

Our Children's House



Parent's Policy Manual

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Note: *Our Children's House is an outgrowth of Walker Avenue Children's House, which offered quality childcare in Greensboro from 1983 to 1994. We extend our appreciation to Madge Megliola and Nancy Napier, former owners of Walker Avenue, for their support and permission to adapt Walker Avenue Children's House materials for Our Children's House.*

This policy manual follows the guidelines set forth by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. In some cases, Our Children's House policies are more stringent than the laws mandated by the state (e.g. teacher to child ratios). Our Children's House reserves the right to implement stricter policies as necessary for the benefit of our children, teachers, and families.

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WELCOME TO OUR CHILDREN'S HOUSE

Our Children's House (OCH) is a North Carolina State licensed 5-star small childcare facility that offers structured free play and learning experiences designed especially for young children. Its unique features are a home-like environment and multi-age grouping in which all ages interact with each other and siblings spend time together.

OCH is a parent-owned and parent/teacher supported, non-profit organization, which values and needs parental involvement in Center operations and support of OCH teachers in our collaborative efforts to maintain a high level of childcare.

Our Children's House offers the following features:

- Home environment and multi-age or family groupings
- Small group size
- Low adult/child ratio
- Individualized child care
- Consistent, well-trained caregivers
- Custom designed curriculum
- Nutritious snacks
- Valued parent involvement

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Children thrive in a warm and loving atmosphere—at home or elsewhere, and children whose families must seek regular care for them, by other adults especially, need a nurturing environment that encourages them to experience all the normal daily activities of children at home. At OCH, our goal is to provide such an experience for each child.

The Home Atmosphere

Because children function best and are most secure in the family, we try to provide a home-like atmosphere in which children and adults can identify as an extended family. We select our teachers with the greatest possible care to ensure that each child receives the special attention needed to develop in a healthy way. It is our goal to provide consistent, competent caregivers in numbers sufficient to keep the ratio of teachers to children as low as possible (never higher than 1:6)

Consistent with the family environment, we allow children access to the full range of the house as they carry out their daily activities. The only limitations on their play are those necessary for their own safety. Multi-age or "family" grouping promotes the feeling of closeness and allows the children to help and learn from each other. Toddlers learn skills from being with older preschoolers; older children learn to lead, as they become models for the younger ones.

What We Value

Trying to describe how our nurturing environment comes to life in our schools is not an easy task, as it involves the very special attitudes and approaches our teachers take in their every interaction with the children. We believe our teachers provide a unique situation in which children know they are loved, respected as unique persons, and values just for who they are. Perhaps our greatest testimonies are the alumni children who want to come back to “my school” to tell their former teachers about current activities and accomplishments, from losing their first tooth to learning to read or even graduating from high school. (Yes, some of our teachers have that much history with alumni children!) All of our children know they will always be welcomed at Our Children’s House.

A group of parents and teachers identified some specific examples of things we value about Our Children’s House. Some of the values that came out of this discussion are as follows:

- Learning through play and hands-on experiences
- Doing all that is possible in the best interest of our children
- Knowing that the teachers love our children, demonstrate a sincere, personal interest in them and appreciate them as individuals
- Providing our children with a warm, safe environment
- Nurturing all who are part of Our Children’s House: our children, our families, and our teachers
- Knowing our teachers work as a team to support, train, and serve as role models for each other and for parents
- Teaching children to learn respect for themselves and others while watching each child develop a unique sense of positive self-esteem
- Teaching children to learn self-discipline, problem-solving skills, and social skills that will last a lifetime
- Letting children be children and letting them grow at their own pace
- Knowing that there is always a welcome lap or a warm pat on the back for every child—our children are talked to, sung with, hugged and celebrated every day!!!
- Encouraging each child to express their individuality---whether that means wearing favorite pajamas to school, putting on a dress wrong-side out or backwards, or being called by their favorite character name at lunch (“Time for yogurt, Lightning McQueen!”)

The Daily Schedule

We structure our daily schedule to provide a good balance between active and quiet times, group and individual play, and indoor and outdoor activities. A sample of our daily activities is offered on pages 23-25 of this manual.

Accordingly, we sensitively design our curriculum to challenge without overwhelming. At OCH we plan learning experiences with each child’s individual nature, needs, and interest in mind.

CURRICULUM

Opportunities for Growth

The curriculum offers many opportunities for growth and progress in major areas of child development:

- Emotional well-being and self-esteem
- Socialization and group-living skills
- Physical skills and coordination
- Cognitive abilities
- Language/literacy

We provide children with hands on activities involving all senses.

Lesson Plans

Teachers post lesson plans weekly to inform parents of specific topics and coordinated experiences. These plans are observations based on the group as well as the individual. Teachers watch the children and extend their play. These plans can change daily depending on the interest of the children. Planned activities are provided for the child to experience and develop their own knowledge.

Reading

All activities and experiences planned in our curriculum are based on interest of the child and offer age appropriate opportunities to develop the mental and cognitive foundations necessary for later reading skills.

Outdoor/Physical Activity

Our Children's House values active outdoor play. Weather permitting, we will spend time outside each day, often more than once. We will engage in active play as well as taking advantage of the learning environment that the outdoor setting provides us.

STAFF MEMBERS

Teachers

Our Children's House is committed to creating a collaborative working relationship between the staff and parents of the children to provide the very best in early childhood education. It is through working closely with the whole family—not just the child—that our family environment is successful. We believe that children thrive when surrounded by love, not just at home, but throughout the whole day. Our staff makes every effort to establish good communication and partner with each child's family.

Staff positions include the following:

- **Center Director** - Manages the day-to-day operations of Our Children's House; supervises all personnel; teaches and cares for children; **serves on OCH board; and maintains vision for the present and future of the program.**
- **Administrative Director** - Manages child and staff files; payroll; budget and accounting matters; enrollment; and a variety of administrative duties; serves on OCH board
- **Assistant Director** – Teaches and cares for children as a lead teacher; also assists Center Director with managing day to day operations; serves on OCH board
- **Teachers** - Teachers may be both full and part-time staff members. Although their primary responsibilities are to teach and care for children, their input is vital to the Center Director in planning for Our Children's House and our curriculum.
- **Student Teachers** - Periodically, student teachers from several area child-care training programs (i.e. UNCG, GTCC, NCA&T, and/or Bennett) may observe and/or serve at OCH for part of their learning experience. Professional staff members share skills with these student teachers and supervise their participation.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SCHOOL

Because we are a parent-owned, parent/teacher operated and non-profit facility, parent involvement and support are required components of OCH's success, both from operational and financial standpoints. Parents take primary responsibility for the maintenance of the building, playground, and grounds. Parents (through the Board of Directors) also make policy and financial decisions. In essence, parents take on these activities so that, beyond daily cleaning and maintenance, our teachers are free to devote their time and energies to the care of our children in an attractive, safe, and fun environment.

Parent Support of OCH Operations

We recognize that parents have varying talents and schedules. Thus, many different avenues for parent involvement are possible. We encourage parents to choose activities that best fit their skills and interest. Each parent is required to serve on a committee (refer to section on OCH Standing Committees).

In addition, OCH schedules school-wide activities that require total parent participation to be successful. Although the Fundraising Committee organizes these quarterly events, all families are required to participate in each fundraiser to the best of their ability. Additionally, we have mandatory quarterly workdays, which include such tasks such as painting the interior of the school or large maintenance tasks on the playground. These events require all parents to help by painting, digging, fixing lunch for the work crews, or cleaning up. These "all call" activities not only provide needed maintenance and hold cost down (tuition), but also contribute to the family and community spirit that

characterizes Our Children's House. Parents may opt to pay \$100 in lieu of participating in a workday. This fee will be assessed to any family who does not make arrangements prior to the workday. We list many of these activities in a yearly calendar of events, distributed to parents, so that parents can make plans for their participation as far in advance as possible.

OCH Membership Meetings

As voting members of the OCH Corporation, we require parents to attend OCH membership meetings. At these meetings, parents have the opportunity to elect Board Members, hear reports from Board members, and participate in future planning for Our Children's House. The first meeting of each school year in August or September is particularly important and is usually incorporated with the mandatory workday.

Social and Educational Activities

At Our Children's House our goal is to create a community spirit among our teachers and parents, working together for our children. We schedule social and educational activities throughout the year. Social activities include family events, such as the annual end-of-year picnic, typically held in May; the Halloween party, featuring teachers in surprise costumes; and the Holiday party, highlighted by a performance by the children. In addition, we plan a fall social event for teachers and parents once a year.

It is our goal to support and complement the parent/child relationship in all areas. Parents are always welcome at Our Children's House. We hope that you will participate in specific learning experiences whenever skills, time, and interest permit. On children's birthdays in particular, we invite you to have lunch or bring a snack in celebration of the special event. We encourage families to bring in healthy treats on these occasions! You may consider bringing in a special craft or activity to complete instead of a treat on that day.

OCH GOVERNANCE

Membership in Our Children's House

Parents become members of OCH when they enroll their child in the Center. Any member can serve on the OCH Board of Directors or an OCH committee. A copy of the OCH Bylaws describes in detail the governance policies and procedures for the organization. A copy of the OCH bylaws is on file in the OCH office.

Board of Directors

The membership elects a Board of Directors to govern OCH. The Board is made up of nine (9) members. Of these nine, at least two-thirds must have children currently enrolled in Our Children's House. Three new board members are elected each year to

serve three-year terms. The Board elects the following positions annually: President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

The Board's work is supported by several standing committees (Marketing, Fundraising, Parent Involvement, and Interior Building/Exterior Grounds) composed of parent volunteers. Standing committees are chaired by a Board member and composed of elected and/or appointed OCH members.

A current listing of the names and addresses of Board members, Board officers and members of standing committees are made available to OCH members in the newsletter.

OCH STANDING COMMITTEES

The following is a list of OCH committees. Each family is encouraged to serve on one committee:

Executive Committee

Chaired by the OCH President

- Made up of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and the immediate past President
- Plans for the long-range needs of Our Children's House
- Meets with and makes recommendations to the Board of Directors
- Serves as the Personnel Committee
- Directly supervises the Director of Our Children's House and administrative director

Parent Involvement Committee

Chaired by an OCH Board Member

- Works with teachers to secure drivers for field trips and assist where needed with planning additional outings
- Assist teachers with planning parent meetings (planning food, icebreakers, etc.) where needed.
- Works with OCH staff to coordinate parent sign-ups and involvement for all OCH events (such as the end of year picnic)
- Coordinates the design and planning of all OCH children's parties
- Plans all teacher appreciation activities

Interior Building/Exterior Grounds Committee

Chaired by an OCH Board Member

- Works with property owner to identify needed improvements and maintenance to the building
- Coordinates and completes all interior facility maintenance for which OCH is responsible

- Works with OCH staff to identify new major equipment needs and makes recommendations for the Board and Membership about securing them
- Coordinates all exterior maintenance for which OCH is responsible; yard services, fencing, parking lot, etc.
- Works with any drainage or erosion control problems on the property
- Coordinates all exterior yard work, such as cutting grass, weeding, watering, fertilizing, etc. and makes sure that these tasks are completed
- Works with OCH staff to assist with playground equipment installation, including sand
- Schedules activities for outdoor parent workdays during the year for planting, gutter cleaning, repairs, playground work, etc.

Marketing Committee

Chaired by an OCH Board Member

- Works to maintain enrollment of 29 children at all times and to maintain a substantial waiting list
- Promotes the image of Our Children’s House in the Greensboro Community
- Serves as a liaison with the media
- Promotes OCH events in the community
- Creates, updates, and distributes OCH brochures
- Works closely with the Parent Involvement Committee to communicate with potential OCH families
- Initiates creative marketing projects as needed
- Coordinates getting information for committee chair and board members to Around the House editor, if necessary

Fundraising Committee

Chaired by an OCH Board Member

- Coordinates, plans, and organizes fundraising efforts
- Communicates fundraising needs to OCH families and board members
- Makes spending recommendations to the board
- Current annual fundraising projects include Yankee Candle™ Fundraising and Autobell Carwash—additional activities may be selected each year

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent conferences will be offered twice yearly, once in the fall shortly after enrollment (or changing to a new class) and once in the spring. Parents are also welcome to schedule conferences at their leisure. Parents or teachers may schedule additional parent/teacher conferences as desired or warranted to discuss the child’s progress and/or any specific problems that may arise.

TOILET TRAINING

At OCH, toilet training is an individualized process that allows each child to follow his/her own schedule. We strive to handle each training session matter-of-factly and patiently. We believe it is important to be sensitive to the emotional well-being and self-esteem of each child.

The training process must never be rushed or forced, with the daily schedule allowing ample flexibility to ensure that each child receives the time and attention they require.

POLICIES FOF PARENTS

Waiting List Procedures

OCH's waiting list is based on the first come, first-served basis, without discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or nationality. A child's name is placed on a waiting list for his/her age group in order of date of application. When an opening occurs, we give first priority to children of "founding families" and "founding teachers," those who established and opened OCH in 1994. Second priority is given to siblings of current and former students and third to parents who want full time over part time. In addition, we may consider other factors to ensure optimum group proportioning.

To place a child's name on the waiting list, we require a completed application form and a non-refundable application fee. We encourage parents to visit OCH with their child(ren) to become acquainted with the OCH program and to discuss the program with staff.

When an opening is available, the OCH Director will call the first eligible name on the waiting list. If unavailable, a message will be left on the answering machine notifying the parent of the opening. Once notified, the parent has three (3) school days to accept or decline the opening. If the parent accepts the opening, OCH must receive a non-refundable deposit equal to one-half the monthly tuition no later than the end of the same three day period. The deposit, which holds the space for two weeks, will be applied to the child's first month of tuition.

Tuition is due from the first day that the opening is available. Parents always will have at least two weeks' notice of an available space In order to give notice to a present caregiver.

If the parent declines an opening the first time he/she is called, he/she will have the option of keeping the child's name at the same spot on the waiting list. Thereafter, if the parent declines an opening, the child's name will be moved to the bottom of the waiting list. If a parent accepts an invitation but the OCH staff determines that he child is not ready developmentally, the child's name maintains its spot on the list.

Admission Procedures

OCH's enrollment is limited to twenty-nine (29) full-time children, ages one through five. Admission of children between 12 and 15 months is based on assessment of the readiness. Because of the multi-age setting, all children must be walking well to be considered for admission to OCH.

We are concerned about the child as an individual and give the child's needs and interest top priority. OCH is eager to serve all children and families and will collaborate to plan for individual needs. We may suggest a trial period (ranging from several hours to several days or more) for the child. We expect that there will be a period of adjustment for each child to a new situation. It may be a trying time for the child, family, and staff. It should not be a cause for too much anxiety and concern, because this is a normal condition. Some preschool children are not ready to participate in a group situation. Therefore, we accept each child on the condition that he/she will be able to participate effectively in our activities. If necessary, we will schedule a conference after thirty days to discuss the child's progress and any problems. If, at the end of sixty days, adaptation problems persist, the parent will be asked to make alternative arrangements for childcare.

Prior to enrollment or the child's first day at OCH, we must have the following forms completed and on file at OCH:

- Application Form
- Health Record with Immunization Record
- Enrollment and Departure Policy
- Emergency Information Form
- Discipline Policy
- NC Child Care Laws & Rules Receipt
- Student Publicity Permission Form
- Parent Directory/Information Form
- Permission to Play Outside the Fenced Area
- Infant Feeding Schedule (for children under 15 months of age)
- Enrollment and Departure Policy
- Field Trip Permission Form

Re-enrollment occurs annually during October and requires updating of certain forms and a re-enrollment fee. We require full tuition payment from the first day of availability (see above) although the child may be phased in gradually, if desired.

Part-time care

OCH provides 2-3 days per week based on availability. Should the need arise, you may be asked to change the days in which your child attends due to full-time availability needs.

Continued Enrollment of School Eligible 5 year olds

Traditionally at OCH, once a child is eligible for kindergarten (s)he moves on, either to kindergarten or to a pre-K program. If a parent feels their child is not yet ready for kindergarten and would not benefit from a pre-K program, they must appeal to the director to allow for the continued enrollment at OCH of this child. This would be for a one year period.

The director's decision is based on whether the child could truly benefit from another year at OCH and whether it would be a good fit for the school. If a child were permitted to attend for that extra year, (s)he would be allowed to complete the school year even after (s)he turns 6 years old. This arrangement will only be considered for children who have been attending OCH and will not be considered for new students.

Termination Procedures

Thirty days notice provided to the Director before removing a child from OCH is required or one month's tuition beyond that time will be required.

In the event we feel that a child's needs cannot be accommodated at OCH, we will give the parents a two weeks' notice of termination in order for them to find alternative childcare.

Temporary Filling of a Vacancy

In cases when a vacancy exists and there is no one paying to hold that spot, an appropriate child may be allowed to fill the spot on a temporary basis, at the discretion of the Director, in consultation with the staff and a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. Payment in full for the period of enrollment shall be made in advance.

FEES & CHARGES

Monthly Tuition

Payment is due on the first day of the month. We will post notices for tuition and any other charges (e.g. insurance, fees, etc.—see below) by the last day of the previous month. It is critical that all payments be made on time. A \$25.00 late fee will be added to all payments received after the seventh day of the month. An account in arrears for more than two weeks will result in termination of enrollment.

Families are responsible for tuition payments and should place their checks in the box outside the OCH office door. If a bank returns a check to us for insufficient funds, we will redeposit it. In addition, the parent(s) will be charged a \$25.00 insufficient funds or

returned check fee. If any subsequent checks are returned by the bank, we will accept cash only for OCH services.

OCH provides current fee sheets to applicants and enrolled parents annually or when any fees change. Because of OCH's non-profit status, any tuition increases are based on increased expenses only. A four percent (4%) increase per year, beginning in January, should be expected.

We are prepared for each enrolled child each day, whether or not s/he attends. Thus, there are no refunds for individual days or partial days absent. When possible, please notify staff about planned absences for your child(ren) several days in advance.

Accident Insurance

Accident insurance is carried on each child at OCH. This insurance covers your child's medical cost (less a \$25 deductible) incurred as a result of an accident while on OCH property or while in the care of OCH teachers on a field trip of supervised activity.

Re-enrollment

Every October we hold a re-enrollment period for all OCH children. At this time we charge a \$10.00 re-enrollment fee and ask each parent to update the following forms:

- Emergency Information Form
- Health Record with Immunization Record (with most recent physical information)
- Permission to Play Outside the Fenced Area

Late Fees

Our closing time (6:00 p.m.) is firm; teachers should be able to lock the door at that time. "Late" is determined by the OCH clock and is calculated by time the parent enters the classroom door. Parents who arrive to pick up a child after the 6:00 p.m. closing time will be charged \$1.00 per minute. In case of an early closing due to inclement weather, "late" is based on the time the school closes that day. The late fee(s) will be added to the next month's tuition bill and will be paid to OCH. All of the collected fees go to the teacher(s) assigned to take care of the waiting child. If the parent has not arrived within one hour of closing, the police department will be contacted in accordance with state law.

In the event that a parent should arrive late, the parent should gather the child's belongings (teachers will try to have these at the door) as quickly as possible so that the teachers may leave. If a parent is frequently late, s/he may be asked to withdraw her/his child from OCH by a resolution of the OCH Board of Directors.

OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

Hours of Operation/Holidays

OCH is open from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, year-round, except for the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (teacher workday)
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Fourth of July
- Labor Day
- Veteran's Day (teacher workday)
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday after Thanksgiving
- Christmas Day
- The day before or after Christmas

If a calendar holiday's date (Christmas, New Year's and Fourth of July) falls on a Saturday, OCH will be closed on Friday; if it falls on a Sunday, we will be closed on Monday unless otherwise posted.

Daily Outdoor Play

North Carolina childcare law states all children have to have outdoor play daily weather permitting. This includes temperature over 20 degrees (take wind chill factor into account)

- Please dress your child in layers
- Water will always be provided and encouraged
- Hands will be checked every 15 min for temperature
- Time limited to 10-20 min. at a time on temperature extreme days
- Hot days: time will be limited between hours 10-4
- Sunscreen applied on hot, sunny days when provided by parent

Inclement Weather Policy

Generally, OCH does not close due to inclement weather. There may be days, however, when we will have to open late, close early, or not open at all because of dangerous conditions. Inclement weather decisions will be made by the Director in consultation with the President or Vice-President of the Board. On a day when weather conditions are severe, parents should call OCH before leaving home to be sure the Center is open.

Notification of Delays or Cancellations

If there is a delay or cancellation in the opening of OCH, there will be a message on OCH's answering machine by 6:30 a.m. If bad weather conditions occur during the day and closing early becomes necessary, parents will be notified by phone.

Fire Drills

North Carolina state law requires that we practice fire drills monthly. During fire drills, the teachers will evacuate the children in a timely manner. Please do not be alarmed if you hear the drill or if your children talk of a fire alarm when you are at home. The staff is also trained in disaster preparedness and other emergency drills may be practiced as needed.

ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

Notifying a Teacher

Arrivals and departures must be confirmed by a teacher. Please do not leave the grounds without being sure that an adult in charge is aware of either your child's arrival or his/her departure. As of January 2011, North Carolina state childcare law requires that a parent sign your child in and out when arriving and departing. The sign in/out sheet is located by the front door. Also, arrival by 10:00 a.m. will ensure your child's opportunity to participate in his/her group time activities.

In cases of separated or divorced parents where visitation rights are denied to one parent, OCH cannot refuse to release a child to such parent unless a court decree or separation document is in our file expressly forbidding such parent from picking the child up from OCH. Please notify staff of any changes or situations of concern that may affect the release of your child to the persons named on your Application Form.

Children are not allowed to open the front, back, or side door at any time. Please be aware of the other children while coming or going.

Parking Lot

Please do not park your car so others cannot maneuver in and out of the parking lot. Be very careful to look for other parents and children!

Nap Time Pick-ups

If you are picking up your child during naptime (12:30-3:00 p.m.), please go the back entrance and enter quietly. If possible, please try to avoid dropping your child off during this time because of the distractions to the other children.

HEALTH POLICIES

Medical Examination

Each child must have a medical examination by a licensed physician or his authorized agent prior to or within two weeks of admission to OCH. This is to assure that the child is in good health, is free from communicable diseases and can participate in group activities. This examination shall also include dates of immunizations, which the child has had in accordance with North Carolina laws (see Appendix A). Please give information regarding immunizations received after enrollment to the staff to ensure that your child's records remain current. Updated immunization records need to be provided yearly to keep records current.

Allergies

In the case of a food allergy, make sure they are clearly listed and posted in the kitchen. Make sure staff is aware of any procedures necessary to ensure the safety of your child. The state requires a doctor's note on file for any allergy or dietary restrictions.

Emergency Information Form

In addition to the health record, each child must have a completed Emergency Information Form. This form includes information concerning addresses and phone numbers of the parents, physician, dentist, and the designated hospital for emergency use. In the event that the parents of the family physician cannot be reached in an emergency, a consulting physician retained by OCH will administer treatment. Parents must sign a statement giving permission for emergency care for their child upon his/her admission to OCH.

When to Stay at Home

We cannot accommodate nor adequately care for a child showing signs of serious illness. If your child shows these symptoms or cannot participate in the normal activities of the school for these or any other reasons, the child should be kept at home. Health checks are done daily by the staff. We may ask that you take a child home when you arrive in the morning or may call you during the day to come for your child. We expect that the decision to send a child home will be the result of mutual agreement between the parent and OCH teachers, taking into consideration the well-being of the child and the school community. However, final determination of whether a child should stay or be at home rests with the teachers.

Guidelines for exclusion:

- Fever of 101°F and above. This is 100 degrees if taken under the arm, 101 if taken orally.
- Persistent crying, lethargy, irritability
- Difficulty breathing

- Mouth sores associated with drooling
- Rash with fever or behavioral change
- White or yellow eye discharge
- Strep throat
- Lice, scabies, varicella, impetigo
- Diarrhea and/or vomiting

Communicable and Infectious Disease

If you learn that your child has been exposed to any of the following:

- a communicable disease of early childhood (e.g. chicken pox, measles, mumps, or rubella)
- any other infectious disease posing a threat to the well-being of the Center's enrollment

Please notify OCH at once so that we can inform other parents and watch for early symptoms in the other children. Children with infectious diseases will not be admitted to OCH until the disease is cured or has run its course. We may require a doctor's statement before the child return's to the center.

Sending Children Home

We will always communicate with you if your child is not feeling well. If your child becomes ill at OCH, we will contact you and request that you come for the child. In instances of vomiting and/or diarrhea, we will call after two cases. Additionally, any child with a temperature of 101°F (100 under arm, 101 orally) or higher must be taken home. We will provide a quiet area for the ill child apart from the group while waiting for pick up. Parents should come at once. Any child sent home by OCH for an illness must be kept at home for at least 24 hours. In the case of fever, the child should be fever free for 24 hours before returning to school.

Medication

No drug or medication will be administered to any child without specific instructions from the child's guardian, a physician, or other authorized health professional. No drug or medication will be administered after its expiration date.

Prescription medication must be in its original container bearing the pharmacist's label that list the child's name, the date the prescription was filled, the physician's name, the name of the medicine or the prescription number, and directions for dosage. If this is not available, a note signed and dated by the prescribing physician or other health professional will be acceptable. It should include the child's name with written instructions for dosage and times given. Prescribed medicine will be administered only to the person for whom it is prescribed. A guardian of the child on medication must sign a medication chart daily.

Patent and over-the-counter medicines, such as cough syrup, aspirin/Tylenol, or medication for intestinal disorders, shall be administered as authorized in writing by the child's parent, not to exceed amounts and frequency of dosage specified in the printed instructions accompanying the medicine. In cases of no suggested dosage, a signed form from the pediatrician will be required. The authorization form must give the child's name, the name of the medicine, dosage instructions, guardian's signature, and the date signed. Patent medicine may also be administered in accordance with instructions from a physician or other authorized health professional.

When any questions arise concerning whether medication provided by the parent should be administered, that medication shall not be administered with signed, written dosage instruction from a licensed physician or authorized health professional.

ALL MEDICINE, OVER-THE-COUNTER AND PRESCRIPTION, MUST BE TAKEN HOME EVERY DAY. This is a State health regulation.

North Carolina law requires that all medications be kept under lock and key, or stored in a refrigerator inaccessible to the children. It is imperative that parents give all medicines directly to the adult in charge or store them directly in the locked compartment upon arrival. To avoid serious accident, please do not allow your child to carry medicine in his/her pockets or cubbies.

Standing orders must be written and updated every 6 months for children who may need emergency medications or daily medications prescribed by a physician. Some examples...

- Benadryl, epi-pen, asthma meds, etc.
- Bug spray, Neosporin, diaper cream, sunscreen, teething gels etc. also require a written permission slip.

ITEMS TO BRING

Clothing

OCH provides appropriate childhood activities; therefore, your child's clothing will get dirty. Children should wear washable play clothes for comfort and ease of cleaning. State law requires each child to play outside each day, weather permitting (see page 17). Please dress your child accordingly.

Change of Clothing

Please make sure your child has a properly labeled (we cannot be responsible for lost personal items not labeled), seasonally appropriate, complete change of clothing in his/her cubby for emergencies, this includes socks. Children in the process of being toilet trained need extra clothes. These clothing changes can be old and worn clothing. All clothing should be clearly marked with the child's name in permanent ink. OCH does

not assume responsibility for clothing. If extra clothing is not in the child's cubby, we will try to provide extra clothing as needed. (Please wash and return these!) Soiled clothing must be taken home daily.

Diapers

If your child is in diapers, bring an adequate supply for each day. Alternatively, you may bring a package of diapers. If your child wears cloth diapers, also bring extra rubber pants and your own diaper pail. All of these supplies should be marked clearly with the child's name. OCH provides wipes, but you may send your own if you have a preference.

Personal Items

Children are encouraged to bring a blanket, coverlet, small travel pillow, or other "security" item from home to be used at naptime. A stuffed animal, doll or other "friend" also may be brought for naptime. Familiar items such as these often bring security and comfort to a child in a new situation. Please help your child choose an item that is appropriate for OCH. Items may be brought in and taken home daily or the favored item may be left in your child's cubby. Please check your child's cubby daily to avoid build up of items there. Teachers will also check cubbies periodically during clean-up times, and during these times or any other time, we may ask you to take home extra items that pose a safety problem.

Due to state health regulations, children may not sleep with OCH blankets, pillows, or stuffed animals. Please make sure that your child has what he or she needs to be secure and comfortable at naptime.

Given our multi-age grouping, leave small items and items with small parts at home since they may endanger the younger children. This would include small hair accessories, doll shoes/accessories, etc. Such items should not be brought to school or left in your child's cubby. In addition, materials that have weapons or promote violence, or that may be perceived as violent are not acceptable. If you are in doubt about whether an item is appropriate, please consult with a teacher.

Other than naptime, please do not allow your child to bring toys to OCH. Do not forget to check your child's pockets. Children should not bring chewing gum, candy, balloons, beads, rings, money, or any other small items to OCH. Items such as these pose a real danger to our younger children, even when they are being kept in a child's cubby.

Teachers will announce any exceptions to this policy, such as show and share theme days (i.e. bring your favorite teddy bear day). We welcome bringing in special items such as an insect found, special pictures, bird's nests, etc. Please give these special items to a teacher to store it appropriately for the day.

We welcome books, CDs, and tapes for sharing, but please be aware that you bring them at your risk. If your child wants to bring a video to share on a rainy day, please be

sure the child knows that the teachers make all decisions concerning whether or not a video is shown and which videos are shown. We cannot be responsible for lost or broken personal toys, books, etc.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Field Trips

Local field trips are occasionally planned to enhance the curriculum and are always designed to be learning experiences. Depending on the age group(s) involved, these events may include trips to a local park for a picnic lunch, the Natural Science Center Zoo, the Library Storytime, and Storybook Theatre (plays). Parent drivers are required; please let us know if you are able to drive occasionally. A permission slip allowing your child to participate must be on file before departure from the center, in order for your child to participate.

Birthdays

Birthdays are celebrated at a snack or mealtime. Parents who wish to bring or send refreshments should notify OCH at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance. Please see page 20 for guidelines on bringing food to share. If you do not want your child to be served sugared birthday treats, please be sure this is indicated on the Application Form under "Other Concerns" and posted in the kitchen near the snack menu. His/her snack or "treat" will be supplied by OCH.

In lieu of party favors or treats, please consider donating an item (e.g. book, tape) to OCH in honor of the child's birthday. Please check the "wish list" in the newsletter for great ideas. Parents may want to get together with another family having a birthday during the same time of the year as their own child, and purchase a more expensive item together. Considering the amount of time that children spend at Our Children's House, this is a great way to make sure that gifts are enjoyed and played with over and over again.

We ask that parents refrain from bringing in balloons as they are a choking hazard!

Holiday Celebrations

We celebrate holidays through art, decorations, and activities. Families of all faiths and cultures are asked to teach us about their beliefs and traditions so that we can share them with the children.

Pictures

Our Children's House has individual pictures taken. These pictures are taken for your convenience and you are under no obligation to purchase them.

From time to time, the children's pictures may be taken in groups, or individually, as they participate in OCH activities. We use these pictures in displays around the school or to record special activities in our scrapbooks and also on Our Children's House website. Please let our Director know if you do not wish for your child to be photographed.

MEALS AND SNACKS

Breakfast

Please make sure your child has finished breakfast before coming to school. We will provide a morning snack between 9:15 and 9:30.

Lunches

Mark bagged/boxed lunches clearly with the child's name and date and store them in the kitchen. By law, bag lunches must contain a nutritious, well-balanced assortment of foods. If not, OCH will have to supplement at cost to the school. Appendix B of this manual summarizes USDA meal patterns for children.

USDA guidelines are as follows:

- Milk/alternative—If your child drinks soy milk, please bring and label. If your child drinks an alternative milk (soy, organic, etc), this is to be provided by the parent. *A doctor's note must be on file authorizing OCH to serve the alternative milk.*
- Meat/alternative
- Fruit or vegetable
- Bread/alternative

Snacks

Snack menus are posted on the refrigerator in the kitchen. No food substitutes will be made, except for allergies. In this case, you can pack a labeled snack to serve your child if needed. Due to the cost of providing appropriate snacks, please do not borrow from OCH's supplies for after school pick up needs.

Food Preparations

All foods requiring special preparation should be properly labeled with the child's name and instructions. Please send a microwave safe container in lunch box for heating.

Cups

"Sippy cups" need to be clearly labeled with your child's name and date and must be taken home daily for cleaning. You do not have to send them filled because we will provide drink during the day.

Baked Goods

Birthdays may be celebrated at snack or mealtime. Environmental health regulations require that ANY baked goods or other food brought to OCH must be commercially prepared food in its original package, with ingredients listed. No home-baked foods, including cookies, cupcakes, cakes, etc., can be served to OCH children. Parents who wish to bring or send refreshments to school should notify OCH at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance. This regulation only applies to food shared at school and not to food in your child's lunch box or food you bring to after-hours events, such as picnics or covered dish dinners.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND STAFF

Regular and consistent communication with parents is an important part of the philosophy of OCH. The following shall serve as a minimum plan for disseminating and exchanging information to/with parents and can be posted on the front door or your child's clip:

Daily Reports

Teachers complete a daily report sheet for each child summarizing the child's mood, eating habits, and developmental progress for the day/week. Parents are encouraged to give feedback. The sheets are used to notify of any needs the child may have, such as diapers, change of clothes, etc.

Regular Newsletter

"OCH News" reports children's activities and special events, gives reminders and tips to parents and notifies readers of the regularly scheduled parents' meetings, including topic and speaker.

"Around the House" is the OCH blog that elaborates on various OCH happenings.

Reminder Memos

Memos from the Board, committees, teachers, and other parents are distributed individually to parents as necessary and are used most often to notify families of any change from the norm: policy changes, staff changes, extra activity fees, changes in childcare fees, or any unusual activity that may affect the daily routing of the children.

Sign-up Sheets/Notices

Sign-up sheets and other notices are posted on the parents' information board or front door. These notices include general notices of community events and/or special activities, events, services, or materials available to the children and families of OCH.

Parent's Policy Manual and Handbook

This booklet is distributed to parents upon permanent enrollment to OCH and shall be used as a reference guide for all policies and procedures relating to children, teachers, and parents. This policy manual is available on the OCH website for quick reference.

Parent Meetings

These get-togethers are held periodically during the school year and are usually oriented to a topic appropriate for parent education. The meetings are often brief seminars presented by a guest with expertise on a subject at hand, with a question/answer period to follow. The meeting also serves as good "catch-up" time between teachers and parents to discuss the children and their activities on a casual basis. These meetings are planned by the teachers.

Membership Board Meetings

All OCH parents are OCH members. We encourage you to attend membership meetings at which we discuss upcoming events, review financial information and make decisions about the operation of Our Children's House.

Communicating with Teachers

Parent/teacher conferences will be offered twice a year or as needed and can be scheduled by the parent or teacher. Please tell us about any changes or variation from normal events that may affect your child's behavior and attitude while at OCH (e.g. did not have a good nights' sleep, an accident, parent out of town, visit from relatives, or illness in the family). We can then be more sensitive and responsive to your child's needs.

It is the responsibility of parents to notify the Center Director in writing of any changes of employment, address, telephone numbers, hours of work or any other pertinent information regarding the family. These notifications are critical so that staff can contact a parent in an emergency.

Complaints

Any parent wishing to register a complaint with OCH should first consult the Center Director or the teacher, depending on the type of complaint. If the parent believes it is then necessary to pursue the matter further, he/she may contact a member of the Board of Directors, who will then notify the other Board members and arrange a consultation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Parents are assured that OCH and its staff maintain strict confidence concerning the children and families served as permitted under the law. Any information that parents discuss with the Director or other staff regarding their child, family or other matters will be held in the strictest confidence in accordance with applicable law. No records or files will be released with written permission of a parent. Parents should be aware that North Carolina statutes require professionals, including childcare workers, to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect to the Guilford County Department of Social Services.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

The goal of all disciplining techniques is ultimately self-discipline; that is, self-control to the point that external reward or punishments are unnecessary to either ensure appropriate behavior or to prevent unacceptable behavior.

This is a tall order and does not occur with anyone, at any age, overnight. Self-discipline is an on-going process, must be learned, and is eventually self-rewarding.

The socialization process requires the internalization of many behavior “rules” both, implicit and explicit. To help young children in this process, we at OCH use the following disciplinary procedure on a general basis. Variations may occur depending on the nature of the unacceptable behavior and other extenuating circumstances.

1. Establish and enforce reasonable limits. This helps children know what is expected of them. Logical consequences (e.g. “if you write on the walls, then you must give up crayons for a while”) are used to reinforce the limits. Restricted privileges are related in proportional scale to the unacceptable behavior.
2. Redirect to other activities whenever possible. Especially with younger children, offering alternatives is an effective way of dealing with conflicts. When successful, this method simply and quickly directs the attention to something else.
3. Use time-out as a means of brief social isolation (e.g. removal from group or activity for a short period). Able to see and hear the activity, but unable to participate, the child develops an appreciation for “abiding by the rules” of the group. *Note:* it is important not to keep a child in “time-out” too long; otherwise, he will find something to amuse himself and forget why he is there.
4. Use positive and negative reinforcement (e.g. “I like it when you listen to the story” [praise for the appropriate story] and “I cannot understand you when you are screaming. I will come back when you are calm enough to talk” [ignoring unacceptable behavior]). *Note:* We do not ignore negative behavior that is harmful to another child, to property or to the child himself.
5. We do not use physical force, corporal punishment, or withhold food as punishment.

One's Schedule

7:00am-9:00 am	Arrival/Multi-age free choices activities (manipulatives, books, dramatic play, blocks, art, etc.)
9:00-9:15 am	Circle Time/Rituals
9:15-9:30 am	Snack
9:30-9:45 am	Diapering/Toileting*
9:45-10:45 am	Active play (weather permitting outside)
10:45-11:30 am	Group time/Free Choice
11:30am-12:00 pm	Lunch
12:00-12:15 pm	Diapering/Toileting*
12:15-12:30 pm	Book Time
12:30-2:45 pm	Nap (diapering/toileting as they wake up)
2:45-3:15 pm	Quiet activities as they wake up (books, puzzles, art, etc.)
3:15-3:30 pm	Snack
3:30-4:00 pm	Outside
4:00-6:00 pm	Multi-age free choice activities/Pick-up

*as needed, as well as, during these designated times

Two's Schedule

7:00am-9:00 am	Arrival/Multi-age free choice activities (manipulatives, books, dramatic play, blocks, art, etc.)
9:00-9:15 am	Circle Time (finger plays, singing, etc)
9:15-9:30 am	Diapering/Toileting*
9:30-9:45 am	Snack
9:45-10:45 am	Active Play (weather permitting outside)
10:45-11:00 am	Transition
10:45-11:45 am	Free choice/group time
11:45am-12:15 pm	Lunch
12:15-12:30 pm	Book Time/Toileting
12:45-2:45 pm	Nap/Rest time (diapering/toileting as they wake up)
2:45-3:30 pm	Quiet Activities (book, puzzles, art, etc.)
3:30-3:45 pm	Snack
3:45-4:00 pm	Outside
4:00-6:00 pm	Multi-age free choice activities (outside is a choice)/Pick-up

* as needed, as well as, during these designated times

Three's-Five's Schedule

7:00am-9:15 am	Arrival/Multi-age free choice activities (manipulatives, books, dramatic play, blocks, art, etc.)
9:15-9:30 am	Circle Time (Finger plays, singing, etc.)
9:30-9:45 am	Snack
9:45-10:00 am	Book time/Toileting*
10:00-10:45am	Group time (teacher directed activities)
10:45-11:00 am	Transition (toileting*, clean up)
11:00am-12:00 pm	Active Play (outside/inside play focused on gross motor skills)
12:00pm-12:30 pm	Lunch
12:30-12:45 pm	Book Time/Toileting*
12:45-3:00 pm	Nap/rest time
3:00-3:30 pm	Toileting*/Clean up after nap
3:30-3:45 pm	Snack
3:45-6:00 pm	Multi-age free choice activities (outside is a choice)/pick up

* as needed, as well as, during these designated times

APPENDIX A:
CHILDREN'S HEALTH RECORD

Children's Medical Report

Name of Child _____ Birthdate _____

Name of Parent or Guardian _____

Address of Parent of Guardian _____

A. Medical History (May be completed by parent)

1. Is child allergic to anything? No Yes If yes, what? _____

2. Is child currently under a doctor's care? No Yes If yes, for what reason? _____

3. Is the child on any continuous medication? No Yes If yes, what? _____

4. Any previous hospitalizations or operations? No Yes If yes, when and for what? _____

5. Any history of significant previous diseases or recurrent illness? No Yes ;
 diabetes No Yes ; convulsions No Yes ; heart trouble No Yes .
 If others, what/when? _____

6. Does the child have any physical disabilities: No Yes If yes, please describe: _____

Any mental disabilities? No Yes If yes, please describe: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian _____

Date _____

B. Physical Examination: This examination must be completed and signed by a licensed physician, his authorized agent currently approved by the N. C. Board of Medical Examiners (or a comparable board from bordering states), a certified nurse practitioner, or a public health nurse meeting DEHNR standards for EPSDT program.

Height _____ % Weight _____ %

Head _____ Eyes _____ Ears _____ Nose _____ Teeth _____

Throat _____ Neck _____ Heart _____ Chest _____ Abd/GU _____

Ext _____ Neurological System _____ Skin _____

Results of Tuberculin Test, if given: Type _____ date _____ Normal ___ Abnormal _____

Should activities be limited? No Yes If yes, explain: _____

Any other recommendations: _____

Date of Examination _____

Signature of authorized examiner/title _____ Phone # _____

APPENDIX B:
USDA Meal Pattern Recommendations

CACFP MEAL GUIDELINES

MEAT & MEAT ALTERNATES

- Cheese foods / spreads, cottage cheese and ricotta cheeses may be used as meat alternates but twice as much is needed.
- Cooked dry beans or dry peas may be used as meat alternates or vegetables, but not both in the same meal.
- Processed meats such as luncheon meat or hot dogs must be 100% meat with no fillers added.
- It is recommended peanut butter be served with another meat alternate at lunch and supper.
- Combination foods such as casseroles and soups credit for up to 3 meal components.

BREAD & BREAD ALTERNATES

- A whole grain or an enriched flour or meal must be the primary ingredient by weight in bread / alternates.
- Cereals must be whole grain, enriched or fortified. The grain product must be the primary ingredient by weight.
- Breakfast cereals, coffee cakes, doughnuts and pastries credit at breakfast and snack only.
- Cookies; including granola bars, animal crackers, vanilla wafers and animal shaped graham snacks; may be served only at snack. They may be served no more than twice a week.
- Combination foods such as casseroles and soups credit for up to 3 meal components.

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

- To count toward the fruit / vegetable requirement, a minimum of 1/8 cup fruit / vegetable must be served; otherwise, it is considered a garnish.
- Two servings of foods from the fruit / vegetable group need to be served at lunch and supper. You may serve two fruits, two vegetables, or one of each.
- Home canned products are not creditable for health and safety reasons.
- Cooked dry beans and peas may credit as a vegetable or a meat alternate, but not as both at the same meal.
- Vegetables and / or fruit items served as a combination item such as fruit salad or mixed vegetables credit as 1 fruit / vegetable serving.
- Combination foods such as casseroles and soups credit for up to 3 meal components.

MILK

- Milk means pasteurized, fluid milk. Reconstituted nonfat dry milk is not creditable.

INFANT FOODS

- Until the day of a child's first birthday, the infant meal patterns must be followed.
- Meals or snacks containing only breast milk or iron fortified infant formula (regardless of who supplies it) served to infants participating in the Food Program are reimbursable, until the infant is developmentally ready for additional foods.
- Regardless of who supplies the iron fortified infant formula or breast milk, the Provider must supply all developmentally appropriate and required solids to be reimbursed for an infant's meals or snacks.
- A Special Diet Statement is required when an infant's meals do not meet the infant guidelines and reimbursement is desired. The Special Diet Statement must be signed by a physician, physician's assistant, certified nurse practitioner, registered dietician, licensed nutritionist, or chiropractor.
- Peanut butter and yogurt are not acceptable meat/alternates for infants.
- Commercial combination infant foods and infant desserts are not creditable.
- Commercial infant foods containing fillers such as tapioca and modified food starch are not creditable.

FOR ADDITIONAL CREDITING INFORMATION, CONSULT YOUR FOOD PROGRAM MANUAL.

Meal Pattern Requirements
Children 1 year and older

Age:	1 - 2 years	3 - 5 years	6 - 12 years
BREAKFAST			
Fluid Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Juice or fruit or vegetable	1/4 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Bread or bread alternate or cold dry cereal or cooked cereal	1/2 slice (or 1/2 oz.) 1/4 cup (or 1/3 oz.) 1/4 cup	1/2 slice (or 1/2 oz.) 1/3 cup (or 1/2 oz.) 1/4 cup	1 slice (or 1 oz.) 3/4 cup (or 1 oz.) 1/2 cup
SNACK			
Fluid Milk	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	1 cup
Juice or fruit or vegetable	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Meat or meat alternate or yogurt	1/2 oz. 2 oz. (or 1/4 cup)	1/2 oz. 2 oz. (or 1/4 cup)	1 oz. 4 oz. (or 1/2 cup)
Bread, bread alternate, or cereal	1/2 slice 1/4 cup	1/2 slice 1/3 cup	1 slice 3/4 cup
LUNCH / SUPPER (DINNER)			
Fluid Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup
Meat or poultry or fish or cheese or meat alternate	1 oz.	1 1/2 oz.	2 oz.
Vegetables and/or fruit (2 or more)	1/4 cup (Total)	1/2 cup (Total)	3/4 cup (Total)
Bread or bread alternate	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice

Meal Pattern Requirement for Infants

Age:	BREAKFAST	LUNCH/SUPPER (DINNER)	SNACK
Birth through 3 months	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk or formula	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk or formula	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk or formula
4 months through 7 months	4-8 fluid ounces breast milk or formula 0-3 tablespoons infant cereal***,Ⓞ	4-8 fluid ounces breast milk or formula 0-3 tablespoons infant cereal***,Ⓞ 0-3 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable Ⓞ	4-6 fluid ounces breast milk or formula
8 months up to first birthday	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk or formula 2-4 tablespoons infant cereal*** 1-4 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable	6-8 fluid ounces breast milk or formula 2-4 tablespoons infant cereal*** and/or 1-4 tablespoons meat, fish, poultry, egg yolk, or cooked dry beans or peas, or 1/2 -2 ounces cheese, or 1-4 ounces cheese food or cheese spread. 1-4 tablespoons fruit and/or vegetable	2-4 fluid ounces breast milk or formula, or fruit juice**** 0-1/2 slice bread or 0-2 crackers*****,Ⓞ

*** Iron-fortified dry infant cereal.

**** Full-strength fruit juice.

***** Made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour.

Ⓞ Required when the infant is developmentally ready to accept it.

APPENDIX C:

Our Children's House Story

Note: *The following essay was written on the first anniversary of Our Children's house by an OCH founding parent. It gives an overview of how OCH began. We hope that upon reading it, you will understand why. It was through our belief that children thrive when surrounded by love that led a small group of parents and teachers to make a dream a reality. We welcome your family to Our Children's House.*

For most families, when their child's day care is not right, nothing seems right. For a small group of parents, our world changed April 30, 1994 when we picked up our children from Walker Avenue Children's House, a care center where many had been since age one. All the parents and teachers were standing around looking shocked while the children continued to play busily in the playground. As they arrived to pick up their children, parents were handed a notice that the owners, two working mothers who had founded the small center 11 years ago, had decided to close the center in 60 days and sell the building. We were devastated by the sudden and unexpected news!

The center housed 25 children in an old brick house with a lovely, shady playground in the backyard. Four full-time and two part-time teachers spent their time with all the children, who were not separated by age groups except for an hour a day for "group time". We and our children had come to love these teachers and the setting. Many of us had children who being cared for who had the same teachers as their older siblings. We had found a reliable, caring, nurturing home away from home for our children and could not imagine it suddenly not existing. Because so many of the parents felt so strongly about the quality of the care our children were receiving, we made a decision to see that it continued. Seven months later we opened Our Children's House, a brand new, non-profit center at a different location, owned by 11 founding families. We spent over half the year on this project and we will never forget it.

Within days of being notified of the closing, parents and teachers gathered in a warehouse owned by one of the families. We learned that the present owners had spent months considering their options and were not going to change their minds about closing in sixty days. We started asking lots of questions and realized how little we all knew about our options to continue the center. We decided to meet weekly and started dividing up the job of gathering the information we needed.

We learned that it would take thousands of dollars to bring the old house to meet new day care codes. The original owners had been grandfathered in through all of the code changes during their eleven years of operation. If we took over ownership in its present location, we would have to meet all of the new state and local codes that had been put into place during that time. We learned that whoever writes daycare codes in North Carolina had been extremely busy during the last few years.

Due to the code requirements and the costs of renovation, it just wouldn't work for us to keep the existing building for the school. What was left without the building? The group of parents unanimously agreed that what made our school so valuable to us was not the building but the teachers. This was a skilled, nurturing, creative group of teachers, most of who had been with the school from six to 11 years. We even had two teams of mother and daughter teachers. We also wanted to preserve the school's philosophy of a small, homelike environment with mixed-age groupings. We asked the teachers if they would stay with us instead of seeking new jobs. They all agreed, showing great trust in us, because at that point we had nothing concrete to offer them.

Our next step was to research any potential settings and leasing options for housing a small, child care center. We came so close to moving into one church that we had building and health department inspectors visit to advise us on its ability to serve as our new location. We had a list of all the improvements needed in order to bring it up to code ready to present to the church. But we decided after much discussion and work that our very best option was to build our own building.

After much research, we found a lot for the new building. Some of the parents worked up a rough building plan and cost estimate to show that it could meet our needs despite its small size. We liked the price and the location so with our plan it looked doable. Next we had to find the money to buy the land and build.

One of our parents with strong entrepreneurial skills worked carefully on a proposal and presented it to us at one of our weekly meetings. We could form a limited liability corporation (LLC) to purchase the land, build the building, and rent it at cost to the nonprofit child care center. We needed to raise enough money to cover the down payment, and then the daycare could cover the monthly mortgage payments as rent. It was a high risk investment but the site was in a great location. The idea made sense and each of the eleven families who decided to participate started calculating what they could invest toward the purchase of the land and building.

We passed around small slips of paper and each family wrote the amount they would be willing to invest in the LLC. We waited anxiously as the amounts were tallied. The total was the exact amount we needed! This plan allowed for some families to invest as little as \$1,000 and others to invest much more. Several parents borrowed the money that they invested. Others were not in the position to make a financial commitment at that time. The important thing was we would have the money to go forward with the project! This subset of eleven families formed a limited liability corporation, named Time Out Properties.

While the LLC worked out financing arrangements, the larger group of parents formed a completely separate, non-profit, child care organization called Our Children's House. One of the parents designed our new logo. We prepared bylaws, established a board and appointed officers. At this point, we had created our school in name and concept.

We had to vacate Walker Avenue by July 1. We moved into a temporary spot in a church that closed its preschool during the summer. We had to have that site licensed for our group, even though it was only available for five weeks. So, while we were working on cleaning and fixing up our interim site for the summer and developing plans for a permanent child care center, we were also looking for another temporary site somewhere in town for use from late August through November. It was very touch and go but we finally found another church that had space and was willing to rent to us on a temporary basis. We began the licensing process a second time.

Going through the licensing process is enough to discourage anyone from opening, a daycare. Our center director and the licensing committee spent countless hours coordinating with city, county and state inspectors, church administrators, and repair and cleaning folks. For example, the night before the final inspection, teachers and parents spent the evening deep cleaning the church kitchen to get it to pass inspection by the health department. We had already paid a professional to clean, but a preliminary look by an inspector told us that among other items, the refrigerator didn't shine enough, the walls weren't clean enough and the water wasn't hot enough to run a dishwasher that we would never even use. Ironically, because of the codes, the children would never enter the kitchen and food would not be prepared for them there, but it still had to be spotless for us to get licensed. Deadlines were critical and we all got grouchy at times.

By mid-July, we felt an intense urgency to close on the land and start building. We hired a contractor and architect and found a bank to finance us. The day before we were to close on the land, the bank we had planned to work with backed out on us. Miraculously, within 24 hours, we found another lender, got approval on the loan, and met our appointment to close the deal with the property owners.

We held a groundbreaking ceremony on August 6, two weeks before moving from one temporary site to the other. We had spent a lot of time on this project so far, and our children in most cases had trouble understanding what we were doing, other than knowing that their parents were away from home or on the phone a lot. This was our chance to show them and our extended families what we were creating. At the groundbreaking, the kids rode a Bobcat backhoe, and enjoyed face painting and other games. We ate a house-shaped cake made by one of the teachers, broke a piñata, and planted a tree. The children presented the teachers with bouquets of wild flowers, and a parent wrote and performed a song about Our Children's House. We had a great day on our new land. If the younger children still didn't quite understand what Our Children's House was going to be, at least they saw that it involved fun things and they had a song to sing about it. They finally started to understand what all this talk had been about and we all got excited.

Through September and early October, we watched the building go up. Teachers and parents worked with the architect to come up with a design that would meet daycare codes, allow for the mixed-age environment, fit on the small lot and keep costs at a minimum. Building plans had to be approved by numerous city officials including the person who makes sure you plan to have a sufficient number of shrubs and canopy trees in the front yard.

During this time, several parents worked daily with the contractor, others worked on developing the personnel manual and parents' handbook, planned for the interior of the building, conducted marketing and fundraising and re-wrote budgets every week. We continued to meet weekly as a group sometimes until midnight or 1:00 a.m. We also continued to go to work at our full-time "day" jobs.

Meanwhile, the teachers were real troopers about working under less than desirable conditions at our interim church location. Some children moved on to kindergarten, but even one of those families stayed actively involved in the entire project. Because of space limitations, we could only house 18 children at the interim site and could not afford to keep all the teachers on payroll. One teacher volunteered not to work for that period, and kept her two grandchildren who were enrolled at the school at home with her. With fewer teachers, however, we needed parents to fill in during the first and last hours of the day in order to maintain our "AA" licensing ratios. So, parents got CPR training and took TB tests, and began to help the teachers as they needed.

The marketing committee developed and distributed a brochure (we had a parent who was a copywriter and one who was a graphic designer), placed ads, listed us in the yellow pages, and worked with the media to get the word out about the center to fill the vacant spots we would have upon opening. We planned to grow from the interim total of 18 children to 29 shortly after opening. We were pleased with the coverage we received from the newspaper and TV stations.

One of our biggest challenges in starting up this operation was the financing. As Time Out Properties, we had bought the land and got a bank to finance the building. But the nonprofit organization, Our Children's House, had to up-fit the building for an AA licensed child care. We spent several depressing meetings discussing the fact that we didn't have enough money to do this. We considered taking out a loan for the up-fitting, but were concerned about including the monthly loan payments in our operating budget. That would leave us with no extra money to save for contingency needs or to give the teachers health care benefits. Running a small, high-quality child care center is not a profit-making., venture. We decided we had to take out the loan, but would work to reduce the balance through fundraising.

Our fundraising committee went all out. We held the whopper of all yard sales in October, which included items donated by over 50 families and businesses. This sale was lots of fun and brought in \$2,800! We also received donations from grandparents and alumni, held a book and bake sale, wrote grant proposals (and got a \$4,000 grant from the Greensboro Jaycees). We raffled off prizes donated by local merchants, and solicited services and materials at reduced cost for the building. The entire fire alarm system was donated and installed free by the brother of one of our parents. Local business donated the printing of the brochure, loads of toys and art equipment, all internal hardware, paint, and even the fabric for our curtains.

In late October the building was up and ready for the parents and teachers to do the finishing work. While other families spent fall weekends doing their own yard work and chores, many in our group let the chores at home go undone so they could participate in "parent work days". One of the parents had once been a professional painter. He supervised parents and teachers in painting the entire interior of the building. Another parent had designed the kitchen (meeting, code here was a real challenge) and ordered all of the commercial equipment. Another couple owned a landscaping company and donated all of the bushes, pine needles, grass, and trees and supervised us in planting. Another parent, who had no prior experience in this area, designed and supervised the building of the playground.

One family owned a moving and storage company that handled our many moves, and collected and stored items for our yard sale. Still another parent, the same one who rewrote the budget every week, and handled all of our finances, put together the swing sets and spent both days every weekend for over a month working on the playground, painting, staining, and landscaping.

Throughout the whole process the group dynamics were intense. This group got to know each other quickly through long agonizing discussions and committee work. We were a relatively small group for such a big project. We each served on several committees and each committee was very small. We were a diverse group of parents with varying levels of education and income. Although we laughed a lot and enjoyed becoming much like a big family, there were disagreements, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and there were many moments when we had to ask ourselves if the work involved didn't outweigh the potential benefits.

Our president organized meetings, developed list after list of things to discuss at meetings and things to be done between meetings. She spent countless hours on the phone with teachers, parents, media, prospective parents and potential donors asking for support and resolving problems. She kept us going when we just didn't feel up to it or thought we had things covered when we really didn't.

We're not sure how we ended up with a group of parents so perfectly matched to this challenge. The entrepreneur, the graphic artist, the copy writer, the painter, the teacher, the moving and landscaping companies, the bakers, the lawyer, the accountant, the event organizers, the woodworkers, the fund-raisers, the grant writers, and the public speakers. The list seemed to be endless. Perhaps because each of us moms and dads had developed a career, we were a particularly skilled group of parents. But then we also found ourselves doing things we had not done before during the project. The resourcefulness of the group and the way we were able to make things happen amazed and delighted us all.

There was a magic in this group. The magic was how each of us swallowed our pride over and over for the good of the whole, how no one walked out for good when they felt hurt, but came back willing to work even harder. Every time there was a seemingly insurmountable problem, someone drew on their resources and skills to come up with a solution. The magic came from the strength of our commitment and the overwhelming, difficulty of our task. If our goal had been less challenging, it just wouldn't have been the same. If as a group we had been less committed, it would never have happened. Our dream and our faith in that dream becoming reality was bigger than any of our individual needs. Our dream was, as working parents, to be able to give our children something wonderful and special. We were all parents willing to go the extra mile to make sure our children spent their days at a very special home away from home.

The week before we moved to our beautiful new building, our director lined up new children to fill our vacant spots. We hired additional teachers needed to keep up with our new enrollment size. The children started singing about Our Children's House and talking about the move. We got our license and we moved all of our furniture and toys in. We hung bulletin boards, put up shelves and wallpaper and shined our floors. The night before we opened, we held a party for all the families so the new children and parents could get acquainted and so we could celebrate.

All of our long meetings, intense discussions, weekend work and, most of all, our commitment to a dream paid off on November 28, 1994, when we opened Our Children's House. The first day we had TV cameras and reporters there. Those of us who had become like family welcomed new faces. There was a dreamlike quality for the parents and teachers who had seen it grow. The children loved their new school, and had no trouble adjusting.

At this writing, Our Children's House is getting ready to celebrate its first anniversary. It is beginning to sink in that we did the unbelievable. We are very proud and pleased. Most importantly to all of us, we learned that when you harness the love for your children, there is no limit to what you can do. We hope that we have set an example for our children that will mean a lot to them someday.