent activity. The fight or flight instinct is triggered, and without intervention, it will at best manifest as disruptive or aggressive behavior or withdrawal, which may show up as a lack of focus or manifest in school absenteeism. Genuine resilience builds community and compassion and helps people journey through difficulty, loss, and trauma.

Since 2021, students have engaged in daily SEL lessons. In 2022, with support from a grant from the

City of Pittsburgh Stop the Violence fund, the program expanded to help develop resilience in coping with trauma, emphasizing community support, self-awareness, emotional processing, and advocacy skills.

The three-pronged approach offers the students guidance and support, an engaging skill- and awareness-building curriculum, and explores hope, understanding, and advocacy through creative projects.

In the 2022-23 academic year, in addition to the curriculum activities, parents/caregivers joined in a learning experience, and the 4th and 5th-grade students participated in a 3-month-long creative and advocacy project.

Parenting While Black (PWB), a project at the University of Pittsburgh, was offered in the Fall of 2022 and Spring of 2023 to two cohorts of eight parents. PWB is a group intervention that provides parents with tools to both support their children's healthy development and their own wellness. The program's goals are to 1) Promote positive racial identity, 2) Help children cope with experiences of discrimination, 3) Encourage school and home-based educational involvement as Black parents, and 4) promote intergenerational mental wellness and racial stress coping.

"Through My Lens: What It's Like To Be A Child In My Neighborhood," was a Photovoice project where students used their new photography and journaling skills to share their experiences and leverage their stories to advocate for change.

"Heroes Among Us: Homewood Stories Past, Present, and Future," explored the essence of heroism within our community. The Spring 2024 project, led by Dr. Khirsten Scott, Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, taught students through their newly acquired research and interviewing skills that genuine heroism is found in everyday interactions when people are loving, courageous, kind, and resilient. Stay tuned, with generous support from the Pennsyl-

vania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and the City of Pittsburgh's Stop the Violence Office, The Maker's Clubhouse is entering its third year of providing this essential program.

To take a closer look, view our project documentaries.



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Additional support for The Maker's Clubhouse out-of-school time STEAM enrichment program comes from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, The Richard King Mellon Foundation, The McElhattan Foundation, the members of Bible Center Church, other corporate and foundation support, and generous individuals.



Dr. Khirsten Scott,

Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh and the Director of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project



Oasis Transportation: A Lifeline Connecting Youth to Opportunity



By Patti Phillips-Best

In today's world, where access to opportunities and exposure to various communities and cultures are key factors in how one's future will develop, the role of reliable transportation cannot be overstated. Oasis Transportation is more than just a service; it is a bridge to brighter futures, connecting over 1,000 children and youth in Homewood and surrounding communities to excellent recreational, cultural, and educational assets in the Pittsburgh region each year. The opportunities and experiences that can transform their lives.

Bridging the Gap in Underserved Communities

Parents in low-income communities often struggle to provide enriching experiences for their children due to transportation barriers. Many lack cars, work irregular hours, and face challenges with expensive or incon-

venient public transit, limiting access to extracurricular activities and cultural experiences. These barriers also contribute to chronic absenteeism, as unreliable transportation makes getting to school a daily challenge, especially when parents cannot ensure their children's safe arrival. This is where Oasis Transportation steps in as a vital lifeline.

A Year-round Commitment to Families

Each summer, Oasis Transportation plays a critical role in the lives of children and families in Homewood by providing free, safe, and reliable door-to-door and field trip transportation during the seven weeks of TMC's Green STEAM & Play summer camp. This is not just a service; it is a gateway to new experiences, learning opportunities, and personal growth. The camp offers a chance for

children to immerse themselves in an environment where they can learn, play, and grow, laying the foundation for a successful future.

The impact of Oasis Transportation does not end with summer. Throughout the school year, the service is a trusted partner in ensuring that children get to and from school safely and on time. The importance of this cannot be understated—regular and punctual attendance is crucial for academic success, and for many children, Oasis Transportation is the only option for safe transport to school.

But Oasis Transportation's commitment goes even further. Beyond the school day, children need access to after-school programs that offer a safe space for them to explore their interests, build new skills, and thrive in a positive learning environment. Oasis Transportation ensures that children can participate in these activities, providing the essential link between home, school, and enrichment programs. This holistic approach supports the development of well-rounded individuals, equipping them with the

tools they need to succeed in life.

Peace of Mind for Parents

Oasis Transportation offers parents invaluable peace of mind. For low-income families, it eases the burden of transportation costs, ensuring children can access education and experiences safely. This allows parents to focus on work or their own studies, knowing their children's transportation is secure. By providing reliable service, Oasis Transportation creates a more stable environment for families, contributing to the community's overall well-being.

A Future Filled with Possibilities

Oasis Transportation ensures that children can access education and enrichment activities, it breaks down barriers and empowers families. In our society, where access often determines success, Oasis Transportation exemplifies how community-focused initiatives can make a profound difference. It's building a bridge to a more equitable future for all.



Hear from a parent, a student, and a team member about the impact of Oasis Transportation on their lives.

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