

# Lakeshore Co-Operative Nursery School

## Program Statement

At Lakeshore Co-operative Nursery School our programs reflect our belief that children learn best through play.

A co-operative nursery school is a non-profit organization of families who come together for the purpose of setting up and maintaining an Early Years program for their children. Everyone is given a voice and is valued for their unique contributions to the program. Families and teachers share responsibilities and decision making. Interactions between children, between children and adults, and among adults are based on a philosophy of respect. Children and families of all backgrounds and abilities are welcomed to our programs. A co-operative school is a valuable project that contributes to the wider community.

*"How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years", (2014)* is a professional resource about learning through relationships for those working with young children and families. It is intended to support pedagogy and curriculum/program development in early years programs." (HDLH, 2014, p.5)

At LCNS we use the four foundations: Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement and Expression outlined in the *How Does Learning Happen?* document to create a curriculum and environment which promotes learning and growth of children and their families.

### **Belonging- Goals for Children**

- Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world. (HDLH, 2014, p.23)

Building positive relationships with children and their families creates a sense of belonging. At LCNS, we build connections with children and their families based on caring and respect for individuality. By greeting the children and families warmly each morning, we let them know that we value them as members of our community. Interactions with siblings and extended family help children see the connection between their own families and their school relationships. Through quiet observations, listening and responding, and sharing experiences we are able to discover each child's unique gifts, capabilities, and interests. Antibias education and inclusion are a priority for our community.

We help children see that they belong by displaying photographs of the children and their families, as well as their artwork and creations. Providing books and materials that reflect the diversity of our community promotes respect, acceptance and inclusion of all children and families. Our antibias mission statement provides a framework and goals for our program.

At LCNS we believe children should be active participants in creating their environment. Children are given opportunities to make meaningful contributions to the classroom setting; such as choosing projects to save in their portfolio, making playdough together, baking muffins to serve at special events, and requesting favourite stories or songs during group time. The children at LCNS are responsible for returning materials they use, cleaning up after themselves at snack and caring for living things.

We honour children's voices by providing opportunities for them to make choices. At LCNS, children choose where to sit, where and with whom to play, and when to eat snack. We support children to participate in social interactions, play, and learning in ways that are most comfortable to them.

Respect for children's rituals and traditions creates a sense belonging. This includes recognizing and celebrating holidays that are important to the children and their families. Children may bring special toys or comfort items into the classroom if needed to help them feel secure. At school, we co-create rituals and routines with the children which may include a greeting song with the children's names, sharing stories from home, and planning for our time together.

### **Well-Being- Goals for Children**

- Every child is developing a sense of self, health and well-being. (HDLH, 2014, p.23)

At LCNS we take a holistic approach to well-being by ensuring that we support both physical and emotional health for children and families.

We support children in developing a sense of self by following their interests, offering choices, and valuing who they are. Many invitations to learning are provided indoors and outside. Providing large blocks of time for play allows children to pursue their own interests and to explore multiple opportunities.

We respect children's ability to know when and how much they need to eat. The free flow snack offered at LCNS includes healthy choices from at least two of the three food groups. The children are encouraged to wash their hands independently and are supported by adults who coach and model proper hand washing techniques before and after snack. Independence is fostered through opportunities to find their own water bottle, to tidy up their own snack dishes and dispose of their leftover food.

Children thrive when they are given opportunities to engage in physical play in a natural outdoor space. Our outdoor environment provides children a safe place to explore, manageable levels of challenge, and opportunities for risk taking. Outdoor play strengthens creative problem solving skills and complex thinking. We recognize the connection between positive mental health and a relationship with nature. Land based learning provides an opportunity to see ourselves as part of the natural world. Children learn to be gentle and respectful with plants and animals. By greeting the world as part of our morning ritual, we are inviting children to notice what they see and hear around them.

Our program focuses on supporting the development of self regulation and positive social interactions. Through recognizing and valuing differences, expressing feelings, and recognizing and responding to the feelings of others, our goal is to create a caring learning community. In supporting children to solve problems we acknowledge feelings, give them words, model behaviours, and suggest positive solutions. Children are given the opportunity to problems solve themselves.

Our program offers quiet areas, opportunities for independent, small, and large group activities, minimal transitions and predictable routines, and safe space for active play in order to minimize stress.

We partner with agencies in the community and invite them to offer information and support to children and families. Our teachers help families to access these supports. Parents are invited to ask for parent resources and support. Toolkits are available for families to borrow when they are experiencing changes or challenging times.

### **Engagement- Goals for Children**

- Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with mind body and senses. (HDLH, 2014, p.23)

At LCNS we see that children are engaged when they are involved and interested. We work to provide an environment that promotes curiosity, creativity, exploration, inquiry and wonder. We get a better understanding of children and their learning when we slow down, observe and reflect on their play. We document our observations through picture displays, teacher reflections, and learning stories. We use documentation to capture children's learning and growth throughout the year and share it with their families. We also share documentation with children to revisit experiences and extend learning. We use our observations and reflections to plan a responsive program that includes child-initiated and adult-supported experiences.

We provide open-ended materials that allow children to make their own meaning. Providing such materials, and the freedom to use them in unique ways, allows children to be creative. Uninterrupted periods of play time allow children to deepen and extend play. With a wide variety of choices, children are encouraged to explore and expand their interests both in the classroom and outdoors. Materials are added and changed as we follow the children's interests. The same materials are offered for long periods of time to create predictability and to allow the children time to fully experience them.

We provide a warm and inviting classroom environment. Our use of lamps, plants, framed photographs, and natural light softens the atmosphere, making it more home like. We believe providing an organized and predictable environment is respectful of materials and space and allows the children to find materials independently. We consider the environment as a third teacher and strive to make our space filled with materials that invite curiosity and wonder. Our outdoor environment mirrors our indoor environment with its thoughtful arrangement. Children are challenged to participate in big body play and are given opportunities to explore and appreciate the natural world.

As a co-operative school, engagement with families is an essential part of our community. The parents are directly involved by volunteering in the classroom and helping to make decisions for the school as members of the Board of Directors. We promote engagement with families by asking them to participate in meaningful projects, sharing interests and talents with the children, and co-creating documentation, art projects, and display materials. We also offer them opportunities to connect and build relationships with other families through group activities, special events, and working together on tasks. A key way we communicate with families is through our monthly newsletter which is created by parents and teachers.

At LCNS our teachers are co-learners alongside children and families. We see learning as a life-long process and we support participation in professional development opportunities to promote growth. We encourage our teachers to remain connected to the Early Learning community.

Engagement with our surrounding community helps families to connect with outside resources and with each other. We recognize that learning extends beyond the classroom. Opportunities include field trips, collecting donations, and making gifts for others (such as seniors).

### **Expression- Goals for Children**

- Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways (HDLH, 2014, pg. 23)

At LCNS we acknowledge that communication is more than spoken words. We can help children feel safe to express themselves by being attuned to and responding to their cues. Our use of basic sign language and picture symbols acknowledges the many different ways people use to communicate. We respect the different languages of the families in our program. We learn words from these languages and make them part of our environment.

At LCNS, we know that language is used for a variety of purposes. Our print rich environment, daily experiences with reading and telling stories, and play with words and sounds promote beginning literacy knowledge. Throughout the day we encourage children to engage in authentic conversation with peers and adults by telling stories about what is happening in their world and by sharing their interests. Adults sit with children at the snack table and in the art studio to facilitate conversations.

Children express themselves through art, drama, music and movement. At LCNS, art experiences are open ended and children may choose the materials they wish to use. Experiences with different materials and mediums invite children to explore using all their senses. Opportunities for dramatic play allow children to act out familiar scenarios from their own experiences. Our home centre is set up with real and realistic props that reflect the diversity of our community. Music and movement offer children a way to express themselves. We provide a daily group time in which to sing songs, listen to music, dance or use instruments. Children have access to a variety of instruments to use during free play.

To be intentional about our learning, we reflect and share ideas with each other about children's engagement and growth. We invite families to reflect with us through our annual survey and opportunities to share ideas at our membership meetings. We respond by making changes to better serve the children and families in our school.

One of our core beliefs as a co-operative nursery school is that everyone has something important to contribute. We all work, learn and play together!

This program statement will be reviewed with any new staff, student, volunteer or other person working within our program upon starting at LCNS and annually thereafter. It will also be reviewed if any modifications are made to the program statement.

Annually all staff and volunteers will be monitored within the classroom to ensure compliance with the program statement.

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