

# OPEN CONNECTIONS™

Volume XV | Issue 81



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2022

**Cover:** Locke, Shep, and Danny spend time in the Makerspace developing a logo option for the group's collaborative board game in Choice B: Build A Better Book.

**Right:** Open Program members enjoy a puppet show put on by Group II. Group II chose a scene to perform from their read-aloud book, *My Side of the Mountain*. The youth then created puppets during time in the Art Studio.

## Open Connections Magazine

Issue 81 | Summer 2022

### 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 want to be able 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).

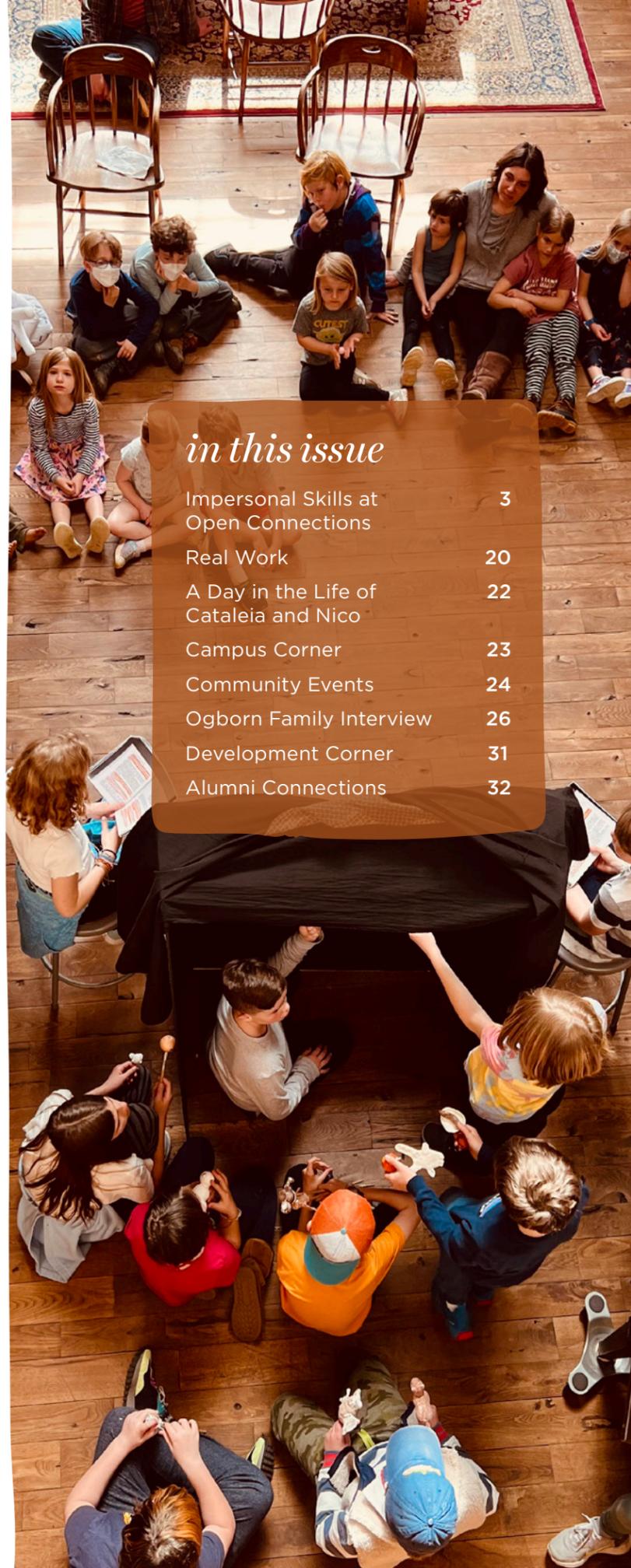
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## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Margaret Welsh



Dear OC Community near and far, I think warmer spring weather has finally arrived! The transition from winter to late spring has been slow, with the cool weather allowing the blossoms to last longer as the green slowly spreads. Now that the trees are fully fledged, our world is looking rich with greenery. Our Gathering space has transformed a variety of times in the recent weeks, too, from the OC Film Fest to a Parents Meeting, then for the teen formal, and now there's a temporary wall built for the upcoming theater performances! It's hard to believe another program year is soon coming to a close.

This year we have focused our *Open Connections Magazine* on sharing how programs at Open Connections seek to nurture a broad range of life skills that are useful no matter the path one chooses beyond OC. This issue will offer you windows into each program's activities with a focus on various impersonal skills.

Furthermore you can explore our regular columns and interviews to learn more about: How do other families spend their non-OC days? What does life-long learning look like in different families? Do you know what a cob oven is? How do OC families support each other in community? Thank you for your interest and engagement!

I hope you find inspiration in these pages.

Warmly, *Margaret*



Cassidy adjusts the electrical connection for his telegraph constructed as part of Choice A: Industrial Revolution. As part of this project, youth also explored some of the history of communications technology, Morse code, basic circuitry, and electromagnets.

# Impersonal Skills at Open Connections



Lila, inspired by a dream catcher she found at the art table in the Open Program, chose to add additional yarn and beading for a bit of color. She then shares her work with the camera.



Ari works to replicate Michelle's pattern within the feel-and-find box using only his sense of touch in the Open Program.



Levi shares with Luke the tiny unbroken bird egg he found during Group I. Levi carefully carried the egg around for the remainder of the program day and gave others the opportunity to hold it.



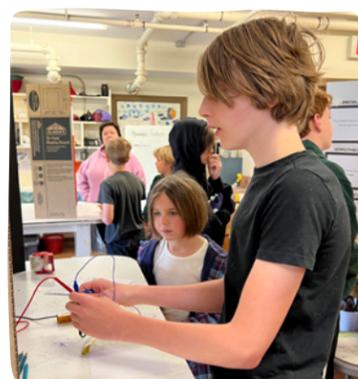
Hannah worked on her beaded horse over several weeks in Group IV. Using beads of various shapes and colors, she filled in the spaces and contours using a Native American stitch technique.



Group II plays a game created by Marlon as part of his Peer Facilitation on the Bermuda Triangle.



On the first day of Choice A: Culture and Cuisine, youth crafted a smörgåsbord prepared with a wide variety of ingredients. Flavor combinations and experimentations ensued.



Elric shares details about his Group III Natural Science Project with Emmy of Group II, demonstrating the conductivity of graphite using a multimeter.

Our mission at Open Connections is to help young people develop the tools and skills needed to create a life full of purpose and fulfillment. At the broadest level, this translates as a focus on Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Impersonal skills. When people leave Open Connections we hope that they are:

- Knowledgeable and confident in who they are,
- Able to communicate their needs and wishes in a respectful and effective way, and
- Prepared to tackle life's challenges and opportunities using both creative and critical thinking.

When we put a strong suite of these skills together, we have a high-functioning, strong, capable, and secure person. At Open Connections, our job is to provide young people with time and resources to develop and hone these holistic life skills. We will continue our diligent efforts to help every person in our community feel empowered to live their lives well, full of purpose and fulfillment.

Indi & Lisa (Facilitator) give their attention to Locke as he demonstrates the stringed instruments he created with repurposed materials.

What is meant by Impersonal Skills? These could be described as the mechanisms that best support learning and the ability to support the other two endeavors of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (highlighted in the previous two *Open Connections Magazines*). These mechanisms include: flexible thinking, creative problem solving, time management,

critical thinking, Real Work, and self-expression to name a few. These concepts speak to “doing,” not just “problem solving,” which implies that writing a poem, composing a song, or creating some other work of art or building a treehouse would be included here.



“The only limit on how deep the rabbit hole goes is based on the level of enthusiasm you have for the game.”

## Conceptual Development in the Open Program

By Peter Huis, Facilitator

During group time, Eric shares a chess board he made in the Open Program woodshop.



Eric takes his next move in a game with Peter (facilitator), while Kai watches from the sidelines during the Open Program.

One of the many joys of working in the Open Program (OP) is getting to observe the early stages of skill building. The speed of this development is often hard to keep up with—one week you are in the woodshop with a young person who is still learning how to use a saw, then before you know it, they are embarking on all kinds of ambitious woodworking projects. The time between teaching someone to thread a needle and them sharing their first completed sewing project seems to vanish in the blink of an eye. Other times skill development happens more slowly. Activities are always informed by the young person’s level of development and interest in challenging themselves. Some of my greatest insights on Conceptual Development<sup>1</sup> came from a place I had not expected: chess.

On my very first day working in the OP, a young person approached me and asked if we had a chess set. Personally, I love chess, so I was delighted by the opportunity. At that time there was no chess board present in the OP space, but after a brief trip to the storage room I returned with a chess board, and the two of us sat down for a game. Before continuing, I want to share that my outlook on chess had been colored by my experience with chess in the adult world where the game can become endlessly complex, esoteric, and not, uncommonly frustrating. The only limit on how deep the rabbit hole goes is based on the level of enthusiasm you have for the game. Enjoying chess in this way, while not unpleasant, is exhausting. For me, playing chess with the OP youth was an invitation to look at chess with a fresh perspective (proof that the OP offers learning opportunities to all, irrespective of age). Returning to my first game in the OP, it so happened that the young person who asked me to play knew a lot about chess; he knew the rules well and was quite developed at playing. When I say he knew the game well, it might be more accu-

rate to say that we happened to follow that same set of rules.

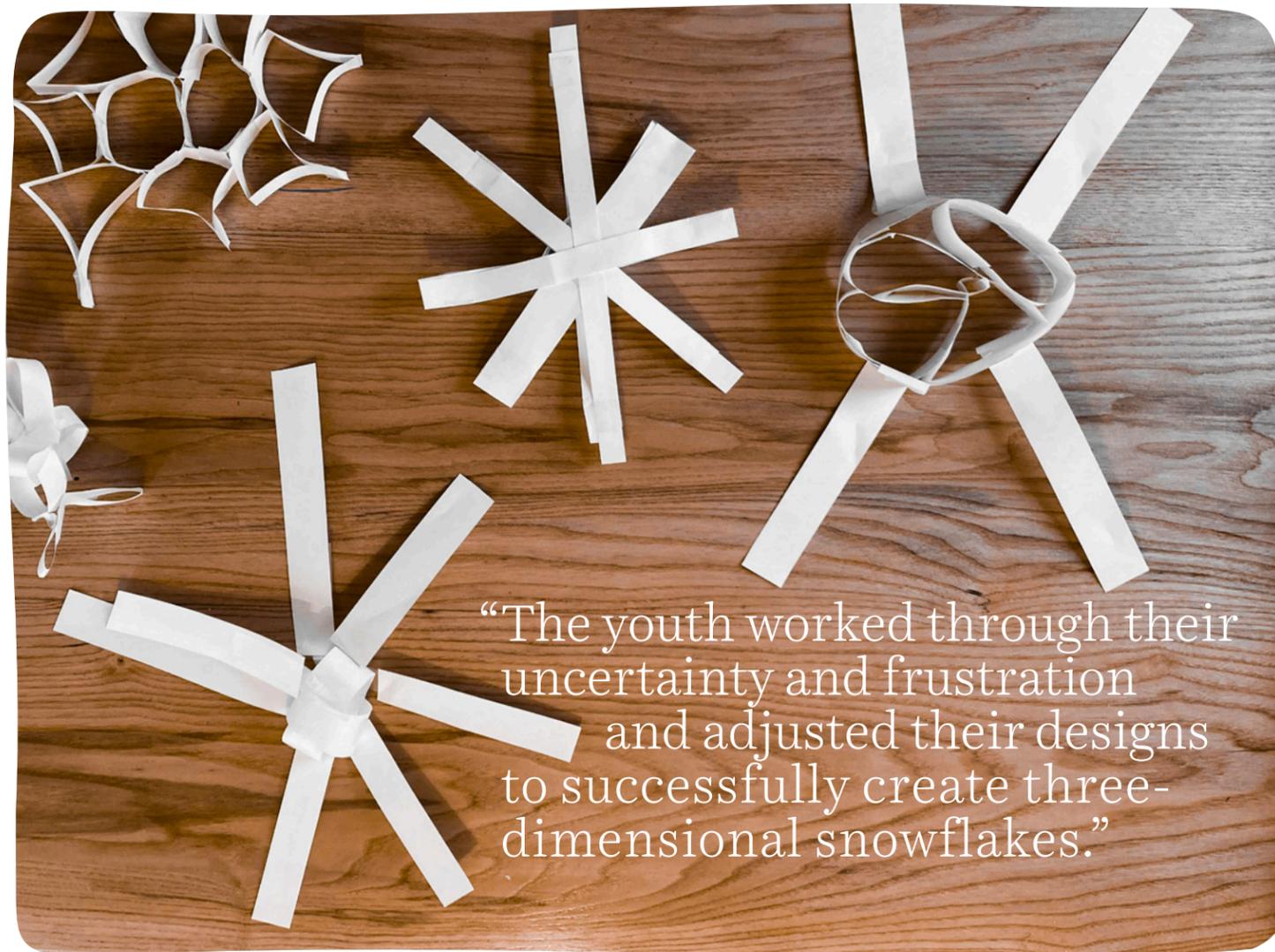
In the weeks that followed, the chess board continued to live in the OP space and chess became a popular activity. As it turns out, chess can be very adaptable and can be scaled to whatever the players want it to be. In a set of memorable games, I worked with another young person to totally rebalance the game. As one of us would propose new rules, the other could ask questions about the application or limitations of the rules. All of this took place in the middle of an ever-evolving game. Still other young people were interested in exploring the more esoteric side with me. In these games, competitive edge was forgotten as each of us would tell the other what moves we planned to make, and the logic behind why we were making them. Plenty of the games we played hardly resembled conventional chess at all. We would move the pieces as we liked and operate under a vague, interpretable set of guidelines. While the pieces and board remained the same, the style of each game varied in motive: to improve, to learn, to create, and to play.

This experience turned out to be very true to the spirit of impersonal development in the OP. Anything that can be approached with a fresh outlook and a playful desire to learn can be made to provide that experience. Even age-old games like chess. ©



Open Program youth, Delillah, Serafina, and Leo all take active roles in their own interpretation of chess. Young people also found ways of including more than two players. In some cases, this was done with dividing into teams, in others, each player got control over a select number of pieces.

<sup>1</sup>Conceptual Development (CD) is an important foundation of OC philosophy and exemplifies impersonal skill building. CD distinguishes between learning something and truly developing an understanding of a concept or idea. Both have value; however, anything that is merely learned without any basis for conceptual understanding is unlikely to be retained. CD by definition cannot be taught. It can be facilitated, in the sense that we can set up the conditions whereby a person can, when ready, create his/her understanding of various concepts.



“The youth worked through their uncertainty and frustration and adjusted their designs to successfully create three-dimensional snowflakes.”

## Developing Perseverance in Group I

By Jane Sleutaris, Facilitator



**Top Left:** When Group I youth were given the challenge to create a 3-D snowflake using strips of paper and tape, some questioned how this was possible. However, after a few minutes of exploration and trial and error, they began to discover that it could indeed be done!

**P**erseverance is an important impersonal skill that enables us to work through hard things and experience the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that results from pushing through frustration and overcoming challenges.

This winter, Group I youth collaborated on a “Slope and Sled” STEM challenge: “Create a sled that can hold 5 pieces of cargo and a slope that will allow the sled to travel the maximum distance, using cardboard, tinfoil, and masking tape.” A week later, they were invited to re-do this same challenge. The thinking behind the re-do was to offer youth an opportunity to think about and apply what they had learned from their first attempt at the challenge. We discussed the fact that scientists, engineers, inventors, builders, artists, musicians, etc. must continually make changes to their process and explore different materials and approaches. The young people’s reactions to re-doing the Slope and Sled challenge were mixed. Some youth embraced the opportunity to apply what they had learned the first time and welcomed the challenge to improve their previous design or create an altogether new one, while others found it unappealing to do the same activity twice, which presented an opportunity to practice perseverance. It can be tempting to avoid activities that induce frustration and discomfort, but working through such challenges helps young people, and adults alike, grow and become stronger individuals.

Another STEM challenge Group I youth did this winter that required perseverance was “Build the tallest possible free-standing snowman with three different-sized tiers and a hat using 3 sheets of white copy paper, tape, and a pipe cleaner.” Youth had to problem solve issues such as:

- *How can I get this paper cylinder to stably sit on top of this paper cylinder that is larger in diameter, without it falling through?*
- *We accidentally cut this piece of paper too small, and we already used up our allotted three sheets of paper.*
- *How can I best use the provided 3 sheets of paper to achieve the maximum height for my snowman?*
- *Why does my snowman keep falling over? How can I get it to stay up?*
- *Can I make my existing design work or is it necessary to start over from scratch?*
- *My partner wants to do something different than I want to do.*
- *This isn't working. It's too hard. I don't want to do this.*

**Far Left:** Annabelle and Addie demonstrate the slope and sled they created in response to the Group I challenge to: Create a sled that can hold 5 pieces of cargo and a slope that will allow the sled to travel the maximum distance, using cardboard, tinfoil, and masking tape.

**Left:** Group I youth were given the challenge to collectively build a fort into which the whole group could fit, complete with a lighting element, using the provided materials. Some of the skills developed from this activity include listening to others’ ideas, collaboration, a bit of engineering, and lots of creative problem solving!



**GI pairs collaborate on a Stretch Snowman Challenge.** Annabelle and Addie chose to make rectangular box-like tiers for their snowman, while Josh and Jack took a different approach and created tube-like tiers.

All of the problem-solving opportunities presented by these challenges require youth to push through discomfort and exercise perseverance.

A third challenge that the Group I youth did this winter was to “Create a three dimensional snowflake using the provided strips of paper and masking tape.” This may initially sound simple enough, but now imagine having no pictures or examples to look at and consider that your only experience with making snowflakes is that of folding paper and cutting out little triangular shapes, ultimately producing a two-dimensional snowflake every time. The youth fiddled with their paper strips and arranged them in different ways on the tables. A few arranged their paper strips in two-dimensional designs and taped them together, thus sparking a discussion about the difference between two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. The youth who had made two-dimensional designs were able to recognize that their snowflakes were flat; figuring out how to switch gears and design a three-dimensional snowflake required some problem solving. One youth realized that he could make two flat snowflakes into a three-dimensional snowflake by taping the outer edges together and inserting a paper ring between the two to separate them and create depth. Other youth discovered that they could bend their paper into shapes which could be taped together. The youth worked through their uncertainty and frustration and adjusted their designs to successfully create three-dimensional snowflakes. These types of learning experiences nudge young people out of their comfort zones and allow them to stretch and grow. Problem solving scenarios such as these offer great opportunities for developing and practicing perseverance. ©



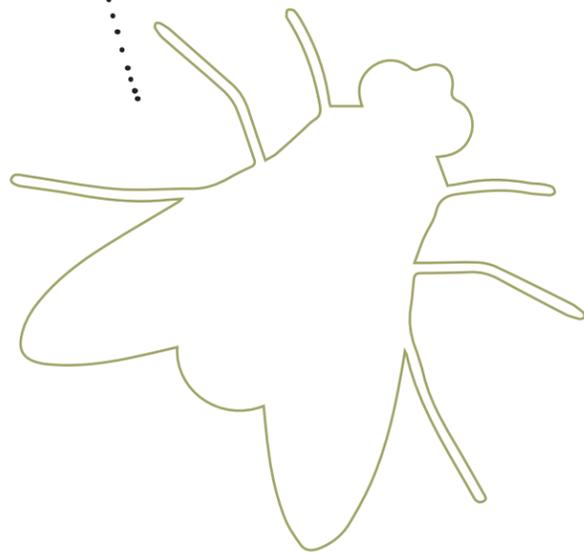
Group II youth explore batting balloons back and forth. This activity was part of Everleigh's Peer Facilitation on tennis.

Sometimes I imagine a tiny fly buzzing around OC's campus, lighting on leaves and high on walls, peeking at our youth as they go about their program day. What adventures does the little winged friend spy? How many opportunities for growth does she observe? Lucky fly! Let us now follow a fly who is spying on Group II to see what impersonal skills they are honing.

In the gravel yard youth are at play, noisily chasing and tagging. But look closely. The game isn't working. People are out too quickly and it is losing steam. They pause to reflect now. What rule would make the game more challenging for the tagger? How can the sides be more evenly matched? Ideas are shared and the game resumes. Now it's better.

## Fostering Impersonal Skills in Group II

By Michelle West, Facilitator



Shep carefully measures ingredients for maximum bounce during a Group II science experiment on bouncy balls.



Traveling up to the Science Lab, we find Group II youth hard at work. Their mission is to build a better bouncy ball. Given a faulty recipe and a tight budget, they work to change variables one at a time to achieve the bounciest projectile. They think critically about the results and tweak and tweak until—boing!!!



Lyla's design begins to take shape during their time in the Art Studio with Group II.

“A facilitator reminds youth that there is no right answer. One youth replies, “The more creative way to say it is, “There is no wrong answer.””

Next, fly out the window, down the hill and into the Art Studio. Young people work diligently to bring characters to life from the book they have been reading. Clay and string and styrofoam and paint demand flexibility and offer creative challenges. The vision comes first. The skills to execute it are developing each day.



Group II youth engage in a math inquiry during a Morning Challenge.

Up the stairs and into the cozy program space, our buzzing visitor lands on a shelf of foraged treasures. From there she witnesses teams of Group II friends with heads together. Logic puzzles and math challenges invite trials and the sort of helpful failures that send these youth off in innumerable directions. Problem-solving out loud highlights the myriad ways of accomplishing the same result and celebrates our beautiful differences. A facilitator reminds youth that there is no right answer. One youth replies, “The more creative way to say it is, “There is no wrong answer.””

Lee leads his Group II peers in an group activity after his Peer Facilitation on Alcatraz Island.

Flit around a while and it is time for a Peer Facilitation. While this favorite project provides many opportunities to work on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, the impersonal also shines here. Researching a favorite topic, creating a presentation, and designing a learning experience for peers are all practice playgrounds for critical thinking. These 9, 10, and 11-year-olds look for credible sources and discern the good from the questionable. They learn the hard skills of Google Slides, but also, what to include in a slide show and how to engage an audience. Taking responsibility for their friends' learning experiences unleashes their creativity and awakens their process consciousness.



Swooping up the driveway at the end of a long day it's clear Group II has been hard at work developing their impersonal skills. It often looks like play, it never seems like a grind, but their minds are engaged and expanding each day. ©

Developing  
*Impersonal Skills in*  
**Group III** By Kelly Dillon,  
Facilitator



Elliot set out to survey the varied portrayals of the doctor character in the longtime-airing TV series *Dr. Who*, hoping to uncover who was the best, most popular *Dr. Who*. Here, he shares his challenging yet fulfilling I-Search journey, and what he discovered, with his Group III audience.

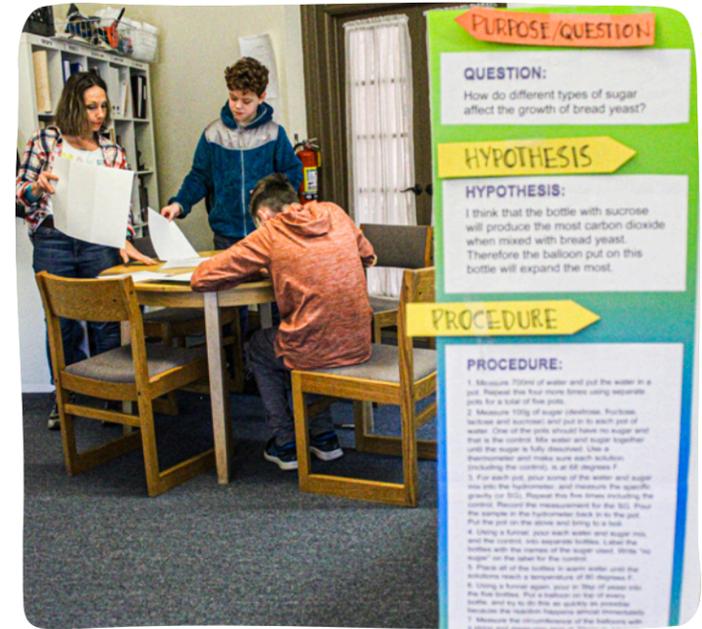
The realm of Impersonal skills addresses the realization of ideas, the ‘thing’ we show up for, and what we take away from it. Although I believe there are curiosities, lessons and opportunities for impersonal skill development at every turn and in any given moment, there are many layers of these in two of Group III’s extended projects: the annual Comprehensive/I-Search Project and the annual Natural Science Project. Like many experiences here at Open Connections, the youth steer the content of these projects, and it can be the inherent confines within each project that invite learning about learning, life lessons for life-long learners.

The Comprehensive/I-Search project is intended to connect youth with the purpose and experience of research, while seeking to answer a relevant, personally meaningful question (thus the ‘I’ in I-Search.) There is program time devoted to introducing and applying some necessary skills, however the lion’s share of the project is done independently at home. Youth are encouraged to use at least 3 different types of resources, including one interview if at all possible. Information literacy is developed in finding, evaluating, and organizing research. Communication skills are learned and applied in asking for support as needed, arranging and conducting interviews, finding effective ways to synthesize information, and then sharing thoughts, ideas and opinions.

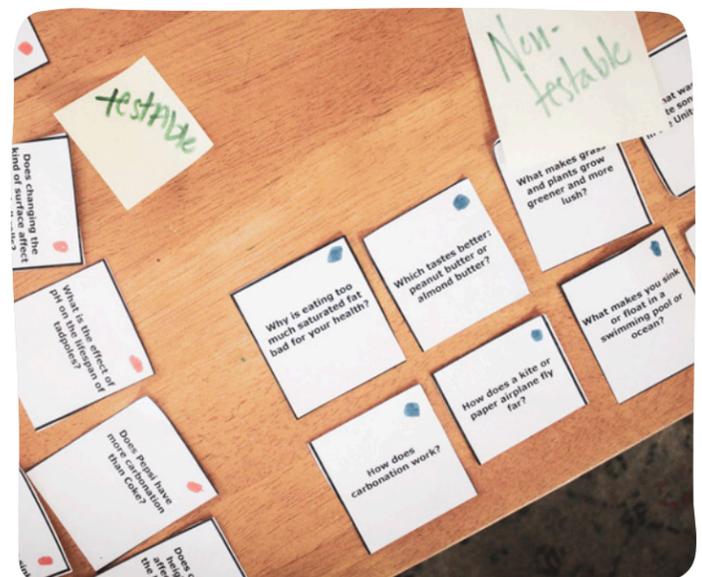
In contrast to the I-Search project, the Natural Science Project applies the scientific method, using an experiment to answer a testable question, rather than relying solely on research or simply looking it up. This is an opportunity to think like a scientist and apply a method of acquiring knowledge that has characterized the development of science since at least the 17th century: ask a (testable) question, form a hypothesis, make a prediction, test the prediction, and potentially use the results to form new hypotheses or predictions. Once again, there are activities and experiences within our program time for youth to explore and apply these concepts, skills and techniques in advance of the home experiments. Once the Natural Science Projects are underway, there are ample opportunities for rigor in careful management of the experimental procedure, observations, data collection, analysis and reflection. Young people often feel empowered by the ability to test and prove (or disprove) a hunch.

Both the I-Search and Natural Science Project culminate with an opportunity for youth to share their work with their peers and lead a question and answer session, in a safe and supportive environment. Each project invites initiative, time management and general organization, with another opportunity to continue the learning and further refine the messy bits in the second go-around in the second year in Group III. And, the learning can and will continue well beyond Group III, as all of these skills are vital to engaging and satisfying living and learning as we continue to make sense of our world and the many things that trigger our curiosity. ©

Heather (facilitator) checks in with Max and Thomas about their Natural Science Project display. A Natural Science Project tri-fold presentation made by a Group III youth in the past serves as a useful reference of how to present key information about an experiment.



“Young people often feel empowered by the ability to test and prove (or disprove) a hunch.”



Group III youth sort through examples of questions and group them according to testability in preparation for coming up with their own testable questions for their Natural Science Projects.



As part of his Group IV Science Expo Project, Søren engaged in a trial and error process over several weeks to determine the best method for making paper using different types of plant fibers.

to look at other ideas. On ScienceBuddies.org I saw a project about mozzarella cheese. It sparked my imagination and I decided to create my own project: How do the different fat contents in milk affect different properties of mozzarella cheese? This question both fits my interests and the time that I had to work within.” ~ Aria

“This year in Group IV I think I have really grown in my ability to plan. When we started the Expo project, I didn't realize how much you have to think ahead and plan. When I began writing the procedure, I had no clue what to do. I didn't know that you have to think of every little thing beforehand and describe it in words. After I finished doing that procedure, I feel like I could write hundreds of them, so I think I have really grown in that aspect and it will really help as I continue to do science projects.” ~ Declan

“Throughout my Science Expo project there has been one key skill that has stood out as being necessary ... perseverance. Perseverance has allowed me to overcome the challenges with my project. Many times when I fell short of my goal or experienced something that I didn't want and was not expecting to happen, utilizing grit and perseverance allowed me to keep going and experience much success. One of my favorite examples is when I had to adapt my experiment after realizing that my bean plants were not growing fast enough. I did this by using a different type of plant (kale) which would grow faster and better. This solution yielded great results and was one of the most impactful decisions that I made during my Expo project.” ~ Locke

“My partner and I started out with an idea for an experiment that looked at the effect of different types of pills on the amount of time it took them to dissolve. While the experiment would have worked, we did not want to continue with it since it would have been boring and monotonous to just watch pills dissolve in acid. Instead, we chose a human behavior experiment involving the effect of distractions on groups of youth of different ages. We had to be very persistent and creative to figure out what we wanted to do. It took several weeks of research to come up with this idea and design an experiment, which meant we were then a bit behind in getting our experiment started. Then there were some ethical concerns regarding the use of video recording, which took more time to resolve. While it took extra time and effort, I am glad we changed our project to this experiment because it is more fun and interesting to do.” ~ Hannah

“When my partner and I were finalizing our Expo idea, we ran into ethical concerns. Our project examines whether young people look up when someone walks into the room during an activity. To collect our data, we couldn't just rely on snap judgment to count the number of glances, we also needed to film it so we could go back and look at the footage to make sure we counted the right number of glances. After conversations with our facilitators, we knew we needed to let parents and youth know that they were being filmed in program. We brainstormed how we could approach this problem

“Group members are responsible for choosing a topic of interest for which it is possible to develop an experiment that they can carry out here on campus.”

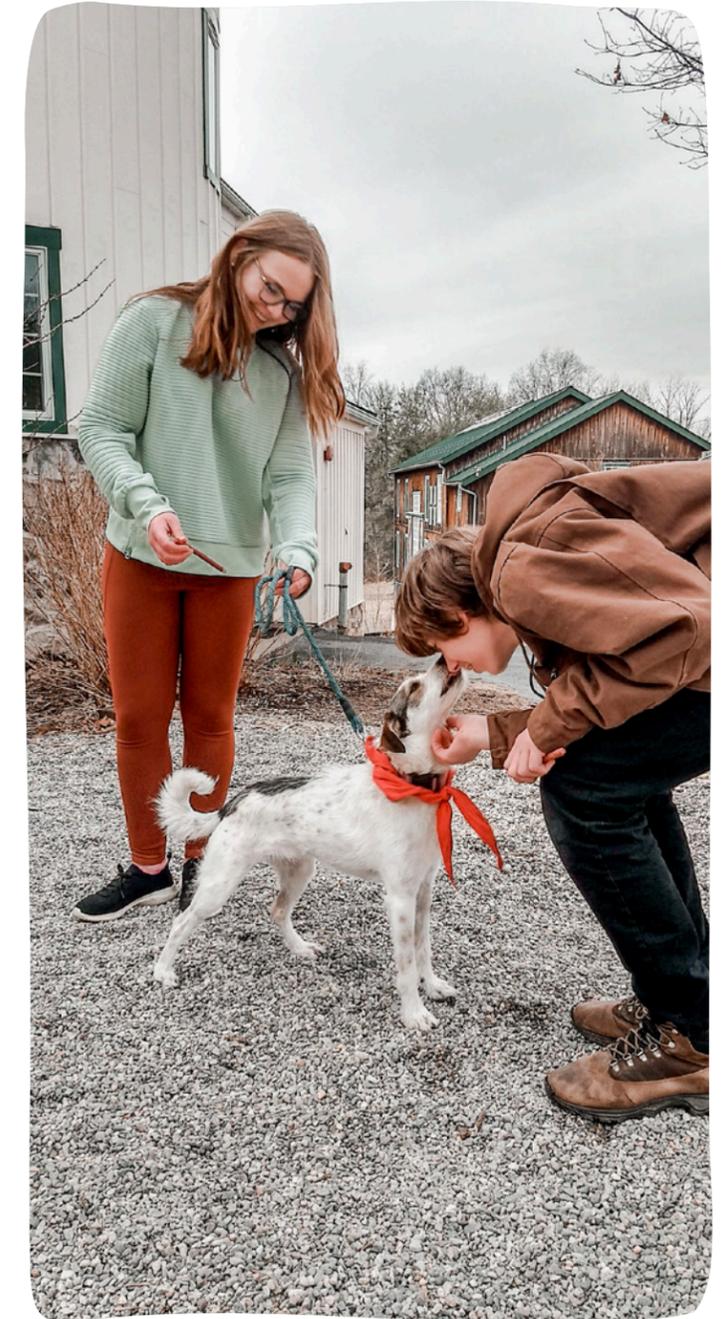
and decided to send an email to parents letting them know that their youth would be filmed during our experiment. After running our experiment with two groups of youth, we are very glad we chose to film it because we appreciate even more how much it helps us make sure our data is as accurate as possible.” ~ Lily

“My experiment is about comparing the qualities of paper made with different types of plant fibers. The first day I set out to make paper, a lot of things did not go as planned. I wanted the paper to be very precise. I was hoping to use all of the pulp to make five even sheets. I tried to pour a small amount into the tub for each sheet. I soon found out that paper making doesn't work this way. The paper was getting too thin and wouldn't stay together. The next few weeks, I tried a bunch of different methods of papermaking and eventually found the way that works best for me and how I will make paper in the future. In the end, I feel very satisfied with what I learned about papermaking. The consistency and quality of each sheet has definitely progressed from the first to the last.” ~ Soren

“A skill I have learned during the Science Expo project is how to dilute acid. I found it to be very interesting and intriguing to do. I gained this skill because my project is about acid rain and how it affects different types of metal, and I needed to make an acid solution to use in the experiment. The way I diluted the acid was by adding acid into water until I got the right PH level. The way I checked the PH level was by dipping a PH strip into the acid and comparing it to the chart. I wore gloves and goggles for protection from the acid.” ~ Indiana

“We both knew we wanted to do a project related to fossil fuel. Unfortunately there weren't many experiments on a small enough scale that we would have been able to accomplish given the time and materials limits of the Expo, so we decided to look into doing a project on mushrooms, or just food in general. We read a little bit about mushrooms, and we ended up considering food waste. Through that, we found an idea that we developed into turning food waste into biofuel, bioenergy, or biogas! We found a project that was perfect for what we wanted, and something we both are interested in: a sustainable alternative for energy production.” ~ Kylie and Evie

“My Science Expo experiment is about pesticides and their effect on plant health and pest prevention. When working on an experiment that requires plant growth within a short amount of time, I have learned that it is important to find a fast growing plant that will completely, or almost, reach full maturity within your time frame. This is necessary in order to be able to collect data and conduct a complete experiment.” ~ Jamie



Evie observes Rey's body language to interpret her response to Indi's posture during a Group IV Comprehensive Project interactive presentation on canine communication in dog training.

## Group IV Science Expo

By Linda Soffer, Heather Gosse, Facilitators, and Group IV Youth

As youth pass the threshold into the teen years and development in the impersonal realm takes a huge leap, Group IV aims to both encourage and challenge teens as they become capable of greater complexity of thinking and problem solving. One major Group IV project involving significant impersonal skill development is the Science Expo. This is a science fair-style event that involves projects conceived of and developed by the young people. Group members are responsible for choosing a topic of interest for which it is possible to develop an experiment that they can carry out here on campus. With facilitator support, the youth turn their idea into a testable research question; develop, trouble-shoot, and carry out a procedure; and present their question, process, and results to the wider OC community. What follows are accounts by current Group IV members of stretching their impersonal skills through their participation in this year's Science Expo.

For my Science Expo project I knew I wanted to do something involving food science. I had a very specific question: How do different types of water affect the rising of yeasted dough? However, within the limited timeframe I had for data collection, I decided



## Shaping Your Life Group Trip

By Linda Soffer, Facilitators,  
and SYL Group Members

**A**s youth move through the adolescent years, their learning demands in the impersonal realm necessarily increase in complexity. The yearly large group project in the Shaping Your Life program (youth ages 15-18) is a perfect opportunity for teens to apply their critical thinking skills and engage in complex problem-solving processes and group decision-making at a new level of responsibility. This project, which is intended to be long-term and large-scale, is chosen, planned, researched, organized, and executed by the youth in the program, with facilitators offering support as requested. This year the group chose an overnight trip as the project that they would complete. In the passages below, group members describe key moments of impersonal learning that they each experienced at different stages of the project.

*The process of picking our trip destination consisted of each Shaping Your Life group member choosing somewhere that we were interested in visiting and researching that wasn't too far away. I chose Washington, D.C. because I had been there before but not for several years. I had always wanted to go back, and I was very excited about sharing my love for the city with my friends. I researched and created a slideshow in Google Slides including travel distance and cost, places to visit, and overall why I thought we should go. I am not very tech-savvy and hadn't used Google Slides for years so creating a slideshow was definitely a challenge. Another consideration was figuring out how much to research. I wanted enough information so everyone saw all of the fun and interesting things, but not so much that it felt like the whole trip was already planned out. I wanted everyone to be part of the planning process. After we shared our slideshows, the group voted and narrowed the selection to 2 cities and gave ourselves a week to think about it. After further discussion and consideration, we decided to go to Washington, D.C.! ~ Norah*

*This year to raise money for Shaping Your Life's trip we held a silent auction fundraiser. This fundraiser has been held before, however none of the current group members had ever been directly involved. The main sources we had for getting an idea of how the*

“The yearly group project, which is intended to be long-term and large-scale, is chosen, planned, researched, organized, and executed by the youth in the program, with facilitators offering support as requested.”

*event worked were some local alumni and many old documents from past years. As the person in charge of the accounting, I ended up looking through a lot of these documents and making sense of the systems past groups had used. The most important of these was a spreadsheet where everything from item information to auction expenses was stored. For someone who quite enjoys working with spreadsheets, this was an amazing discovery! I combined various elements of the existing spreadsheets to create something of a Frankenstein-spreadsheet. This became my most useful tool throughout all stages of auction planning and execution because it functioned as the one place where the information I needed could be found. Through this whole process I was able to learn much more about this tool that I already enjoyed. I now feel much more confident in not only my spreadsheet skills, but also my ability to manage a large amount of diverse information. ~ Ruby*

*When we began planning the silent auction fundraiser for our trip to Washington, D.C., we decided that each group member should be responsible for coordinating one of four aspects of the event: auction items, food, entertainment, and childcare. I was responsible for planning the food for the event, which was a challenge. I had no previous experience with catering events, so this process involved a lot of problem-solving and new learning. The event did not require tickets to attend, so there was no way to gauge how many people I needed to plan food for. I met up with Michelle West (current parent and restaurant owner) who I knew had a lot of experience with catering events. I asked her questions about what types of food were good for an event like this and how to estimate*



Norah and Ella add a soft background of colored pencil to the map of Washington, D. C. that the Shaping Your Life group created to display at the silent auction fundraiser. The group of 4 quickly realized that it worked best for only 2 people to work on the physical map simultaneously, so they decided to pair up and for one duo to research while the other drew, then switch.

*food amounts. After that I chose what food we should get. I focused on economical finger food to save money and cut down on the need for utensils. I also made sure to have vegetarian and gluten-free options. We wondered about getting a donation of a gift card from a local grocery store to help pay for food. I went to a store and asked the manager if they could donate to us, and they donated a \$25 gift card. The event went smoothly and the food was well received. From this experience I gained confidence and some new skills, including asking for donations and planning food for large events. ~ Aminah*

*My peers and I quickly fell in love with the idea of creating an interactive map of Washington D.C. to have on display at the Silent Auction. We devised a system for getting it done in a productive way and for using simple materials to our advantage. We were very intentional about our use of different drawing materials for communicating information and creating visual clarity. For example, when drawing the roads and buildings, we used highlighters because we wanted to place the most emphasis on those elements. For the grass and other land we used colored pencils because their softer pigment would make these areas recede in comparison to the markers, directing the viewers' focus to the roads and buildings. Black Sharpie was great for marking location names, as it is bold and easy to see amongst the bright colors of the map. We think this project turned out well and really added to the experience of the auction, and we hoped you enjoyed it as much as we did! ~ Ella ©*

# Reflecting on *Impersonal Skills in the* Choice Program



Amon, (Annabelle) and Addie work to roll out dough to the proper thickness and consistency to hold the different fillings of their varenyky during Choice A: Cultures and Cuisine.



Following brainstorming and discussion around safety precautions necessary for a positive experience for both Choice A: Risk program youth and Kelly the snake, Brendan eagerly takes a turn at handling OC's resident albino cornsnake.

## Choice A: CULTURE AND CUISINE

The kitchen is a wonderful laboratory to hone your skills when it comes to using the right tool for the right task, and at the right time! Throughout the eight weeks of this offering, we explored culinary dishes from no fewer than eight different countries. To make these dishes, many of us were using kitchen tools and techniques that were entirely new to us. We were able to take advantage of the well-equipped Farmhouse kitchen which afforded us the ability to use tools like: dough scrapers, rolling pins, stand mixers, and the cob oven. All of the dishes that we prepared were nuanced in their recipes, and demanded our utmost attention. For example, when we were crafting Ukrainian varenyky we made dumpling dough to be filled with either blueberries or a potato and cheese mixture. It took patience and experimentation through several iterations of the dough-making process such as, the kneading, the rolling, the closing, and boiling process to really be able to produce dumplings as we expected. It's easy to imagine that building these impersonal skills in the kitchen will come in handy for years to come.

## Choice A: RISK

In the Choice A: Risk offering, youth have weekly encounters and experiences that hold some inherent danger. The aim of the program is to think critically about any true risk, and do any necessary research. What precautions could be taken to reduce the likelihood of any harm done? Are all the details understood? Have I communicated where I stand and/or any reluctance I may have? Am I honoring any limitations or thresholds—mine or those of others? Is there commitment to act responsibly, and be mindful of any impulses so that we can proceed safely? Once we're all clear, we're free to explore and discover, knowledgeable and prepared for the calculated risk.



Tulsi and Benji choose cards from their hands to program their robots for their initial moves in Robo Rally as Addie, Cataleia, and Marlon wait for play to begin in Choice A: Games.

## Choice A: GAMES

While a Choice offering about Games offers many opportunities to practice intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, it also offers opportunities to hone impersonal skills. One week we explored Robo Rally in which players need to program their robots five moves at a time. Planning this sequence involves picturing which way a “rotate right” or “rotate left” card will turn their robot and how the robot's moves will interact with board elements like conveyor belts. Players also need to practice resiliency as surprises occur, such as when someone else's robot pushed their robot in an unexpected direction!



Marlon, Cataleia, Benji, Tulsi, and Addie get started on a game of Jenga during Choice A: Games. In addition to participating in games chosen by the facilitator, youth in this Choice offering had opportunities to choose and teach each other games from a wide variety available such as this Jenga game.



Emmy tests her water wheel prototype below the pond as Logan waits his turn and Chris (facilitator) supports the flume as part of Choice A: Industrial Revolution.

## Choice A: INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

In Choice A: Industrial Revolution, the participants worked alone or with a partner to create a small-scale prototype of a water wheel then tested it below the pond. The group spent an additional two weeks working together on the design and construction of a larger water wheel, exploring yet more impersonal skills as they identified materials to use, sequenced the different parts of the process, learned how to use the tools needed, and made the design come to life!



Marlon tightens the connections on the key for the telegraph he is constructing as part of Choice A: Industrial Revolution. As part of this project, youth also explored some of the history of communications technology, Morse code, basic circuitry, and electromagnets.



Aria and Evie work on a gathered dress and a patchwork skirt, respectively. Each researched, planned and executed their designs using a “create and adjust” process in Choice B: Sewing and Handwork.

### Choice B: SEWING

Although sewing *can* be a collaborative activity (think quilting a bee), most of the projects youth explore in Choice B: Sewing have unsurprisingly centered around projects which interest the individual. Whether learning/honing hand-sewing techniques, or acclimating to an unfamiliar sewing machine, youth determine a process of creation that often necessitates research, trial and error, and a good deal of persistence. Sometimes scrap fabric is used to determine the best way to construct an object, or to wisely use limited resources. The construction process often gets tweaked to achieve the desired result, which could be a garment that fits.



During Choice B: Sewing and Handwork, Aria sews a small padded blanket for one of the pups she and her family is fostering from the SPCA.



Danny and Søren work on the marble run portion of a Rube Goldberg Machine during Choice B. They eventually chose to cover the entire run in Saran Wrap to keep the marble from falling off the course.

### Choice B: BUILDING A RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINE

The youth had only eight weeks to imagine, agree upon, and create a Rube Goldberg machine. This time-bound, project-based experience provided numerous opportunities to use and develop creative-problem solving skills. A sample of the setbacks and resolutions include:

- “The cord is too short and we can’t extend it!” — *Let’s add another Lego Mindstorm robot in the chain.*
- “We were going to freeze pucks of peanut butter and jelly, but neither of these foods freeze solid and we are almost out of time!” — *What if we cut out wooden pieces on the Glowforge that represent pucks of peanut butter and jelly?*
- “People are absent due to COVID exposure and we are running out of time!” — *What if some of us worked on the project at home and after program time?*
- “The marble is too small and doesn’t always trigger the touch sensor!” — *Could we have the marble hit a larger ball and have that ball trigger the sensor?*

It was inspiring to see these youth face challenge after challenge and find creative ways to move past them and achieve success.



Max designs and builds a mask entirely from scratch during Choice B: Puppets and Masks. He will later paint it black, consistent with the plague masks worn by some doctors in 17th century Europe that were Max’s inspiration.

### Choice B: PUPPETS AND MASKS

Makers of all ages regularly face opportunities to develop and grow life/learning skills as they harvest humble, hopeful seeds of ideas, then tend and nurture them into an outcome. The Choice B: Puppets and Masks group has followed an open format allowing youth free to pursue their own unique and inspired ideas and visions. This independent work has provided encounters with initiative, self-regulation, responsibility, and organization while figuring out how to use the time and materials available to realize an idea. Creative, flexible and critical thinking are certainly necessary ingredients in imagining and designing a mask, while grit and resilience can be essential in overcoming the inevitable challenges and allow for a continued path of modifying and creating.

“This independent work has provided encounters with initiative, self-regulation, responsibility, and organization while figuring out how to use the time and materials available to realize an idea.”



Evelyn makes her first match and Derek (Visiting Artist) takes another turn as they playtest the group’s tactile memory game prototype in Choice B: Build a Better Book. The play testing yielded some unexpected results that required modifications to the game.

### Choice B: BUILD A BETTER BOOK

The Choice B: Build a Better Book offering invited youth to step outside of their everyday experiences and into the world of designing for people with visual impairment. Youth in this offering received empathy and awareness training through program activities that included: interpreting objects without the use of vision, reading and writing in Braille, creating tactile story experiences, exploring multi-sensory technology, and developing a universally accessible board game. The specific training they received was an essential part of creating an informed final game design in the Makerspace. The game, MemorOC (an OC-themed memory game), turned out to be completely accessible and great fun when played by people of all abilities! ©



Real work is important in the Open Program. Taran and Brecken work to transfer some of the gravel from the removed Gaga Ball pit to a firepit in our outdoor program space!

*From the OC Glossary of Terms\**

## Real Work

Real Work is most easily defined by contrasting it with its counterpart, make-work. Real Work is something that is done to produce a useful result and which needs to be done. In the context of “learning” or “educational” situations, were the “student” not to have performed the Real Work activity, someone else would have had to. As an example, when a youth sets a dinner table, placing flatware, a glass, and napkin at each place as a way to help prepare for a family meal, the youth is doing Real Work. The youth is not primarily engaging in a lesson of one-to-one correspondence, even though development of that concept is certainly required to complete the task. Similarly, when a youth develops the skill of sawing in the process of building a birdhouse, the youth is doing so in order to create that end result, not so that Sawing can be added to their preschool resume.

Conversely, when an algebra student asks, “When am I ever going to use quadratic equations?”, the make-work nature of the activity is revealed. It holds no real meaning for the student, no connection to the real world of the student’s life at that point. The response, “Well, someday you may want to be an engineer” simply isn’t “real” enough to close the gap in meaningfulness.

Real Work is experiential, as opposed to academic, although it certainly may include the application of some academic knowledge. It involves more aspects of being than offering a merely intellectual exercise. Again, it has a purpose beyond fulfilling an arbitrary agenda set by someone else.

At Open Connections, we seek Real Work opportunities that, like setting the dinner table, will include new learning as a by-product of functional activities. When the teens took on the project of designing and building the tree platform in the White Pines, they were clearly setting themselves up for a significant amount of Real Work. In the process of determining their budget, purchasing the necessary supplies, calling the township for approval, and coordinating all of this with one another and the appropriate adult staff, they were fully engaged in Real Work. To have built a tiny “treehouse” in the same manner, at age fifteen, as an assignment for a social studies class, would have been make-work.

On the other hand, for a much younger colleague (age 7 or so), the use of the tools and the development of certain academic skills (such as learning to calculate the amount of wood needed, or finding out where one gets the necessary supplies for making a tiny treehouse) would feel like Real Work due to

When the teens took on the project of designing and building the tree platform in the White Pines, they were clearly setting themselves up for a significant amount of Real Work. In the process of determining their budget, purchasing the necessary supplies, calling the township for approval, and coordinating all of this with one another and the appropriate adult staff, they were fully engaged in Real Work. To have built a tiny “treehouse” in the same manner, at age fifteen, as an assignment for a social studies class, would have been make-work.

the shadowy border between reality and fantasy at that age. In our Open Program (for four to nine-year-olds), it is a kind of Real Work to make a product that you are going to use, even if no one else would have pursued your work if you hadn’t. Building a doll’s treehouse is close enough to real for a seven year old; building a life-sized treehouse, is more so. Building a life-sized treehouse at 15 might fulfill a generally recognized need, whereas the doll-sized treehouse was ultimately part of make-believe. (Of course, when the youth starts making treehouse kits and selling them on the Internet for \$800 apiece, Real Work will be in full bloom.)

Real Work is an important component of Open Connections philosophy, and supports its mission to empower young people and adults to create the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment. Real Work can be found throughout our programs in support of the development of Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Impersonal skills so that youth are prepared to tackle life’s challenges and opportunities. ©

\*OC Glossary of Terms can be found in the OC Parent Resource Library at Open Connections.



# A DAY IN THE LIFE of Cataleia and Nico

By Luz Angela Bolivar

Our family values a learning model that is child-centered, one that recognizes the beauty in each individual. Cataleia and Nico play an important role in their education. Their questions, curiosity, and sense of exploration leads them to discoveries. They are the main drivers to their own learning. Their learning does not happen at a desk during most of the day. Learning happens all the time, anywhere and everywhere.

The rhythm of our non-OC homeschool days varies. There are some values/components that remain the same though: free play, passion-driven inquiries, oral language, culture, and nature exploration. Cataleia and Nico start their day with some free play time to pursue their own interests. It may be Lego building, playing in a fort, designing clothing, reading a book, writing, playing with blocks, playing music, taking care of our three chickens (Fluffy, Bun Bun and Snowflake).

After about 30 to 45 minutes we usually hear Nico, “Mommy/ Daddy tengo hambre” “I am hungry.” Cataleia has a great passion for cooking and often takes the lead to help make breakfast.

After breakfast, they each have a couple of tasks to do before some structured instructional time. We are a team and we help each other. Each family member has some responsibilities and we count on each other to accomplish them all.

We usually devote 45 to 60 minutes every day to do some math, reading, social studies, and science. We select topics depending on the youth’s curiosity questions or our observations.

Our afternoons include interest-based activities including gymnastics, art lessons, library visits, arboretum explorations, nature walks, bike riding, and lots of reading in English and Spanish.

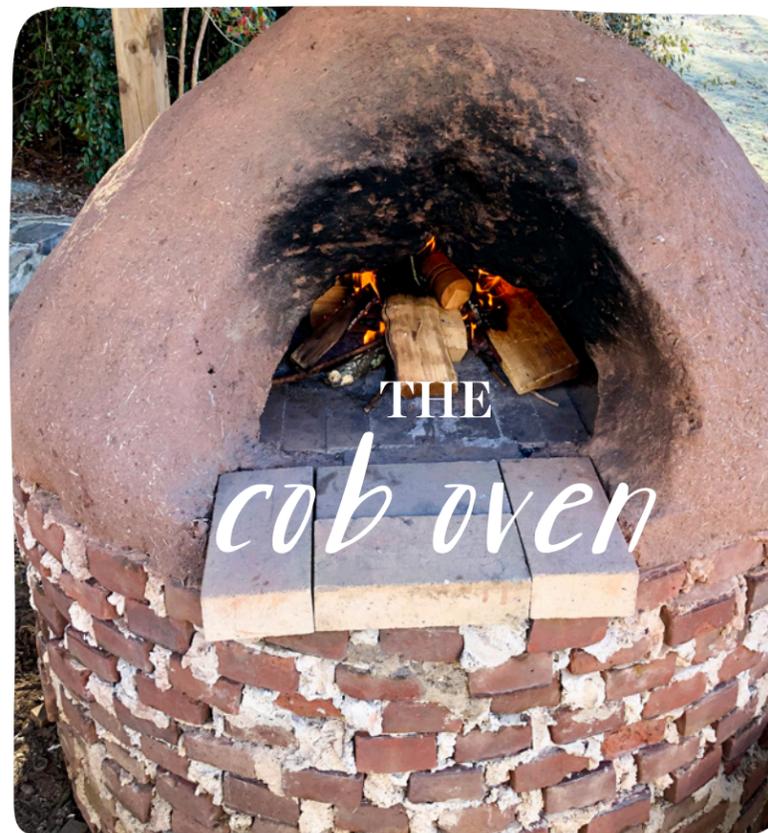
On the weekends, Cataleia and Nico enjoy long trail walks where they climb trees, enjoy picnics, and play in streams. There is always time to have a playdate and make new recipes.

We usually go to Colombia over the summer where our youth have the opportunity to enjoy exploring nature as soon as they get up: seeing beautiful sunrises, running after some animals, making orange juice (especially if we are at Aunt Martha’s farm), and engaging in Spanish language conversations with many family members.

No matter where we are, we come together every night around the table to enjoy a homemade dinner, often prepared with the youth’s help. We connect as everyone shares highlights from their day and discusses plans for the next day, future goals and topics of curiosity. ©

## Campus Corner

by Sarah Becker, *Facilitator, Assistant Director*



The cob oven is prepped with a strong fire early on a chilly morning for Choice A: Culture and Cuisine to start experimenting with Neapolitan Pizza!



Tulsi and Addie work to position their pizza in the cob oven so that it will cook properly.



Amon works on perfecting the dough stretch to get the desirable thin crust for his pizza during Choice A: Culture and Cuisine.

Many OC programs spend time outside and learn to start and sustain a fire...the next step is cooking with it! At OC we not only have opportunities to cook over open fires, we also have a unique resource, a cob oven, which was built by the community in 2016. The cob oven is in the yard behind the Farmhouse Kitchen.

Last summer, during Staff Development, we gathered to learn the processes involved in making fresh pizza in the cob oven. Chris, our resident cob oven expert, and property manager (among other things) facilitated the staff. Learning to use this powerful tool is an excellent example of working on an impersonal skill.

The steps to using the cob oven are relatively straightforward, but not without nuance. You need to know how far ahead to build the fire to warm the oven to the correct temperature as well as how to arrange the fire and clean the surface when it’s time to cook. In addition to knowing how to use the cob oven itself, you need to keep in mind the nuances of your food preparation.

Youth had several opportunities to engage with the cob oven this year. One of these occasions was during Choice A: Cultures and Cuisine during the exploration of Italy. We were making pizza starting at 9:15 on a chilly morning in early February. After starting the fire, we turned our attention to our pizzas. Working with the dough to make sure that it was the proper thickness and consistency required a lot of trial and error! After the pizzas were finally assembled, we discovered that getting them off the paddle and into the oven, with proper positioning, is a form of art that we all worked to master. The amount of time that the pizzas needed to cook became the science of estimation (and an exercise in patience). Ultimately, we ended up with pizzas all across the spectrum of done-ness and thickness. The next time all of these youth (and facilitators) use the cob oven, they will come to it with knowledge, technique, and finesse that they didn’t have before.

As you can imagine, there are a lot of ways for a person to cook in the cob oven, and a lot of ways in which this tool is simple and easy to use, while also requiring a person to flex their impersonal development. Every time you use a tool/skill, you get a little better, and understand it more fully. Maybe one day we can all master the skill of the cob oven—and then have an epic pizza party. ©

# Spring Community Events



Community Days



SOI Silent Auction



OC Film Fest



Field Trips

Wellness fair



## FAMILY INTERVIEW

# Ogborn Family

Written by Lindsey, Lyla, and Trey Ogborn



### Please describe your family constellation:

Lyla (12) and Trey (10) who both attend OC 2 days/week in Group II. Parents are Lindsey and Jeff.

### How did you get involved with Open Connections? What led you in this direction?

Homeschooling in general was an intuitive hit. I researched alternative schools before Lyla started Kindergarten and we ultimately tried a charter school. After a year we realized that the typical school life did not suit our family. Jeff was working nights and weekends so he wasn't able to be with the kids as often. We also saw how tired Lyla was and the pressure she was being put under to complete projects and read and write at such a fast pace. I got to wondering about homeschooling and

something lit up inside of me. I started researching and learning about different approaches. I also realized that Jeff and I became self-directed learners after we finished our formal education. How much better off could our kids be if they had the opportunity to follow their passions at a younger age? At the time, we didn't know anyone else who homeschooled and wanted to make friends. After browsing on Facebook, joining a few homeschool groups, and researching co-ops, I discovered OC...and it was only 15 minutes from our house! Lyla and Trey started the next year in the Open Program and loved it. We have been part of OC since then, minus last year when we took a break due to the uncertainty of the pandemic. We are so thankful to be back!

### What is your family's approach to learning? What are some of your resources?

As we have moved through this homeschooling journey, with lots of trial and error, we have now settled into a place of slight structure mixed with unschooling/self-directed learning. We are absolutely loving the math curriculum we tried this year, the Life of Fred series. It is simple and entertaining and has made math so much more enjoyable and relatable to us all. Our other main focus is writing which we do through prompts or fun books such as "Rip the Page." Both Lyla and Trey have struggled in the past with the desire to write so we are approaching it in a fun way. We dive into examining our beliefs and emotions through writing, create funny stories, and write poetry.

We enjoy field trips, the majority of which are focused on science and social studies/history. The library is a favorite destination. The "Who is/was" books allow us to go deeper into a famous or memorable person's life and see how they started, what they overcame, and how they made it to fulfill their life's purpose. We love the Reading Public Museum (although it is somewhat of a drive) which offers regular homeschool days with activities incorporating history, science, and art into one lesson. We then enjoy the museum and any special exhibits while we're there. Homeschool events at Ridley Creek State park are another favorite. Ranger Gary is lots of fun and insanely knowledgeable when it comes to plants and wildlife. We love to hike and in warmer weather you can find us swimming in creeks at least once per week. Both kids love to create and with the abundance of information on the internet, they are able to find inspiration or direction to guide their interests and passions.

### What are some of the key benefits to this educational approach with your family?

We love the flexibility. Even with attending OC two days per week this year, Lyla and Trey have plenty of free time to focus on their interests. One of our favorite perks has always been the ability to go to playgrounds, libraries, museums, etc. during the weekdays when they aren't crowded. I also believe that homeschooling saved our relationships with our children. We get to watch them learn, and connect with them in ways that parents don't often get to in this age. We are extremely thankful for that.

### What concerns or challenges have you experienced along the way? How have you addressed them? Do you have any concerns as you look ahead?

The pandemic was a big shake up for us. Just before the world shut down, we sold our home and were temporarily living with Jeff's parents. We bounced to two temporary houses, living out of storage units. It was hard to feel settled anywhere. The pandemic cut off our connection with friends, community, family, activities and field trips. To top it off, Jeff and I decided to divorce. It was definitely a time to re-analyze everything about our lives. We all became a lot more aware of what is really important to us. Jeff and I are thankful to have maintained our ability to co-parent. Lyla and Trey have both overcome their



*Both youth seem to have an easier time talking to and connecting with adults than some of their peers. They really enjoy connecting with their facilitators and feel comfortable with them. They also have an easier time connecting with youths of all ages.*

own hurdles and are coming out more aware of themselves, their emotions, and their passions due to our big changes.

### How do your young people spend their time when they're not at Open Connections?

Lyla spends a lot of time with a glue gun in hand creating anything that sparks their interest out of cardboard, foam, paint, etc. They love re-designing/painting/decorating Jurassic park dinosaur masks. Lyla is currently into drawing and is using the Procreate app to make images/photos for friends and family.

Trey is into all things Lego and recently has rediscovered his love for trains. His room is filled with his Lego creations, some from sets but many created from his own vision, along with wooden train tracks running along his floor.

Both Lyla and Trey enjoy Minecraft, Roblox, and other online games through which they also connect with friends. Lyla and Trey love playing on our trampoline and doing anything they can to make a mess outside whether that be with mud, water, soap, or chalk. This winter they both enjoyed snowboarding. We have not



yet gotten back into any structured activities. For now, the kids prefer to lead their own activities or play games/sports with friends instead of being structured and that is working for us. Connecting with friends and family more regularly again (post pandemic), as well as attending field trips is bringing a sense of normalcy back.

### From your young people's perspectives, what are the main pluses of this type of education?

**Lyla:** "I like how OC is more open and we go outside a lot more than regular school. At home I get to wear my pajamas at school and school at home is only an hour, sometimes less. I can play and have lots of fun at home and at OC and I get to hang out with my friends."

**Trey:** "You don't have to sit in a classroom all day and you can go outside and have fun



a lot. You don't have homework. You have freedom to make choices instead of being told what to do. At home we get done school in like 10 minutes! We get to go on cool field trips."

**From your young people's perspective(s): what does a life of purpose and fulfillment look like?**

*Lyla:* "It looks like being able to follow your passions and connect with friends and family."

*Trey:* "Building with Legos...and what Lyla said."

**How have the 3 broad life skill realms (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) that have been nurtured at OC been reflected in life outside of OC?**

Both youth seem to have an easier time talking to and connecting with adults than some of their peers. They really enjoy connecting with their facilitators and feel comfortable with them. They also have an easier time connecting with

youths of all ages, which has opened them up to friendships outside of OC that they otherwise may not have entertained.

The confidence that is instilled in them when they are trusted with things that kids aren't typically given access to such as power tools, knives, and starting fires gives them confidence and the knowledge to utilize those things safely at home. The ability for them to dress and express themselves as they please without judgment has really helped with social anxieties that can be typical at their age. We have had other parents comment at times that Lyla and Trey seem to be really seated in themselves; they are able to make decisions about their appearance and passions without trying to fit into the norm.

**What would you tell other families about how to get the most out of their OC experience?**

Early on, I made it my mission to attend EVERY single event offered to make sure we got that community feel. Starting out

I was definitely nervous about meeting people and did find value in staying after programs to mingle while the kids played. Don't be afraid to join into conversations or field trips offered even if you feel you don't know anyone. Every family we have met thus far has been friendly, welcoming, and inviting. We are all drawn to this "school" for a reason after all, right?

**How would you describe OC to friends and family?**

It is a place where youth are treated like the adults they are going to become, which makes so much sense, doesn't it?! They are free to be themselves and voice their opinions in a way that helps them feel safe and supported. They have access to a variety of mediums to create with while also staying in touch with nature, themselves, and each other. We absolutely love it and are so thankful for the opportunities and many connections it has created for us. ©



Art journals are a container for creative self-expression for Shaping Your Life group members Ella, Aminah, Norah and Ruby. This year mindfulness and other stress management strategies have been incorporated into the journal work, which you can see by their expressions is working very well.



During Choice B: Puppets and Masks, Sebe uses a manufactured blank mask as a form to support his lightweight mask foundation crafted from aluminum foil and masking tape. These materials are flexible and adaptable, making it easy to add additional features as a design evolves.



Choice B: Illusions and Perspectives explored taste illusions including the role of color and presentation on taste. The afternoon included eating miracle berries (which temporarily make acidic foods taste sweet) and sampling a variety of acidic fruits.



During a fantasy game in the Open Program, Delilah, Bronwyn, Ethan, and Mara pause for a photo in the upper environment, a space for quiet play and collaborative games.



Group IV spends time in the Woodshop making wooden spoons, using mostly hand tools. Spending time in special spaces on campus was a request by youth. A benefit of making programming reflect self-directed learning is the opportunity for young people to facilitate skill-building within areas with which they have a level of competence. L-R: Indi, Aria, Kylie, Søren, Locke, Jamie, Lisa (facilitator), Lily and Evie.



In the Open Program, Wally and Ari challenge each other to a game of "Countdown," a game to develop number sense and math skills. Owen and Nico watch and wait for a turn.



Kylie measures the circumference of the balloon attached to a bottle of decomposing food waste as part of the data collection for her Science Expo project in Group IV.



After examining macroinvertebrates collected from the creek under the microscope, Luca draws his findings on paper during the Open Program.



## Development Corner

As this year winds down the Development Committee would love to take some time to reflect on this year!

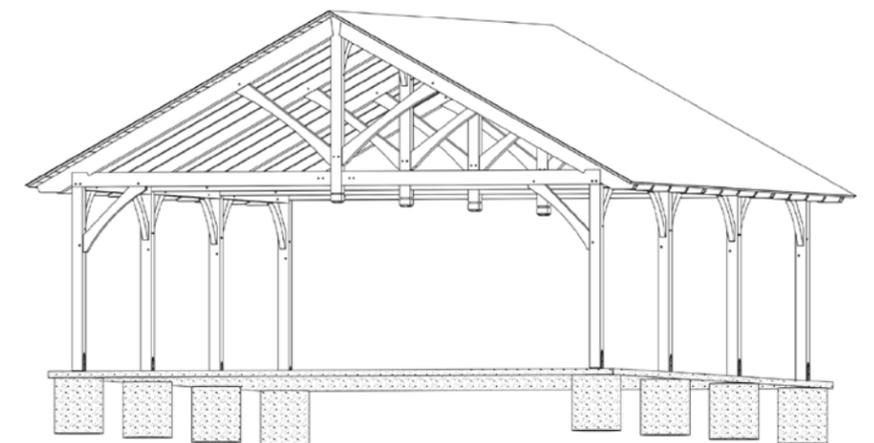
Alumni Connections had our First Annual Winter Event, and we're looking forward to the summer gathering with Alumni, too. Campus had many bustling events throughout the year, from the impressive Winter Marketplace to the lively OC Film Fest '22. Our community continues to impress and amaze. We're excited to announce that we've received a grant that will allow us to build a pavilion on the front lawn! The pavilion will be 30' x 40' and will be able to be used in all weather conditions! We look forward to seeing this come to life over the coming months. We're also really happy to report that 41% of our current families have donated to our Annual Giving Campaign, #CreatingConnections. We are still hopeful to have 100% family participation by the end of the year. No donation is too small to make a difference, and we are so grateful for all of the generosity so far! Your donations help to make Open Connections sustainable and accessible.

Thank you for your contributions and thank you for being a part of this community! We hope that you have a fantastic and adventure-filled summer, and we look forward to seeing you again next year!

With gratitude,

*Sarah & Becker*

Sarah Becker and the OC Development Committee





## ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

People who have spent time at Open Connections as part of their educational journey go on to a wide variety of paths; some people go on to travel the world while others go to college or jump right into the career of their dreams. Some alumni stay actively involved in the OC community long term, even becoming OC facilitators and parents! The paths our alumni take really run the gamut, reflecting our mission to develop life-long learners.

It was fantastic to see some alumni back on campus during our First Annual Winter Alumni Connections event in December!

Looking forward...

**OC alumni and their families are invited back to campus for our First Annual Summer Alumni Connections Event on Saturday, June 11th.**

We'll fire up the grills and have campus ready for an epic game of Capture the Flag. We'll have good tunes, great company, and plenty of lawn games, too. The Alumni Connections Community is part of what makes this place so spectacular. We look forward to sharing all of the great things that have been happening at OC, and we want to hear your thoughts and ideas about the future of OC! Stay tuned to our social media, your email, and our website for more information as the date moves closer. We'd love to see you!

If you're going to be in town, please join us at the Pausing Ceremony on June 10th.

If you are interested in helping plan alumni events, or want to make sure we have your current contact information for announcements, please reach out to [Sarah.Becker@openconnections.org](mailto:Sarah.Becker@openconnections.org).



RSVP Today!



Silas builds dimensional features on a mask during Choice B: Puppets and Masks, creating a likeness of a favorite anime character.

