

# GUELPH OUTDOOR PRESCHOOL & KINDERGARTEN



*Our Approach*

# OUTLINE

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# INTRODUCTION

*Education is not the filling of a pail, it is the lighting of a fire.*

**W.B. Yeats**

We are a fully-licensed, full-day, year-round childcare center serving children ages three to six years old. Our program uniquely combines a developmentally responsive curriculum, exceptional learning environments, optimal nutrition, and dedicated staff to help children reach their full potential.

Children have amazing, powerful learning capacities. Naturally curious, they strive to understand the workings of the physical and social world. We encourage children in their pursuit of knowledge and experience with a minimum of limitations on their learning goals. The program blends highly individualized research-based methods, community engagement, and plenty of outdoor fun and learning. Upon completion of our program, children will be well prepared for subsequent learning in any educational model.

# PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

## Focus

The program focuses on the outdoors and the natural world, however the curriculum is not limited to developing environmental awareness. We give children exceptional opportunities to learn about their world including natural, built, and community environments.

## Research-Based

We strive to use the best practices in early childhood education staying current with research developments, and incorporating the best ideas in the field. The curriculum will evolve over time as opportunities arise to enhance the program.

## Emergent

The curriculum follows the children's curiosity, expanding on their emerging interests. As a team we work together to be flexible, open and attentive to the children's evolving interests and to capitalize on these learning possibilities. We set up learning opportunities and provocations, but adapt and shift along with the children's passion and engagement.

## Real-life Context

Early years experts agree that real world based learning is a highly effective way to teach. When learning is rooted in authentic experiences - tasks that are purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the children's lives - children are more interested, and stay interested longer.

## Play-based

Research demonstrates that children achieve greater academic, social and emotional success by learning through play. The Emergent curriculum uses play and real-life experiences to drive learning and achieve curriculum goals. This model follows the children's curiosity and builds on their developing interests, making learning more meaningful. Plenty of uninterrupted blocks of play-time are available throughout the day, to allow children to become fully engaged in their play and learning.

## Outdoor Learning

Children at the Guelph Outdoor Preschool and Kindergarten spend as much of their day as possible outdoors. Natural environments are an optimal context for early childhood development. Outdoors there is an abundance of sensory experiences, more diverse gross and fine motor challenges, varied open-ended materials, and endless opportunities for imaginative play, all of which are crucial to development.

The natural outdoor classroom helps set lifelong patterns for excellent physical and mental health:

- It is typically less chaotic and stressful for children.
- Offers increased physical activity and exposure to sunlight, helping to improve children's emotional well being, increasing happiness and reducing aggression.
- Helps cultivate key social skills, such as cooperation, flexibility and self-regulation, laying a foundation for making healthy social connections.
- Offers a safer and more enriching environment than many conventional playgrounds.
- Better prepares a child for later learning by helping them develop key cognitive functions such as greater attention span, problem solving skills, and creative thinking because outdoor spaces are more diverse and less ordered than indoor spaces.
- Stimulates imagination and creative play.
- Helps children develop a deeper understanding and respect for our environment and our collective interdependence on the natural systems that support life.

## Community Engagement

Research shows that learning about the world is more effective when children are actively engaged in the world around them. By being active in their community, young children develop the abilities to form social connections that will help them build the social and emotional intelligence necessary to excel in school, the workplace and personal relationships, both as children and adults.

We seek meaningful relationships with community organizations to find and create learning opportunities. We strive to create a healthy community culture within the preschool. We have already begun to form partnerships with the Ignatius community, and the community at large.

As a leader in the local food movement and sustainable agriculture, Ignatius is a rich and diverse community model. We are working with the Ignatius Organic farm and the Community Shared Agriculture program to supply fresh organic vegetables for our meals and engage children in the workings of real farms. We will be working with farm interns and community master gardeners in designing and creating the preschool garden, using permaculture and other sustainable practices to build a beautiful, fun, four season, low-input kitchen garden.

## Art and Music

*Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education.*

### **Plato**

Studies have shown that integrating the arts into language, math and science instruction helps bring these subjects to life and facilitates learning. Music and art are powerful tools to motivate and engage children.

*Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.*

### **Confucius**

Singing and dancing is fun, helps group cohesion, and makes children and adults feel good. We incorporate music and art into the daily rhythm of the preschool and use it as a tool to aid learning.

We have amateur and professional musicians on staff, who can improvise and play music with the children as part of their daily routine. Having musicians on staff can help children see inside the culture of music and the way skills can be built slowly and simply. We purchase real instruments that sound good, and work to keep them in tune. We believe that if instruments make a beautiful sound, children are more likely to play them.

In addition, we provide weekly Music Together classes. This program, first offered in 1987, pioneered the concept of a research based, developmentally appropriate early childhood music curriculum.

Music Together is an internationally recognized, leading music curriculum for early-learning settings. A comprehensive, research-based program, Music Together's primary goal is to support children's music development so they can achieve tonal and rhythmic competence. Yet the rich, play-based learning environment created by Music Together's developmentally appropriate approach to music-learning also fosters children's growth in other domains essential to school and life success. The Music Together curriculum and program model support:

- Music Learning and Development
- Language Development and Emergent Literacy
- Social and Emotional Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge
- Physical and Motor Development
- Approaches to Learning”

# LOCATION AND FACILITIES

*Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.*

**Albert Einstein**

We believe the educational setting is very important for learning and a general sense of happiness. Both our indoor and outdoor facilities are beautiful and inspiring. The inside and outside spaces are directly connected and function as an integral whole, facilitating the flow of materials, ideas and learning.

We are very grateful to be located at the Ignatius Centre at the north end of Guelph. Ignatius is a pioneer of organic, sustainable agriculture and ecology. It is home to a thriving garden community, organic farm, community shared agriculture, innovative enterprises and community organizations. Ignatius has led initiatives such as Plant an Old Growth Forest, leading to the decommissioning of Marden Creek dam, freeing the creek for the first time in 180 years. Many local agriculture, education, food and wellness enterprises and organizations call Ignatius home, including FarmStart, Ecological Farmers of Ontario, Organic Council of Ontario, Tuckamore Bee Company, Salsateria Rebel Foods, Wellington Hall Academy and many others. The Ignatius community provides exceptional real-world learning opportunities for children.

## Indoor Facility

The indoor space is designed to be both beautiful and functional. Our indoor room is a grand hall, with 30' high, south-facing windows. It is bathed in sunlight during the winter months, and is full of natural light all year long. The hall overlooks the valley, with views of distant forests, meadows, and gardens. Many of the windows open to allow direct fresh air into the room.

The play rooms are beautifully decorated and have lots of soft lighting, plants, area rugs, and comfortable places to play. The furniture is child-sized and comfortable. The playrooms are divided into many smaller, intimate areas to enable focused, uninterrupted play. There are lots of natural materials and colors.

## Indoor Materials:

A large assortment of open-ended materials such as pine cones, bits of string and cloth, clothespins, hardware, disks of wood, logs, wooden blocks, etc.

- A variety of safe, quality art supplies.
- Real, tuned musical instruments.
- Adequate numbers of developmentally appropriate toys, puzzles, games, and books.

We aim to bring the children's home life into the preschool, and the preschool life home, by including family photos, familiar objects, and cultural familial traditions in our classroom whenever possible.

## Outdoor Facilities

Located in a rural setting minutes from downtown Guelph on the 600 acre Ignatius property, the outdoor facilities are rich and varied in natural and cultural resources. The location offers extraordinary play and learning opportunities in every season. The natural areas consist of diverse cultivated and wild ecotypes, including meadows, forests, creeks, and gardens. The network of hiking trails offers all year opportunities for all sorts of exploration, gathering, cooking, and play.

## Outdoor Materials:

Outdoor playscapes are well stocked with tools and materials for all kinds of outdoor play and discovery, including:

- Tools for digging, building, gathering and examining, such as trowels, shovels, buckets, sieves, wheel barrows, magnifying glasses, jars, spray bottles, etc.
- Materials to inspire imaginative dramatic play, such as kitchen tools, dishes, baby dolls, dress-up clothes, small furniture, etc.
- Open-ended materials to extend and facilitate imaginative play, such as lengths of material, clothespins, string, random junk/treasure, and of course, all the natural materials found outside!
- Various art materials including paints, brushes, crayons, glue, tape, yarn, scissors, clay.
- A selection of real, regularly tuned, quality musical instruments.

## **Kitchen Garden**

Growing and preparing food provides relevant real-life opportunities for introducing children to mathematics, science and technology. Food integrates many aspects of the human experience, including culture, education, community, health, and environment.

The business of growing and foraging for food builds ecological and food literacy that connects children to their food and the natural world, laying healthy eating and activity patterns for life.

Through cultivating a school kitchen garden, children begin to understand the road from seed to table. As a fundamental tool of cultural transmission, food is a natural and inviting forum for helping children's social development, language and communication.

## **Food**

We source ingredients that are local, seasonal and primarily organic, supplemented by produce from our kitchen garden. Good ingredients are tastier, more nutritious and better for the environment. Our commitment to supporting sustainable farming affirms our commitment to the children and future generations.

## **Local**

Eating locally promotes community, sustainability and food security. We strive to source the majority of our food from our community, or neighboring counties. We do include imports such as citrus and tropical fruits in the winter, for variety, nutrition and flavor. We source imports that are ethically grown and organic.

## **Seasonal**

Eating seasonally promotes a diet that is nutritious and diverse. It connects us to the natural cycle of the seasons and builds an understanding of where our food comes from in a meaningful way. Fresh seasonal foods are nutritious and delicious. Eating seasonally can mean eating a larger variety of foods, and is a way to connect to the world and the ephemeral pleasures of each season.

## **Primarily Organic**

Fresh organic food is often more nutritious than conventionally grown food. Most local, organic food is sustainably grown in healthier soils, is non GMO, and relies more on heirloom varieties that are often more flavorful and nutritious but are not ideal for long distance travel, storage, uniformity and appearance.

## **Fresh**

Freshness directly affects nutritional quality and taste. Lasting food preferences are made in childhood, thus we strive to showcase every ingredient at it's best, and avoid forming inaccurate food aversions.

## **Diverse**

Being exposed to a diverse range of foods prepared in traditional and new ways can help diversify the children's palate, leading to a more varied and healthy diet.

## **Delicious**

Fresh, deliciously prepared meals help children discover the pleasures of a variety of foods.

# STAFF

*We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.*

**Author unknown**

We are a multidisciplinary team of women and men, including early childhood educators, teachers, environmental educators, working musicians, artists, environmental designers, and builders. A diverse staff is more representative of the wider world and community, and offers children a broader pool of knowledge and skills to learn from. The variety of perspectives helps keep the program fresh and authentic.

Because young children learn much by imitation, it is paramount that the staff model the values we aspire to communicate to the children, such as respect, integrity, compassion, curiosity and the love of learning.

It is important to have fun and play as much as possible in an early learning environment. As a team we strive to maintain a joyful and playful attitude and to immerse ourselves in the tasks at hand fully. We welcome opportunities for spontaneity and improvisation as they arise.

We feel that the happiness of the staff is directly related to the quality of their work. We offer competitive wages and welcome staff contributions to the design and delivery of our program. We provide many opportunities for professional development, as well as resources to help staff fuel their curiosity and creativity. We work to build a high degree of job satisfaction by delivering a cutting edge program of exceptional quality.

The combined effects of nature, physical activity, and fresh air are important contributors to the physical and mental health of the staff. We offer the staff and children the same nutritious and delicious meals, helping everyone feel good every day.

Having healthy and happy staff creates a culture of commitment and a low staff turn-over rate. The children benefit from the cohesion and rapport that a dedicated team can develop.



## CLOSING

At the Guelph Outdoor Preschool and Kindergarten, our mission is to provide children with high quality early childhood education and care in a stimulating environment that takes learning and play outdoors. Through direct, playful interactions with each other and our environment, we aim to help children to develop a sense of wonder and respect for nature, promote excellent physical and mental health, build relationships based on care and respect, and encourage a joy for lifelong learning. Through play and exploration we strive to constantly find meaningful ways for children to connect to each other, themselves, and the living world around them.

Please contact the Guelph Outdoor Preschool and Kindergarten if you would like to learn more about our program, to book a tour, or have any questions or comments. Please see our reference list for further reading.

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