



## Changes 2017

By: *Liisa Hale and Claire Bainer*

Happy New Year! Welcome 2017! We all feel this new year bringing changes and surprises. Following the habit of good nursery school teachers, and wanting only the best for humanity, we are very deliberately keeping our focus on what we do want—all the happy surprises and wonderful changes that are happening every day all over the world, hoping they will also bring us all more happiness and prosperity in the coming year.

Changes are afoot at BlueSkies in 2017. Liisa will soon drop her work hours to half time as Spencer takes up more and more of her responsibilities. Monaire is off to finish her BA at University of Oregon, determined to graduate before her daughter who is a sophomore at UC Santa Barbara! We are so proud and excited for Monaire as she up-ends her life in pursuit of such a positive goal. We'll miss her, and we are also thrilled to have Julia stepping into her role. Julia comes to us from a marketing and fundraising background that we will be sure to take advantage of along with her great managerial skills as our new Office and Fundraising Manager.

We are also making some internal shifts to further strengthen the leadership of the school. We have all been missing Erika Gilfether's leadership in the upper school, and to that end Ameena has agreed to increase her responsibilities and become the Program Director for both the infant toddler and preschool programs. Baby House Head Teacher Christa will be her part time assistant, while continuing her leadership in the Infant room half the day.

We (Liisa and Claire) are more and more aware of time passing and our retirement creeping up on us. Liisa is a few years ahead of Claire in her exit strategy. We will slowly phase out of the more day-to-day management of the school – Claire will continue full time this next year and begin dropping back in in 2018 and plan to complete her career at BlueSkies by her 70th birthday in 2020. By that time we will have hired a new Executive Director to guide this wonderful school along so your grandchildren and great grandchildren can still experience the best child care center in Oakland when they need it most, in these early years.

On January 5 we completed our second book, to support programs developed through a nationwide expansion of public funding for programs for four-year-olds. The book is intended to help Transitional Kindergarten teachers (also known as PreK or Universal preschool) and Kindergarten teachers see play and direct instruction as different and equally valuable tools on the continuum of teaching skills. We hope to help the teachers align their teaching with the children's capacity to take in information, which requires better understanding of child development and how to fit this into required curriculum. There is a common misconception that playing and teaching cannot co-exist; as BlueSkies proves to the contrary, the richest learning is the outcome of the richest play, which is a result of teachers teaching through the choices they make in the

## Upcoming Events

### Thursday, Jan. 12

Parent Scholarship  
Committee Meeting  
6:15 - 7:45 pm

### Monday, Jan. 16

BlueSkies Closed for MLK  
day

### Thursday, Jan. 19

Parent Services Committee  
Meeting  
6:15 - 7:30 pm

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## Co-Directors Report Cont...

classroom – the toys, the schedule, the expectations for behavior, the coaching that the teacher provides when the children need help to manage, and the lessons the teacher adds when the children are ready for them. This book offers practical and flexible ways to blend the development, curriculum and instruction with the children's needs and readiness. It includes a big section on discipline and language development, bringing forward options for more age- appropriate practices in these areas for young children. We teamed up to write this book with a longtime friend and colleague, Gail Myers, who was a preschool teacher who moved on to teach Kindergarten, First, and Second grade. Her expertise as a teacher who understands and values play, and also understands the public education system, was a valuable part of this collaborative work. Sending this manuscript off to the publisher just as the year begins is in itself cause for hopeful anticipation of the changes 2017 may bring.

As a new and controversial president takes office I find myself focusing ever more intently on our work and the importance of creating peace on our beautiful earth. Mahatma Gandhi's quote – "My Life is my message" – is worth contemplating now more than ever. This year, more than ever, we know that just as we speak to the children in kind, friendly ways and we focus on what we do want, we can decide to address each person we encounter in with the same openness, curiosity and love as we do our children. Keeping a positive, constructive attitude in the words we use and in the actions we take will help us be part of the positive changes we hope to bring forward in this changing world. Perhaps it is time to expand our love of children and family into the world we live in and, like Gandhi said, let our lives be our message expressing the world we want to see and be part of.

Our lives at BlueSkies deliver a message of faith in the human spirit, and in our ability to work in harmony for the good of all, and that is a message worth spreading! This new book joins another book and four teacher training DVDs, each one of which has helped teachers understand better the children whom they teach, and align their teaching to children's needs with compassion and friendly support. One of Spencer's first tasks at BlueSkies is to bring a long-simmering website update to fruition; we are excited to be planning for a much more robust site to disseminate these teacher education materials, and more, to those who want to learn how to be effective teachers of young children. Teaching young children to practice kindness, support and compassion and to expect it from others is the path to a society filled with kindness, support and compassion. Our message is not only that we will do this, but that we help others to do it.

We have been accused over the years of looking through rose-colored glasses... and sometimes it's true. Of course we have to be real about things like paying bills and cleaning the gutters, but we also have to be aspirational about living and being change in the world. We are lucky to be able to manifest our aspirations here through the teachers and community of BlueSkies, always seeking ways that we can contribute to a healthier world. We are excited about the changes that are coming to BlueSkies, bringing it into the next stage of its evolution. We look forward to 2017, even as we carry some trepidation, because we know that the human spirit and social justice will prevail and we, and BlueSkies, are part of it.



## Snapshot in the Schoolroom

When Gabe's mother walks through the office on her way to pick up Gabe, she meets Gabe's four-year-old friend Lilly going out the door with her mother. "Gabe is still cleaning up," announces Lilly with a little foreboding in her voice. Sure enough, Gabe is putting the last few things away in the doll house as his mother comes in the door. Spotting her, Gabe pulls a sad face and says, "I didn't get to go to story today." "You sound sad about that; you must have had a lot of cleaning up to do," comments his mother. Suddenly smiling with the memory, Gabe says "Lilly and I were playing Trick-or-treat. We got all dressed up and got treats and a Halloween bag too. Then we played we were dead; we piled the dress-up cloths on top of us. Then Milo came and needed 'Take Out' so we made tacos for him, and two drinks." "Wow," says his mom, "It sounds like you and Lilly were very busy; no wonder there was a lot to clean up." The teacher smiles and comments, "They were busy! Lilly did her part of the clean-up and came to story, but it took such a long time for Gabe to finish up his part." Turning to Gabe the teacher says, "Too bad it took you so long, Gabe; I missed you at story. Next time I hope you can pick up a little more quickly so you can be part of our story group." Gabe and his mother head to his cubby, and then on out the door of the Nursery School as they talk about which book they will read when they get home.

Finishing up and putting things back where you found them is part of completing an activity, not a negative consequence for playing. Children care for one another as group members by leaving each area ready for the next children who will use it. All through these early years children are learning how to stop and start activities intentionally; by the fourth year at BlueSkies children usually clean up easily because they know cleaning up is not only the completion of an activity, but is also a gateway to the next activity. Something interfered with that for Gabe today, and the teacher has worked it through with him, so she lets his mom know why he missed story time without going in to every detail.

When children dawdle to avoid cleaning up, the teachers have different strategies to help. Sometimes they break down the tasks – "Gabe, why don't you put away the kitchen things and Lilly can put away the dress-up things." This clarifies the task and simplifies it when the children feel overwhelmed by the number of things they have used in their play. The teacher might also step into a younger group and cull away toys that are no longer in use, to help the play stay focused and ease the final clean-up. Occasionally a child may yell, cry, or even throw things to distract the teacher. New or younger children may be testing to see if the teacher really means what she says, while

older children may be so excited to be in a relationship where communication and ideas are coming together that they become dysregulated and get silly.

A big tantrum that is loud and disruptive can draw curious children who want to see what is happening. The teacher helped everyone gathering for story by narrating what happened: "Gabe is crying so loudly! He is so sad; he really wishes it was different, but you know at school where there are so many children we have to remember about others—cleaning up, being quiet at nap time, remembering to use our words, are all ways we do that. It is too bad he forgot to get busy and clean up, and now he is so mad and sad because he is not ready for story. Too bad; can we help him stop crying? Would you like to get him a drink of water, Oliver? Pam, I see the tissue box on the book shelf, maybe he'd like to wipe his eyes." Her clear explanation helps both the upset child and the others see that everyone in the group is held to the same agreements, and that actions have consequences. The teacher gathers the watchers and the sad/mad child in emotionally, and perhaps physically in her arms as well. She explains, empathizes, and comforts them all in their concern for their friend. After the child is calm, the teacher will still leave Gabe to finish his job, knowing that consistency is comforting – even if she is consistent about expectations the child was resisting. Lilly understands too; she knows about school and about mothers who help their children when times are rough. She watched this scene unfold, and seeing Gabe's mother coming to get Gabe in true 4½-year-old fashion Lilly prompted Gabe's mom for what lies ahead.



## BlueSkies-isms

*Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's "BlueSkies-ism" will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.*

*"Oh, that's too bad. You wanted \_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_ happened instead."*

This has to be said with full compassion and without a hint of sarcasm when things go wrong due to the choices a child has made. It tells the child that you are sorry that she is struggling or made a mistake so that

things are not working out as she had hoped. Saying this turns the responsibility for the problem back to the child and provides the opportunity to think about what she could do differently to create a happier outcome.

## comings & goings

### Welcome!

Cord in the Baby House with mom, Christina

Oliver in the Baby House with parents Grace & Vincent

LaTasha, our new Food Service Manager, and Julia, our new Office & Fundraising Manager

Welcome back to teachers Maria C., Paulina and Helen

### Farewell!

Dylan Yocke in the Wobblies

## Teachers out in January



The following staff will be on vacation this month:

- Erika out 1/11 - 1/17
- Maria S out 1/20 - 1/27
- Claire out 1/23 - 1/25

## Thank You, Parents!

We love being part of your children's lives! It is such an honor to watch them grow and learn... but we don't do it for the pay!

Your generosity means so much to us each year -- providing us with a bonus to help add extra cheer to the holidays. Thank you!

With Deep Gratitude,  
The BlueSkies Staff



## We're Hiring!

We are currently looking for a talented Afternoon Teacher to join our team. Please help us spread the word!

Find the full job description here:  
<http://www.blueskies4children.org/jobs>