

winter  
2023-2024



OPEN CONNECTIONS™

Volume XVII | Issue 84



**Cover:** Karl and Eliza take a break from weeding to climb to new heights during the Shaping Your Life groups' White Pines Clean Up, a portion of a program day devoted to clearing overgrowth in this popular space so it can be used by other programs.

**Right:** In the final vertical portion of the large-scale ball run that Shaping Your Life group members engineered during this year's Cardboard Challenge, a golf ball descends the spiral, spills into the funnel, which directs it down the chimney and out of the window of the house.

## Open Connections Magazine

Issue 84 | Winter 2023-2024

### Mission

The goal of this *Open Connections Magazine* is to inspire and connect, both with the Open Connections community and beyond. We hope to entice a wider community to get engaged with Open Connections by telling the stories of our community in these pages. As a small and established nonprofit, located just outside of Philadelphia, PA and centered on the mission of empowering people to live their lives full of purpose and fulfillment, we firmly believe that we can have an impact beyond our physical campus. Our hope is that the stories depicted in this magazine will inspire a connection of some sort. Maybe you'll feel connected to your own purpose. Maybe you'll find a connection that resonates with your values. Maybe you will spark a connection with a friend or family member as you have a meaningful conversation about what you've seen printed here. Maybe you'll connect with a story that brings to mind a meaningful memory of growth during your own youth.

At Open Connections, we focus on process over product, and put the learner at the heart of the experience. We value respect, freedom, and responsibility. With the strong belief that people are natural learners, we provide an environment and community that allows for individuals to learn in a way that works best for them, at a pace that is comfortable for the learner. With this magazine, we aim to share some of the enchantment that occurs on campus. In these pages, look at how happy, how focused, and how intentional people of all ages are. Open Connections has been and will continue to be a place of great growth and exceptional warmth.

Through this magazine we invite you to connect with us, and explore what a life full of purpose and fulfillment can look like.

Additionally we welcome artwork by adults and youth who are striving to find a voice in photography (or in other forms of artwork that can be photographed clearly for publication).

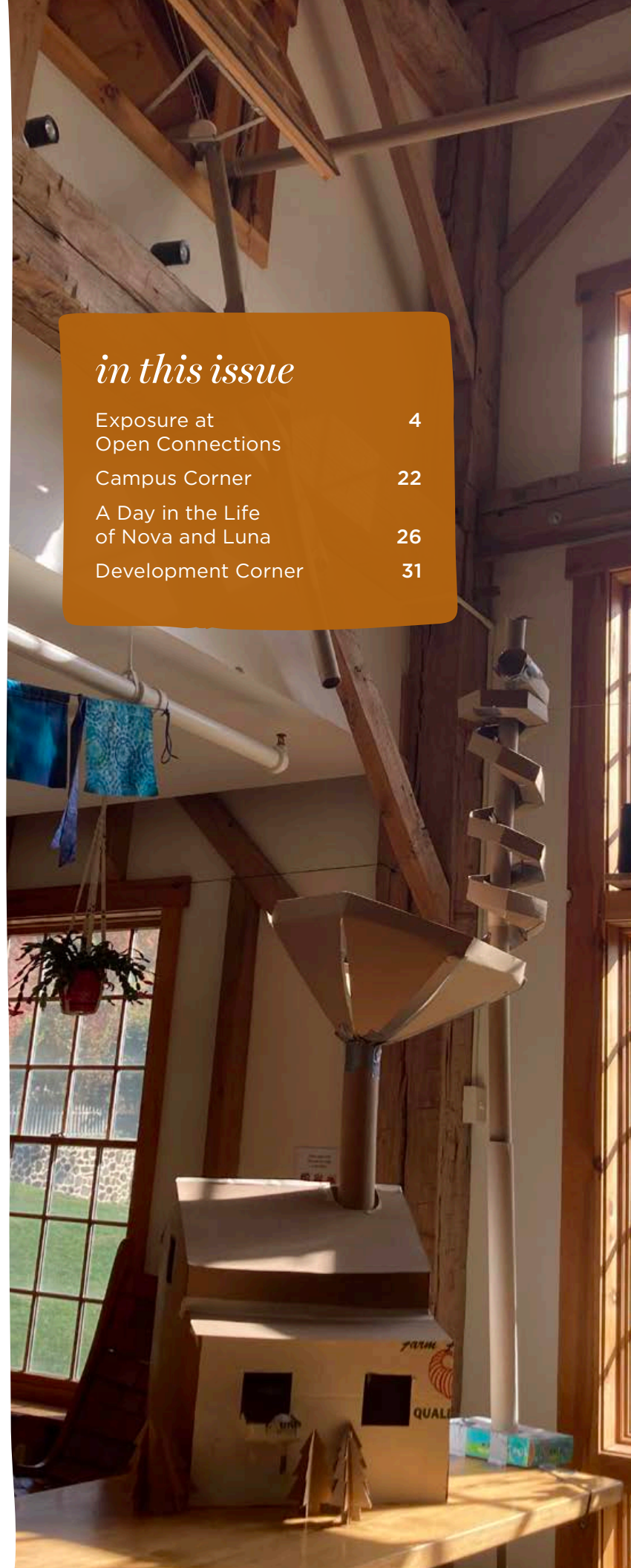
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## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Margaret Welsh



Dear Friends,

We have had a long stretch of sunshine this fall as the weather cooled and the leaves fluttered down. Open Connections youth have spent many hours enjoying our campus, from the woods and stream, to the beloved sand-pit. As I write, we are finally getting some much needed rain, however, the intrepid OC youth are still enjoying time outside.

This issue of the *Open Connections Magazine* is focused on how our different programs answer the conundrum of “we don’t know what we don’t know.” Take a journey with us and read vignettes from each program. Exposure to new learning is interwoven throughout our days together, nurturing an attitude of life-long learning.

Continue on the journey with our regular columns, which help us connect and get to know each other and

our campus better. Our Annual Giving drive this year is centered around a theme to encourage all of us to Expand Horizons. We would love to hear from you—how has *Open Connections* exposed you to new learning and expanded your horizons?

Speaking of expanding horizons and exposure to new learning, after 11 years in the Office at OC, and 13 years editing the *Open Connections Magazine*, I, myself, am moving on to new adventures. I will take with me many memories of learning, and experiences as an OC family and a staff member. I have grown so much in my time as part of this amazing organization and I look forward to staying connected through alumni events.

I hope you find inspiration in these pages and wish you the best as I pass on the torch. I hope you find inspiration in these pages.

With appreciation,

Margaret



Every Thursday, Group III plays a game that is determined by a couple of youth. Here, Silas is explaining a new version of tag that he, Shep, and Jude collaborated on. A later version of this tag included a cornfield and potions.





Open Program youth are all smiles during a game of "Freeze Tag" on a sunny day. Delilah, Nova, Luca, Leo, Luna, and Serafina collaborated to play tag in a way that suits everyone's wishes.



During Group III, Ollie thoughtfully crafts the foundation of a mask to fit over his head, a project that he has chosen for this year's OC Cardboard Challenge.



Isaac, Trey, Madhava and Lee, proudly pose for a photo with the container they created to protect the pumpkin inside from breaking, during the Great Group III Pumpkin Drop.



The Open Program art table is filled with creativity and inspiration. Here, Violet, Gracie, Mara, and Lucy work on their "tiny houses."



Group IV and Shaping Your Life members innovate a unique way to cross the gravel yard with all members in physical contact during a group game called Funny Walk. L-R: Max, Thomas, Heather (facilitator), Ruby, Aminah, Karl, Hannah, Eliza, Parker, Evie, Norah and Ella.



Vincent uses strength and perseverance to climb all the way to the top of the wall during the Open Program.



Luna uses a watercolor technique with a waterpen and liquid watercolor to create a nameplate in Group I.



Calliope and Heather (Facilitator) look for any changes to the body farms placed by the pond during Group II's exploration of decay.



Group II (ages 9-11) and Shaping Your Life (ages 15-18) combined for a trip to Ridley Creek State Park. They completed the short orienteering course in small mixed teams, then enjoyed a picnic lunch and a couple of intense games of Eagle Eye. This experience was an example of the opportunities at Open Connections for multi-age collaboration.



Max and Jude build tonoscopes during Choice B: Exploring Sound. Once finished, they sprinkled salt on top of the membrane and bombarded the underside with sound of varying frequencies attempting to find a resonant frequency that would force the salt into creating various patterns.



Jack and Cadence present their research on birth certificates to the rest of the Shaping Your Life group during a life skills activity on different forms of identification.



Owen, Mara, and Luca work together to dig a deep trench in the sandpit during the Open Program. Many shovels make light work.



Savannah and Gracie work with dime blocks to fill shadow spaces, finding ways to fill the shape with fewer and fewer blocks during Open Program.



Maks and Jett team up to measure the circumference of their pumpkin during a Group I science lab.



Group III youth, Everleigh, Emmy, Rhian, Maggie, Lyla, and Cataleia pause to share their enjoyment during a team puzzle challenge.



Savannah works on her "corn critter" with the use of paint, and a variety of craft materials during the Open Program.





Tanner rinses his cyanotype print and hangs it out to dry during Group II.

## EXPOSURE

At Open Connections, we subscribe to the notion that, *“we can’t know what we don’t know.”* Our facilitators incorporate a wide variety of activities into programs to expose young people to new ideas, giving them an opportunity to see all of the possibilities that exist in this diverse and bountiful world. This can look like exposure to different ways of thinking and living, or different cultures and backgrounds. It can mean exposure to new ideas, concepts or perspectives. Every program provides youth with a variety of exposure points that could pique interests, inspire more learning, or ignite a passion. Hands-on activities, experiments, projects, stories, games, recipes, trips, and events are just some of the ways that Open Connections works to expand the horizons in our young people.



Norah, Locke, Parker, and Karl of Shaping Your Life investigate a topographic map of the Media Quadrangle in preparation for running the orienteering course at Ridley Creek State Park with Group II.

Jacey (facilitator) holds the stethoscope diaphragm against the tree trunk while Leo listens intently for sap sounds during a Group I “Day in the Woods” themed day. Members spent time forest bathing and using their senses to explore the natural world.



# Exposure Fuels Learning in the OPEN PROGRAM

By Michelle Brockway, Facilitator

**H**ave you ever wondered what exposure looks like for a four-year-old, or questioned how early exposure supports youth development? Take a dive with me into a day in the life of a young person in the Open Program and you will see how we expose youth, ages four and up, to a plethora of concepts.

On any given day, there are numerous points of exposure throughout the Open Program (OP); you might see young people building in the workshop, experimenting with chemical reactions in the lab, or creating abstract art pieces. You might also see a group baking a pie in the kitchen or a young person working one-on-one with a facilitator on a conceptual development challenge. The Open Program space allows our young people to practice self-directed learning by exposure to real tools, an abundance of resources, and a safe social environment.



Delilah enjoys reading to her peers during Open Program's Group Time.



Michelle (facilitator) works with Mara and Serafina on their spatial relations skills at the Conceptual Development table in the Open Program. Mara is working with Dime Blocks to fill the shadow spaces.

## GROUP TIME

Delilah started her time in the Open Program when she was four. For a four-year-old, or even an adult for that matter, it can be intimidating to sit in front of a group and share words or a story. The first time Delilah accepted the invitation to get up in front of the group, she requested that I sit by her side, and when she read, it was with great reservation and very low volume. As the weeks went by, Delilah asked to share again, and again. One day, she felt confident enough to sit solo in front of the group, her volume had increased and her self-confidence was clear. In the warm, accepting environment at OC, and with an open invitation to grow, Delilah became comfortable with speaking in front of her peers and now she offers to read books at Group Time on a regular basis. Recurring exposure points contribute to meaningful growth, and help to inform future experiences.

## COOKING

One day in October an abundance of apples provided Open Program youth with the opportunity to hone their cutting skills and make fresh cider. This activity presented space to develop precision skills, work collaboratively, increase safety awareness, and build healthy habits. All of these are important skills that last a lifetime, and have many applications.

Kairo hones cutting skills by slicing apples for fresh apple cider in the Open Program. This real work opportunity requires hand-eye coordination, safety awareness, and a steady hand.



## CERAMICS

The Open Program is able to take advantage of the variety of specialized resource rooms on campus. One Thursday a young person requested to go to the Ceramic Studio in the Farmhouse. After extending an invitation to the rest of the OP youth, a small group spent the morning creating clay pieces. After the pieces are fired in the kiln, this group will have another opportunity to visit and glaze their pieces. Through this experience young people are developing hand strength and fine motor skills in addition to being afforded the time and space to turn their visions into unique art pieces.



A group of Open Program youth take advantage of Open Connection's Ceramic Studio. Levi, Fina, Luna, Lucy, Delilah, Nova, and Mara build hand strength and share creativity as they design unique art pieces.

*These examples are just a small peek into the many types of exposure points offered in the Open Program from day to day. Exposure to a wide variety of concepts, activities, and ideas during these early years plants the seeds for more learning that will grow with our young people all the way into adulthood.*

*What seeds will be planted this year that will instill a love for learning in our youth? ©*



Open Program youth enjoy a walk in the woods and practice their balance on a fallen log.

“We learn simply by the exposure of living, and what we learn most natively is the tradition in which we live.”

—David P. Gardner, Educator and Life-long Learner



# GROUP I

## Exploring Clay Handbuilding

By Jacey Lucas, Facilitator

While discussing activities and topics of interest this year, the youth in Group I expressed a strong wish to spend time working with clay. Many of them have created with clay before—shaping pinch pots, coiling clay into vessels, stamping textures, and sculpting free form objects. This type of self-directed exploration is a wonderful way for youth to become familiar with the medium and express their creativity.

We also recognized an opportunity for growth through exposure to more of what the clay studio can offer. At Open Connections we have a fully equipped ceramics studio, complete with carving and stamping tools, moulds, a wedging table, a slab roller, an electric kiln, and glazes galore. In looking for an expanded way to engage with the clay studio, we introduced a miniature room building project where youth would utilize various equipment and techniques to build walls and furniture for a small room of their own design.

### SLAB ROLLING

The walls of the rooms needed to be a consistent thickness for strength. Youth learned that the slab roller was the perfect tool for achieving this. This was also an opportunity to discover the need for precision after a setting was inadvertently shifted, resulting in uneven slabs.

Wally uses the slab roller to flatten a piece of clay that he will cut out and use for one of his walls.



Group I members work in deep focus and concentration as they stretch their clay building skills.

### ATTACHING

“Scratch-and-attach” is the mantra repeated when assembling separate pieces of clay into a single form. Without this assembly method, components may fall apart during the drying process. Members of Group I applied this technique to attach pieces of furniture in their rooms.



Above: Lila builds a tiny coffee table using the “scratch-and-attach” method for attaching clay pieces together. Below: Maks uses a wooden spiral stamp to create intricately swirled surfaces in his miniature room.

### STAMPING

Youth were invited to experiment with wooden stamps to create floor tile patterns and wall textures for their miniature rooms.



### TEMPLATE CUTTING

Each room needed three walls of the same dimensions. Youth used templates to achieve the level of accuracy needed for construction.

Left: Having used the slab roller, Charlie uses a template to carefully cut out a wall for his miniature room.

Exposure to new techniques will continue in the coming months. After the pieces are kiln-fired, the youth will be applying glaze, then adding mixed media details such as fabric curtains and LED lights to bring the rooms to life! ©





Early in the program year, Group II youth jumped into a team-building challenge. Their challenge was to work together to move a marble from one side of the room to the other using only one sheet of cardboard. Through A LOT of discussion, problem solving, team-work, and grit they accomplished their goal!



GROUP II



Group II youth, Lincoln, Josh, Tanner, and Harrison secure the area around the body farm made of chicken parts. Cinder blocks ensure any hungry visitors might be deterred.

Annabelle poses with the name plate she created. Rick (facilitator) supported Group II members in making name plates in the Makerspace with Adobe Illustrator and the Glow Forge.



“By providing a supportive environment to try new things, we build resilience and empower youth to integrate these experiences into their ever-developing selves.”

Calliope discovers how to lift a fingerprint by carefully following a step by step procedure in the the Science Lab. This was an introduction to a new space on campus for many of the youth.



## CHALLENGE AND EXPLORATION

*The Power of Exposure to Nurture Confidence and Collaboration*

By Heather Hurley, Facilitator

At Open Connections, learning comes to life through exploration and discovery. Young people are encouraged to delve into unfamiliar ideas, take on new challenges, and help guide their own learning and growth each day. In Group II, youth are regularly exposed to perspectives and experiences that expand their understanding of the world. One way we cultivate curiosity is by creating opportunities to find possible solutions to open-ended problems through experimentation, collaboration, and testing. Our goal is to nurture self-directed learners who can engage with the diversity of ideas that make up our world. By providing a supportive environment to try new things, we build resilience and empower youth to integrate these experiences into their ever-developing selves.

### *Exposure can look like using familiar materials in a new way:*

In our first week, youth were challenged to move a marble across the entire program space using only a piece of cardboard. While this seemed like a straightforward challenge, design process barriers popped up almost immediately: “What can we use to hold the cardboard together?” and “How can we keep the marble rolling rate steady because it is going way too fast?”. Each youth was involved in sharing their vision, and suggestions were considered from all angles. The group would attempt a run of the marble only to find they needed to reconsider a particular issue, such as, not having enough cardboard to span the length of the room at one go. Youth persevered through many iterations of design, finding themselves closer to meeting the goal each time. It took cooperation, communication and cheering one another on.

### *Exposure can look like completely new topics of study:*

This year we jumped right into thinking about the idea of *mystery* and what components that can include. We started a serial podcast story about the mysterious disappearance of kids with possible superpowers. We explored how mysteries may be solved using crime scene investigations by building our own body farms and designing an experiment to watch decomposition in action. We continue to think about what makes mysteries compelling and may even consider crafting our own mystery stories this year.

### *Exposure can look like taking advantage of each “specialty” area offered on campus:*

Considering the many specialty spaces here at OC, Group 2 youth visited each one separately and considered how they might use them this year. The wishes ranged from exploring different ways to create culinary dishes from potatoes to trying their hand at the 3D printer in the Makerspace. Our goal is to cycle through all the amazing spaces for rich and varied experiences this year; so far we have used Adobe Illustrator and the GlowForge to design nameplates for our coat hooks, and explored the Science Lab to develop our fingerprints using cyanoacetate.

Hands-on explorations and exposure to new spaces and ideas fosters creativity, critical thinking and confidence as youth learn to integrate emerging ideas into their existing knowledge and skills. Whether re-designing a game, collaborating in a playful teamwork challenge, or sharing a sincere appreciation for one another, we work to empower our young people to take chances and try ideas through active exposure to the wide, wonderful, fascinating world. ©





**Left:** Emmy volunteers to scribe, capturing contributions from smaller groups regarding values, needs and wishes—a step in the process toward collectively drafting a Group III agreement of conduct that supports a safe, inclusive, and fun atmosphere for living and learning.

## IGNITING CURIOSITY *and* DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS

By Kelly Dillon, Facilitator

One of our primary goals as facilitators at Open Connections is to create days that offer youth exposure to a variety of topics, ideas and concepts. Naturally there are many ways we might go about this, and some may increase the likelihood of authentic curiosity and participation. Relevant purposeful work, playful exploration, and flexible opportunities for youth to apply and develop their own skills and interests are all ingredients that generally result in rich, meaningful experiences. Read on for examples of exposure to various concepts in Group III that are intended to ignite curiosity and support developing broad life skills.

### EXPOSURE TO GROUP DECISION-MAKING

Early in the program year, discussing and agreeing to the culture we would like to create and uphold in Group III is foundational. If all youth are to sign their names in agreement, then they all need to have their voices heard to ensure a safe and inclusive learning atmosphere for all. Decisions by committee can be challenging and time consuming, and arguably well worth it. Many issues were encountered organically in the real-work of navigating intrapersonal and interpersonal life skills that come into play when negotiating the terms of a contract. Who leads the discussion? How do we hear and acknowledge all voices and opinions? How do we arrive at a decision that meets everyone's needs? Is a show of hands always fair? What about alliances? Is there fun to be had in doing this, while still taking it seriously? Group III also received insights from a few Shaping Your Life youth, who had recently participated in drafting a contract of their own. The hard work paid off and the Group III youth arrived at something they could all sign in agreement.

“Many issues were encountered organically in the real-work of navigating intrapersonal and interpersonal life skills that come into play when negotiating the terms of a contract. **Who** leads the discussion? **How** do we hear and acknowledge all voices and opinions? How do we arrive at a decision that meets everyone's **needs**? Is a show of hands always **fair**? What about alliances? Is there **fun** to be had in doing this, while still taking it seriously?”

### EXPOSURE TO MATHEMATICAL REASONING

Many Group III youth might agree that logical, mathematical reasoning is dreadful and should be avoided at all cost. It can be challenging to build trust in this area, and to assure folks that there can be fun, interesting and, dare I say, cool things that can happen when we agree to get curious and are willing to have a different experience in the math realm. In an effort to dispel any misguided age limitations, and intentionally revisit the joy and value of the conceptual development manipulatives introduced to many youth in the Open Program, we laid out some of the different materials with little to no instruction. Youth were free to play and make use of Cuisenaire Rods and pattern blocks in ways that felt friendly to them. What happened? Some created colorful arrays that explored patterns using a sort of analog approach to algorithms. Others investigated rotational and mirror symmetry found in mandalas. One young person tested how many different combinations of shapes could be used to create a pentagon of the same size. A pair of folks used shapes available to them within a standard set of pattern blocks to precisely follow and fill the arc of the circumference of the table surface they were working on. This exposure to new, or perhaps forgotten, materials reignited curiosity and fresh thinking around math activities.



The colors and shapes of pattern blocks can be hard to resist; Lee and Isaac, of Group III, are inspired to make mandala-like arrangements that follow a rotational symmetry.

### EXPOSURE TO CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Visual art, particularly drawing, is often very popular among the Group III crowd, many of whom may sketch to occupy their hands during less physically demanding group activities. When we make drawing an integral part of an experience, it acknowledges a known interest, offers an accessible way to engage in what's happening, and provides opportunities for practice and development of a versatile artistic skill and different means of communication. Group III youth have applied their drawing savvy in several ways while developing their critical thinking and creative communication skills:

#### **Feel-and-Find, Drawing Edition:**

Youth were challenged to blindly gather detail of an object hidden from view in a bag, and then draw the object.

#### **Descriptive Writing and Drawing Challenge:**

Each person was given a rock with the aim of creating both an observational drawing and a detailed written description of the rock. The group later tried to match each rock with a drawing and description.

#### **Inktober**

Group III welcomed October with some drawing in response to the first five prompts of Inktober, created in 2009 by Jake Parker as an intentional challenge to practice and improve his inking skills and develop positive drawing habits.



I wonder what other curiosities will be ignited this year? ©

**Left:** Group III youth (Cataleia, Lyla and Everleigh pictured here) study drawings and detailed descriptions created by peers, and work to match them with the rocks that were the inspiration behind the activity.



# UNLOCKING *New Interests*

By Michelle West, Facilitator



Eva and Danny wrap a plastic container with bark gathered from fallen trees. The group designed an experiment to test how various natural materials compare as insulation.

“How do you know what you don’t know? The answer is exposure.”

“Exposure” does not always have the ring of health and positivity that it carries here at Open Connections. In many other contexts, to be exposed is to be made vulnerable or left open to the harmful effects of the elements. Experiencing something entirely new at OC does carry certain risks: What if it isn’t fun? What if it’s too difficult? What if it forces me to let go of something I thought I knew? In Group IV, we hope that exposure to new ideas and academic subjects will bring as many benefits as risks. The goal of exposure is not mastery of a topic, but an introduction that invites continued curiosity. At times the goal is to encourage young people to stretch beyond what they already know they like to learn. At OC, we like to say, “How do you know what you don’t know?” The answer is exposure.

## SCIENCE EXPO

In Group IV this year, the group will participate in a Science Expo. In preparation for that project they will have many new experiences in the Science Lab. This fall, they have had opportunities to explore measurement, variables, and experimental design. Together they have created research questions and hypotheses. They will continue to explore the physical world and encounter the confounding challenges that make it so difficult to be sure the experiment was a good one. There are no facts to memorize – only the opportunity to do the real work of science and figure out if that is the sort of work they enjoy.



Eske, Thomas, and Max use dry sand and dirt they have collected to attempt to conserve the heat in a container of warm water.

## POP-UP SPANISH

The Spanish language is also part of this year’s Group IV program. In this program element that we call “Pop-up Spanish,” youth have brief, immersive engagements with the Spanish language through games and chats. The focus is entirely on communication and fun. We acknowledge that no one can learn a language entirely in a two-day-a-week program that also has many other agenda items each day. Our goal is exposure, and more precisely, that the young people’s (often first) experience with language learning is positive and successful.



Group IV uses Spanish phrases and cardinal directions to guess the country Michelle describes.

After encountering new experiences, young people often discover that they would like to take a deeper dive. They may decide to learn more Spanish or ask for a chemistry class. Nothing could thrill us more! Youth might also decide that Pop-up Spanish is just enough language learning for them, or that the scientific method doesn’t really tickle their fancy. Exposure doesn’t demand mastery or require a years-long commitment, it only asks for a little vulnerability and a willingness to try something new. Sometimes, when we are very lucky, exposure to a new topic is the key that unlocks a lifetime of discovery and adventure. ☺



By Youth in the Shaping Your Life Program with Linda Soffer, Sheila Pai and Heather Gosse, Facilitators

As the oldest youth at Open Connections, group members in Shaping Your Life (SYL) are already in transition to the adult world. Accordingly, SYL projects and processes are mindfully designed to provide youth with exposure to a wide range of real world experiences to foster and develop life skills that youth will need as they move beyond their teen years. Current SYL members were asked to identify and share aspects of the program that support their entry into the “real world” outside of OC.

### GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Many group decision-making processes help to guide the work in Shaping Your Life. The teens make time to go through layered discussions around topics like the Symposium focus, the overnight trip destination, and even the choice for group game, in order to incorporate everyone into the planning of the program and make it more engaging. This process invites a diversity of thought, allowing the teens to think in ways they hadn't before. Voicing opinions, overcoming peer pressure or anxiety, and knowing how to listen-to-understand are skills that are practiced during these group discussions.

From making decisions about year-long projects to discussing how to use program time on any given day, encouraging each person to use their voice and share their ideas leads to a sense of freedom and shared ownership within the program. This allows the teens to land on a satisfying conclusion to a discussion that ensures all voices are heard.

An example of the layered decision-making process was around choice of the umbrella topic for the SYL Symposium next spring. First, pairs explored possible subtopics, activities, speakers, field trips, and materials that could be read/watched in the group's study around the chosen topic. The group began with over 20 possible topics, which they narrowed to 16, then 8, then 5, and eventually to 1... The 1940's! Stay tuned for an exciting Symposium evening in the spring!

### PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

An integral part of Shaping Your Life involves communicating information and ideas through public speaking and presentations. While the Symposium event in the spring offers a chance for some group members to practice formal presentation skills to a broader audience, there are informal and smaller-scale presentation opportunities for all youth throughout the year. An important part of new experiences is stopping to reflect on them, developing self-awareness. Here are two presentation reflections:

*“During last year's Symposium I recall being very nervous because I had never given a large scale presentation before. My practice runs of my presentation were pretty bad, but when I got up to the podium all of my preparation and research came back to me and I finished my presentation feeling good about my experience!”*

—Eliza (2nd year SYL member)



Finn shares his personal introduction with his Shaping Your Life group members using a PechaKucha style slideshow. This challenging and engaging format requires a strict parameter of 20 slides (or 10 for SYL's mini versions), and a 20-second time limit per slide providing a creative challenge for youth.

“Coming together as a whole group to narrow down our individual expectations of ourselves and of each other, and then agree to a set of terms took a lot of communication, reflection, and teamwork.”

*“For the PechaKucha presentations in September, I was faced with the challenge of figuring out exactly how to present a comprehensive introduction to my life in a short period, bound by both the limitations of visual media and the time constraints of the PechaKucha style of presentation.”* —Finn (new SYL member)

### OVERNIGHT TRIP AND FUNDRAISER

A large-scale project in Shaping Your Life which involves exposure to a wide variety of adult life skills is the group's annual over-night trip. After the group agrees on a destination, formulates the trip itinerary and establishes a budget, the silent auction fundraiser date is set and a backwards plan for it is formulated. A meaningful amount of time is dedicated to contacting individuals and organizations to ask for donations, and then managing the donations as they come in. Simultaneous to donation procurement, the event planning side of things takes place with designing the auction layout, planning for childcare and food, budgeting for expenses, and then advertising to adults both within and outside of the OC community. In addition to the fundraiser details, making reservations, and other plans for the actual trip provides a full range of communication opportunities for these budding adults. Overall, the group trip and fundraiser is a project that exposes youth to many valuable life skills.

### THE GROUP CONTRACT

During the first week of the program year, Shaping Your Life engaged together to create a group contract to help guide their experiences and interactions. One of the terms from the agreement—Bring your B.E.S.T: Bravery, Engagement, Self Care and Trust—was used to compile multiple group members' ideas into a single comprehensive acronym. Coming together as a whole group, to narrow down individual expectations of self and of each other, and then agree to a set of terms took a lot of communication, reflection, and teamwork. Formulating and following the group contract gives the teens an opportunity to define and articulate their shared values, as well as collaborate and make compromises with peers. These valuable skills will serve the teens well in their lives beyond OC. ©



Norah (3rd year in SYL) shares her experience with Locke (new to SYL) while they do research for the group overnight trip. In addition to planning, budgeting, and fundraising, this project promotes the sharing of information and passing down of experiences from returning group members to newer ones, providing mentoring opportunities.



Aminah, Indi, Ruby, Evie, Cadence and Brian perform a skit demonstrating what a lack of engagement looks like during an activity exploring group culture. After the skits, youth began formulating the terms of the Shaping Your Life group contract around group norms that all members agreed to follow.



# CHOICE PROGRAMS



Choice A: Film, Documentary Edition had an opportunity to hear from OC Parent, Jack Edinger who is a documentary maker! Here, Asher interviews Jack in front of a green screen. Asher is working on a documentary about Open Connections.

## Choice A: Film, Documentary Edition

By Sarah Becker, Facilitator

Documentaries offer viewers exposure to different topics and hold the potential to open our eyes to something that captivates and fascinates us. The young people in Choice A: Film are not only getting an opportunity to see some examples of what types of documentaries already exist, they are getting an opportunity to be exposed to and experiment with the tools and techniques that documentarians use to make the films that change our world!

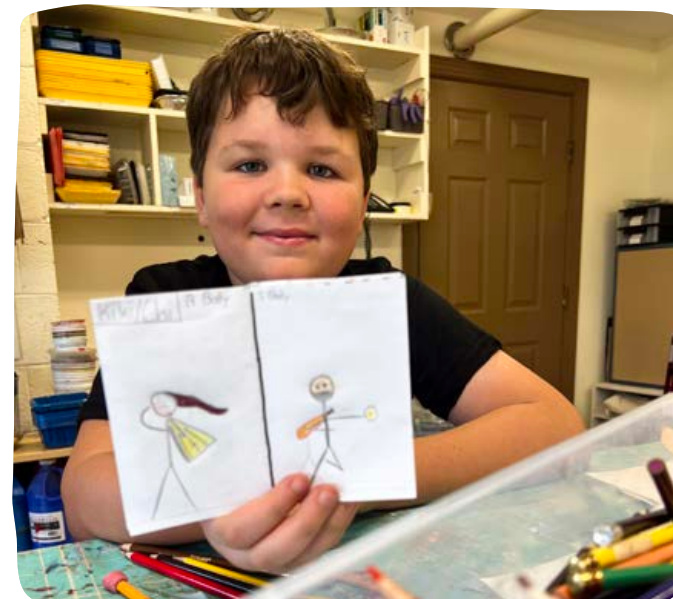
## Choice A: Lego Robotics

By Rick Sleutaris, Facilitator

The Choice A: Lego Robotics offering provides youth hands-on, project based exposure to the world of robotics. Youth work with the Lego EV3 system and are able to customize their robots, add a variety of sensors (including touch, ultrasonic, and color), and program them. The hardware provides exposure to different building techniques and structural integrity while the software gives youth an opportunity to explore if/then/else statements, loops, boolean algebra, and subroutines.



Eli modifies his Lego robot to take on the "Wall of Holes" challenge in Choice A: Lego Robotics, with the goal of pushing/dropping balls through a variety of holes at different heights. His current design required him to experiment with many, new to him, types of lego bricks such as axels, couplings, beams, and pins.



Kai continues to work on a mini-comic zine in Choice A: Zine-making, featuring Master Chi and a cast of characters based on some of his younger brother's drawings.

## Choice A: Zine-making

By Kelly Dillon, Facilitator

Zines can be a fun way to explore creative expression. In Choice A: Zine-making we've looked at copies of self-published zines and discovered that just about anything goes regarding subject matter. Free to mine their passions and ideas for content they might like to share, zine-makers can think critically about what to include in the way of text and images to best tell their story. There are many artful ways to layout and design a mini publication, and I have found that the youth can be most receptive to learning about new possible approaches and skills when they encounter a need or wish for those skills.



The Choice A zine-makers, Isaac, Kai and Josh, gather at the copier, the first of many anticipated visits. Once design, layout, and final artwork is complete, this next step of photocopying is how zines have traditionally been published.



Wally checks the progress of the brown sugar boba toward the perfect level of chewiness during Choice A: World of Tea.

## Choice A: World of Tea

By Sheila Pai, Facilitator

In Choice A: World of Tea, we got exposure to new teas, tea knowledge, and kitchen skills. Our creations included boba tea and scallion pancakes, green tea and almond cookies, and hibiscus lemon verbena tea with lemon verbena blueberry muffins. We dove into the history of tea and tea culture around the world, and we experienced the smells, flavors, and joy of both drinking tea, and learning baking and frying skills.



As part of Choice A: World of Tea, Josh, Wally, Lincoln, and Madhava make Indian chai using their own spice mix, and fried cauliflower pakora to eat with tamarind sauce. Both were huge hits!



In Choice B: Dumplings from Around the World, one of the areas of exposure has been to a wide variety of different cooking methods. Here, Danny and Silas begin the process of pan frying the pot stickers their cooking group made. Meanwhile, Jude reads the instructions in the recipe for the following step, which involves steaming the pot stickers. Group members also fried, steamed, and baked dumplings as we explored this highly diverse group of foods.



Eske uses Tinkercad to draw a portrait of Danny that he later incorporated into a key ring during Choice B: 3D Design and Printing.



In Choice B: 3D Design and Printing, different group members have prior knowledge and experience in different aspects of the process, and there have been many chances to learn from each other. Here, Danny coaches Rhian through the process of downloading their design from Tinkercad, finding it in their downloads, and saving it on a thumb drive. Other group members have readily shared their prior knowledge of Adobe Illustrator and Tinkercad, helping others learn what is possible using these tools.

### Choice B: 3D Design and Printing

By Heather Gosse, Facilitator

The Choice B: 3D Design and Printing group started with activities designed around exposure to the overall process of 3D design and printing. To assist in learning the ropes, everyone started with a couple of specific projects, including designing and printing a custom die. The youth created designs using Adobe Illustrator, imported those designs into Tinkercad, scaled them, and aligned them with the different sides of their die. Last step, print!

### Choice B: Aerial Arts

We were so fortunate to have OC Parent, Kate Johnson (with support from daughters Cadence (SYL) and Hazel (Group IV) offering Aerial Arts to Choice B. Youth have had the opportunity to develop their understanding of the anatomy of movement and balance both within themselves and the rig that is supporting them. All content was carefully described and demonstrated, followed with opportunities to investigate hands-on, whether navigating the micro and macro movements within a featured skill, or assembling the apparatus. Expert guidance and unique modifications were offered as needed, so that everyone had the opportunity to achieve growth and success.



One week in Choice B: Aerial Arts, Locke, Uma, Rhian and Jay had the opportunity to assemble the rig. This involved discussion of static vs. dynamic forces as the group learned about each component, gaining important insight around the safety of the performer/athlete, equipment and structure of the location where the apparatus is installed. The group decided to see if they could make the rig higher this time, exposing them to more problem-solving and awareness of safety as they ascertained whether a taller (wider) rig would fit in the Gathering Space.

Uma uses outside writing time during Choice B: Poetry to pen a poem in her own voice and style after the group's weekly discussion of poems by well-known poets and discussion of various poetic elements.



### Choice B: Poetry

By Sheila Pai, Facilitator

In Choice B: Poetry, we explored the power of poetry to say a lot in a little space, to move us to laugh heartily, and to ponder more deeply. Learning poetic elements such as metaphor, imagery, diction, rhyme, and enjambment helped us incorporate more complexity and intentionality into our own poems. As poets, we played with form and experienced how poetry allows unique expression of our thoughts, emotions and creativity. Youth took turns being Poet of the Day, sharing a poem they liked to inspire the group's writing. Each day, the group listened to and read a variety of poems before taking time, usually outdoors, to write their own poems individually or together. ☺



Shep and Silas cut paper for "cheese" poems in Choice B: Poetry. The cut paper is placed on any page of a book and the words peeking through the holes become inspiration for poems.



# Campus Corner

by Sarah Becker,  
Facilitator and Assistant Director



During Camp OC in June, youth started and ended their days by gathering in the Pavilion. Here, we can see some happy campers at the end of the camp day gathering to play a game of rainbow tag.

## The Pavilion

At Open Connections, we love being outside as much as possible. We know that exposure to fresh air and green space is beneficial to growing minds. The addition of the Pavilion was a natural choice for a community that values the outdoors and gatherings as much as we do.

Since construction was completed on this new campus feature, we've transformed the space in a number of ways, from outdoor programming and lunch gatherings, to a staff development arena, base for camp games, and the Pausing Festival stage. We're taking full advantage of this new, outdoor, flexible gathering space.

The Shaping Your Life program in particular, has really incorporated this area as an extension of their program space. To kick the year off, the teens decided that they would regularly

eat lunch in the Pavilion. Spread out amongst the two tables and the couches, the teens socialize together. The Pavilion is also where this group collaborated on their Group Contract (see page 17). From working in small groups, to collaborating as a large cohesive unit, this space is versatile enough to accommodate all of their needs.

This past June, the stage for the Pausing Festival was set up underneath the shade of the Pavilion, and the crowd looked on as folks sang, danced, recited and otherwise performed their hearts out at the culmination of another great program year.

Another flexible, adaptable, and comfortable space on campus is a welcome addition and we just can't wait to see what new and innovative ways the facilitators, youth, and community members imagine as to how to use this space! ©



Max, Eva, Hazel, Uma, and Thomas enjoy time in the Pavilion creating watercolor representations of favorite moments from their Group IV program day.



The OC community gathers one last time before summer break for our annual Pausing Festival where we celebrate the connections and memories we made over the past year. The new Pavillion is a welcome addition to the gathering time.



A classic Conceptual Development activity that Open Program frequently engages with is attribute blocks in a venn diagram. This activity is scalable to all ages. Shaping Your Life teens Evie, Karl and Aminah use it to learn more about each other.





The White Pines Tree House offers opportunities for developing confidence, strength, and balance. Here, Open Program youth, Nova, Kairo, and Liberty enjoy the climbing net leading up to the upper level.



Maggie (Group III) works with determination to complete her Cardboard Challenge Day Plinko game, wanting to finish it so that it could be play-tested during sharing time. This desire led to prioritizing remaining features given the confines of time and asking for support as needed.



Mixing liquid watercolors and bubble solution creates a fun art medium! In Group I, Weston experimented with different transferring technique to get the bubbles from the container onto the watercolor paper.



Nora finds a creative solution to cut her cardboard tube in half by using a vise in the Open Program Woodshop. She carefully takes her time to cut her line straight and smooth.



Søren, Eske, and Shep concentrate intently as they fill their shumai in Choice B: Dumplings. The groups focused on organizing their tasks in an efficient way, and we were able to make two kinds of dumplings with a few minutes to spare!



Encouraging others to join him inside, Maks (Group I) writes "Do Enter" on the door of the cardboard house made on Cardboard Challenge day.



Sian uses glue to create a helicopter with interesting scraps which he found in the Open Program woodshop.



During an afternoon of "All Campus Recess", youth from all programs enjoy a game of parachute. Gracie and Lila make a run for it from one end of the parachute to the other.



Eva (Group IV) serves up ice cream to her customer, Luca (Open Program) during community-wide sharing time on Cardboard Challenge Day. Eva arrived with a vision for the day and used every minute of her day to realize it.



Four documentarians, Madhava, Wally, Lincoln and Eli, pose with some equipment during a quieter moment in Film Choice A: Documentary Edition.



Uma gracefully eases into the 'Closed Butterfly' move during Choice B: Aerial Arts, modifying to protect an injury on her foot, with guidance from Visiting Artist and OC Parent, Kate Johnson.



This team of youth, Silas, Trey, Lyla, Maggie, and Cataleia, drew on insight from a previous Group III Geodesic Dome Building Challenge using straws, to inform their construction of a new version using twisting of balloons. There were universal challenges and delightful distractions.



A trip to the climbing rocks is always an adventure. Open Program youth gather after all making it to the very top. Front: Lincoln, Delilah; Back: Vincent, Luca, Kellen, Nova.



*We all know that homeschooling looks different for everyone. We want to know what our community does on days when the youth are not running around Open Connections. Here is a glimpse of how one family spends their non-OC Days*



## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF *Luna & Nova*

By Amanda Yessin,  
OC Parent

Our homeschool style allows Luna and Nova's interests and curiosities to dictate what we're going to learn and explore. We start our non-OC days with lots of morning cuddles and talks of our plans for the day. Luna and Nova usually participate in helping prepare the breakfast and clean up afterwards. Then they will read for a half hour or so. Most days the girls wish to create something with various items they find in our recycling. Most recently, Nova made a fun-house for her grandma's cat, Mushmush.

One of the things about homeschooling we appreciate is flexibility in our schedule. Some days Luna and Nova attend a gymnastics class, and some days we will hike in one of the many state parks in Delaware. Our living room floor is currently the location of Nova's massive Amusement Park made from Legos. Luna is working on many different crafts she's made for our family that is coming to visit for Thanksgiving. We spend hours making characters and jewelry from polymer clay, paintings and drawings.

We feel so lucky to be able to have the day we want, doing what we enjoy. We love to travel together and learn about the world we live in through our travels. Last Spring, we spent some time in Arizona. We did rock climbing in Sedona and visited the Grand Canyon. We learned about Native culture, American History and the importance and significance of National Parks.

We share "Apples & Onions" during dinner as a family. We take turns talking about our Apples which are things we are appreciative for, that make us happy, or a good deed we witnessed. Our Onions are things that are upsetting to us. This sharing is something we all look forward to every night and gives us an opportunity for some really great conversations.

Homeschooling, and unschooling in particular, has allowed us to meet the needs of our young people in a way that is so special and valuable. ©



Hannah works on painting the background image for the tile she is making as part of a group art project in Shaping Your Life.



Group III youth, Shep, Jude, Ollie, and Lee, team up to practice possible strategies for effectively launching a ball using a stretchy length of fabric with handles. Next, they will volley the ball back and forth with another team. This challenge was a youth's wishful build on a previous challenge using the same materials.



Bodhi, Vincent, and Jax share some love and snuggles with our noisy guinea pigs during their time in the Open Program.



Tanner, Jack, Josh, Lincoln and Harrison collaborate to use building materials, challenging themselves to build until the tower reached the ceiling of the Group II room.



One of Shaping Your Life's main focuses this year has been on earth sciences. Here we see Finn and Locke looking through microscopes to discover the cell structure of plant samples and identifying the functions of different parts.





Levon tests his boat design in the upper pond. He changed and added to his design over several weeks in the Open Program.



Eli and Isaac prepare for another round of Battlebots using their custom built and programmed Lego robots during Choice A: Lego Robotics.



Group IV does a feelings check-in using some new Spanish vocabulary at the start of their pop-up Spanish time.



Sam offers a helping hand to Kellen in finding the right wood and tools to make his ladder during the Open Program.



Alethea takes a break during the Open Program to give Pip and Nim (our friendly goats) some extra love and attention.



Nico and Crosby share their finger puppets created with a variety of art materials during their morning in the Open Program.



Feel and Find boxes are always a favorite in the Open Program. Here Daniel and Ari work to use touch to figure out what letter is inside their box. They will write down their guess before they check.



Group I members, Leo, Wally, Weston, Jett, Maks, and Ollie celebrate after completing their sand fortress building STEM challenge. Within one hour, they built a sand fortress spanning 5 ft in circumference surrounded by a 1 ft wide moat, with water flowing around the fortress without the use of buckets to move the water.



Tanner puts the finishing touches on the environment of his body farm for Group II's exploration of decay.



In Group III, Madhava, Lee, Emmy, Cataleia, and Maggie collaborate to pass a ball through loops of rope during a new, timed, team-building challenge. Their many hands and minds made light work of quickly cutting their time from 28ish seconds to 10ish seconds.



Jack experiments with a creative use for melted crayons for his art collage during Open Program. His last step is to outline the edges with a sharpie to pull out the colors.



Following Stroud Water Research Center's Leaf Pack Network initiative, Group III reviewed the procedure before collecting leaves and creating leaf packs that were then anchored in Little Pony Trail Creek here on OC's campus.





In Choice B: Poetry, the group wrote a fun, wacky poem together. The poem actually helped with the discussion of the role and creative choices of line breaks.



Outside in OC's woods, Charlie, a Group I youth, examines a ginkgo leaf under the magnification provided by a field scope.



Nova displays a design that she created with rubber bands on a Geo Board in the Open Program.



Shaping Your Life youth make their way through a blind maze, set up in the woods near the tire swing. In this blindfolded team-building activity, group members must navigate a series of ropes anchored to trees, sometimes with gaps in between.



In Group II, Henry and Annabelle look at some differences in journal styles in preparation for constructing their own hand made journals.



Jax shows how the bow he created in the Open Program woodshop works. The Open Program woodshop offers opportunities for developing problem solving skills and time with real tools.



Isaac, Kai and Josh are quite pleased with the results of their collaborative zine. Choice A: Zine-making finished their time together by making a collaborative zine with personal representations of each of them.



Madhava and Trey built a scale model of a geodesic dome; investigating geometry and pattern in preparation for a larger scale Group III project.



Open Program youth investigate the new picture magnets. Each young person and facilitator have a current, toddler, and baby picture! Youth and facilitators alike loved getting to guess who was who!

# Development Corner

To the extraordinary Open Connections Community and all of our wonderful Supporters—

We are winding down 2023, and as usual, it is an opportune time of year for me to reflect. This year, as I am looking back on my second full year with the OC Community, I am in awe at how much I have learned from and how much my own horizons have been expanded by my experiences here.

The mission of Open Connections that deeply resonates with me is to empower people to create the life that they want, full of purpose and fulfillment. Part of how we work to accomplish that on campus is by providing exposure to things that are new, different, and exciting. Exposure to new games, new concepts, different ideas, opportunities for flexible thinking, and scenarios to push beyond comfort zones, are just some of the ways that OC endeavors to expand the horizons of our community. With this in mind, our campaign for Annual Giving this year is #ExpandingHorizons.

Within the pages of this magazine, you can witness how our community is thriving and growing in this environment that fosters curiosity, encourages compassion, and cultivates community. Thank you for your part in this community and your support, whether it's a donation, engaging with our youth or alumni, spreading the word about Open Connections, or just learning something new about yourself! Here are some ways to make a gift in support of Open Connections:

### Donate online:

<https://www.openconnections.org/support-oc>  
Text *ExpandingHorizons* to 610-827-5755

### Or mail a check to:

Open Connections, 1616 Delchester Road, Newtown Square, PA 19073

### Additionally, here are some ways for you to continue connecting with Open Connections:

#### Virtually:

- Social Media
- Website: [openconnections.org](https://www.openconnections.org)

**In-Person**—call or email me to set up a time to come visit campus!

Have a calm, restful, and warm break! I look forward to connecting again in 2024.

Gratefully and with wishes for a peaceful season,

Sarah Becker  
Assistant Director, Facilitator, Current Parent,  
Development Committee Member



Support OC!

Weston (Group I) poses with the basketball hoop he made as part of Cardboard Challenge Day.







Levi and Mara disassemble a non-working computer to learn more about the inner workings. Compared to other take-aparts, the computer had very tiny parts that required a steady hand and attention to detail. Take-aparts are donated, non-functional electronics or appliances that are always available for dissection during Open Program.



Cadence performs a series of 'tricks' for Choice B: Aerial Arts, demonstrating what is possible with continued practice.



Carter poses wearing the mask he made for the OC Cardboard Challenge, joining several of his Group III peers in replicating versions of characters from a favorite video game.



Group IV members, Hazel, Uma, Danny, and Eske look down from a perfect, sunny perch.



Leo, Wally, and Jett work together to complete the steps required to make their cupcake batter during a Group I baking activity.



Josh examines both an x-ray machine and a skull during Group II's exploration of the ideas of mystery and forensic science.





**FREEDOM** to  
**LEARN** *and*  
**CREATE**

