

S P R E A D I N G

JOY



KEEPING YOU UP-TO-DATE WITH PROJECT JOY

Spring 2004

Welcome!

Hi everyone. I'm excited to send you the first edition of *Spreading Joy*, Project Joy's newsletter. It has been a long time coming, but now—with the help of others—it will be delivered to your doorstep four times a year.

The purpose of the newsletter is to keep our friends and supporters connected as we try to make our world a more joyous and peaceful place in which to live. Your much-appreciated donations are making a difference. Project Joy has accomplished a great deal and we are excited to tell you about it.

We'd also like to use this newsletter to explain our approach to enhancing the lives of children and why it has been successful. We'll show you what our staff are doing every day inside homeless shelters, public housing developments, Head Start classrooms, and throughout the communities of Greater Boston to achieve our mission. We've got a lot of ideas as to how to enhance the lives of children facing the most unfair circumstances and we could benefit greatly from hearing yours, too.

Don't worry, you won't be pummeled with Project Joy "propaganda" or hit up for donations with each newsletter (with the minor exception of this one). It's really is just a way for all of us to stay connected, help as many children as we can, and have some fun in doing so.

With Appreciation,

Steve Gross
FOUNDER



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the lowdown on Project Joy



Our Mission

Founded in 1989, Project Joy's mission is to foster the healthy and wholesome development of children facing the most unfair circumstances. Simply put, our mission is to help kids access joy. Without joy there is no life. Joy protects and nurtures hope, strength, compassion and love in all children.

A Little Joy Goes a Long Way

Even though all children need joy, for some it is much more difficult to access. The "unfair challenges" we mention in our mission statement are things like homelessness, early childhood trauma, community violence, and extreme poverty. For these children, joy is far more difficult to access.

The great news is that a little goes a

long way in the lives of children. Loving, supportive relationships, friends to play with, songs to sing, games to play, pictures to draw, and adults to help them navigate when they are lost, can protect children from even the harshest environments.

It's All About Healthy Play

The mission is accomplished through the use of music, storytelling, dance, and collaborative sports and games. It's really pretty simple, children learn and develop

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by playing, pretending, and interacting with other children. Healthy play comes naturally to some children,

but at times, all children need some adult structure and support to help them play happily and safely. Children who have suffered abuse and neglect, been witness to

Project Joy Staff (from left to right): **Niamah Soweh, Taylor Watts, Dicki Johnson Macy, Frank Censullo**

violence, or lived in environments of poverty and uncertainty often need a lot of additional help to play successfully. This is what Project Joy is all about—helping children access healthy play.

Helping Access Healthy Play

We help children by running play groups in homeless shelters and Head Start programs and by providing the adult caregivers of these children with the training, supervision, and resources to help their children access healthy play—for healthy play ultimately yields healthy children. •

Just What Is Head Start?

Head Start is a federally-funded, comprehensive preschool program for children from birth to five years who are living beneath the poverty level. The overall goal of Head Start is to increase the school readiness of young children from low-income families.

Where Does Our Money Go?

With the exception of nominal administrative expenses, we spend almost all our annual budget on direct services:

Training/Certification for Teachers We train the Head Start teachers to become co-leaders of Project Joy playgroups.

Project Joy Counseling Staff Staff members lead the playgroups, help train the teachers, and provide ongoing teacher coaching.

Project Joy Play Kits The Kits includes all the materials needed to run a playgroup (see page 4).

People make the difference. We invest in them wisely.



Our Biggest Event Yet

For more details log on to: http://www.lifeisgood.com/festivals_back/ContentPlus.asp?cmd=CONTENT&articleID=129

A Little History

In 1988, The Better Homes Foundation, was looking for a way to support the development of preschoolers whose families had become homeless. At that time, I was a strapping young man of 21 and had just begun working as a counselor at The Academy of Physical and Social Development in Newton. The Academy was, and still is, a cool place. It was a converted old warehouse that housed a children's gym. Kids would come there after school or on Saturdays to run, roughhouse and play all sorts of sports and games. Each small group of children would be led by a counselor, who would use these fun physical activities as a way to help children build self-esteem, make friends, and deal with the array of challenges that most kids face while growing-up. It was a great program. Children who came into the Academy usually left the Academy happier and healthier.



A young, idealistic Steve.

Putting the Wheels in Motion

Ken Barranger, another counselor at the Academy, and I were given the task to create a program similar to the Academy that would support the healthy development of homeless children. I'd never met a homeless child before, but assumed that they would be similar to most of the other children with whom I had worked. At the time I did not know that the majority of all homeless children were preschoolers. I'd never really worked with preschoolers either but assumed that they would be just like other children with whom I had worked, only smaller. We decided to pilot a weekly gym program.

Trial By Fire

The moment that first van load of children arrived at the gym, I knew that we'd met our match. First of all, preschoolers have such different developmental needs than school age children. They have much shorter attention spans, have more difficulty sharing and playing cooperatively with peers. They are also more impulsive, reckless, and have a seemingly infinite amount of curiosity and energy. Add to this the overwhelming stresses of homelessness, which can exaggerate some qualities and retard others, and you have one difficult group to manage! We did manage however. We ran, jumped, climbed, laughed and played

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What The Life is good® Backyard Festival
When June 5, 2004 11am – 6pm
Where Lederman Field
The Esplanade, Boston
Rain or Shine

Great news! Life is good® has chosen Project Joy to be the beneficiary of their Life is good® Backyard Festival. The day will be a celebration of all the games you'd love to play on a big ol' sprawling lawn by the river. The jam-packed day will feature live music (Entrain, Ill Kings & others), kids entertainment, classic picnic food, and a colorful array of throwback games to help you gear up for summer:

- Wiffle® ball home run contest
- Horseshoes contest
- Croquet
- Frisbee toss
- Nerf football toss
- Hoop shooting contest
- Burger flipping contest
- Watermelon seed spitting contest
- and much much more!

The event is free, with suggested donations to Project Joy.

See you there!



What's Inside a Project Joy Kit?

A whole lotta fun! Project Joy Kits include all the equipment teachers need to run a playgroup:

Parachutes colorfully create unity and a safe place.

Foam Balls and Foam Discs throw a party!

Music helps children balance affiliation and solitude.

Silk Scarves encourage transformation and illusion.

Cooperative Bands stretch our imaginations and bind us together.

Oil Pastels and Paper facilitate creative expression.

Potato Sacks challenge us to hop and jump.

Multi colored toys and props instigate fun.



Project Joy is on the Web!

Check it out—we've just launched our website. It's still in the infancy stages, so visit often as we expand and refine.

We'd love to hear any great ideas!



www.pjkids.org



10 Movies to Bring You Joy...

- 1 About a Boy
- 2 Captains Courageous
- 3 Cheaper by the Dozen
- 4 Cousins
- 5 Grand Canyon
- 6 Parenthood
- 7 Raising Arizona
- 8 Wallace & Grommit
- 9 Willie Wonka & Chocolate Factory
- 10 The Wind in the Willows

A Little History *continued from page 3*

together once a week for forty weeks. By all accounts, the program was a huge success.

Project Joy Evolves

We kept it going. The Academy donated the gym space and the equipment, Harvard University donated the van and student volunteers, and we donated our time. The kids kept coming and we all loved it. Soon the realization came that there were a whole lot more than 18 children who needed to experience this kind of joy. Not only homeless children, but the many children who were growing up housed in poverty. With the expert guidance of Dicki Johnson Macy—a preschool dance and movement specialist, who signed on to help adapt the program to best meet the developmental needs of preschoolers—Project Joy was born. •

Project
Joy

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Look for a
new edition of
Spreading Joy
this summer!