

## From the Editor

I do hope you've enjoyed this years' newsletters, and especially this, our teen-focused issue. Families with learners of all ages will appreciate the information within, much of it written by our teens themselves.

We very much appreciate your feedback on, and help with, the newsletter. If you have a comment to share, or if you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please don't hesitate to let me know!

Thanks for your support— *Crystal*

## A Vision of Change by Kyle Herman, Typhoon Studio Advisor

Shifting educational paradigms, especially in the public school arena, is no easy task, but charter schools help make it possible. Community Montessori opened its doors in 1998 as a private school with one classroom of 3-6 year-olds. From the beginning, though, the founder and Director of the school, Barbara Burke Fondren, had two long-term goals: add one age group every year through high school and eventually become tuition-free.

"My vision," she says, "has always been to have a Montessori school available to our community as a vehicle to make an impact on the way we think about parenting, learning, and teaching." Ball State University endorsed her vision, granting the school a charter in 2002 and encouraging innovation in instruction and assessment. Fondren credits BSU with "giving us the confi-

dence and the leverage to design the Teens' Program the way we did," emphasizing student choice over teacher control and project-based assessments over standardized testing.

In the Teens' Program, currently consisting of 177 students ages 12-17, teachers become advisors, helping students make sense of state-issued course descriptions and graduation requirements for a Core 40 diploma while empowering them to custom-make their own courses.

Such an approach to education may sound like a foreign language to traditionally-trained teachers, but to the students, it makes perfect sense. "Being a

student at Community Montessori has been an incredible adventure," says 15 year-old Erin Frey, who has attended the school since she was three. "Choice is a vital part of the way I function, and

having been given the opportunity to approach a problem any way I see fit, as opposed to one predetermined method, I learn experimentation, trial and error, and allow my curiosity to flourish."

With the support of their advisors, students plan their own course projects using a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP). Once a student generates project ideas, her advisor submits the PLP to a mentor teacher as a peer-review process to ensure the projects contain enough rigor, breadth, and

*(Continued on page 2)*

*"For education to change the world, the world first has to change education."*



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### April

- 6 - PIP Workshop
- 10 - Enrollment for 2010-11 School Year
- 16 - All Programs Closed—Staff In-Service Day
- 19-25—Technology Turnoff Week Challenge
- 30 - All Programs Closed—Staff Personal/ Professional Day

### May

- 4 - PIP Workshop, 7 pm
- 10-14 - 50% off Book Fair and Book Swap, First Annual T-shirt Swap
- 14 & 21 - Parent Partner Conferneces, All Programs Closed
- 16 - Spring Family Picnic
- 27 - Last Day of School

## Exploring *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*

Contributed by *Jana Morgan Herman*

Wow! What a PIP meeting we had this week. The topic was conscious parenting. This would fit into our *Montessori: Science behind the Genius* study under chapter eight, “Adult Interaction Styles and Children Outcomes.” Conscious parenting requires that adults observe, reflect, and act in ways that support the optimal development of the entire family. Striving to maintain consistency, honesty, no double standards, and to prepare the environment for success are keys to conscious parenting. One way to demonstrate consciousness is how we parent our children with regards to media.

In January of this year, the Kaiser Foundation released results from a recent study on children ages 8-18 and the media. This information was followed perfectly by Frontline’s “Driven to Distraction” which focused on how excessive technology and media may negatively affect the development of the brain. Now, hold on, don’t take a hammer to that computer just yet! How will you Google that new curry recipe or check out what happened on Oprah today?

Think about the old adage “all things in moderation” and just take a week or two to ‘be conscious’ of how much time your family spends on video games, computer time, texting, talking on the phone, IMing, Facebooking, etc. Do you spend more time talking, walking, eating, and playing together, staying connected to your family? Or do you spend more time plugged into the virtual world?

Developing brains require human, face-to-face interaction to fully develop. If we balance what we do with media, how we do it, and for how long, we are staying connected the people we love and care about the most. Now, I’m passing you a challenge. Between now and April 19 note your family’s technology habits. Then, if you are brave and ready, join us for National TV (& Technology!) Turnoff Week the 19<sup>th</sup>-25. Email me if you want to be a part of this event or if you need help on how to survive without the tubes and wires!

## Fun (and learning!) in the Summertime

This summer, Community Montessori students in the Teen Program have the unique opportunity to pursue some experiential learning. Two groups will be setting out to expand their sense of community. One group will be traveling for 14 days throughout Colorado and Utah. They will be engaging in a variety of physically challenging and rewarding activities. Learners will be camping, hiking, boating, and climbing. Allen Frantz, Monsoon advisor and experienced outdoor guide, will be leading the crew through the wild west.



Another group of teens will be heading off to the big city of Chicago with Monsoon advisor, Emily. Learners have been working on planning their own trip and will be traveling with purpose as they volunteer around the city and learn the ropes of “budget” travel. Both of the opportunities intend to supply our teens with a heightened awareness of outside places, travel experience, and the strength and confidence of self sufficiency.

## A Vision of Change

(Continued from page 1)

depth.

A typical PLP consists of 5 to 6 projects that may involve independent research and presentations; coursework for I-Classes, an online learning program; attending 60 minute instructional seminars that meet twice a week for 6 weeks; or connecting learning outside of school through service-learning projects, internships, or summer travel programs.

Although both Montessori philosophy and the most current educational research supports project-based learning and allowing for student choice, neither students nor advisors describe this process as clean, fast, and easy. One student admits, “It can get overwhelming, especially if you’re not very organized. My advisor is always willing to help, though. She spends a lot of time with each individual student, but she still gives us room to think through problems ourselves, which helps a lot with critical thinking skills.”

The biggest challenge Community Montessori faces, though, has little to do with PLPs. It is the same challenge it faced as a private school with one classroom: creating enough synergy among students, parents, and educators to carry the momentum of education reform beyond the ground on which the building sits.

Fondren feels a synergy growing, though. After more than a decade of squinting at a far-off spot on the horizon, her vision will finally come into sharp focus next year, as Community Montessori will reach full capacity and graduate its first class of seniors, some of whom, like Erin, have been in the program since they were three years old. For Erin, this school is all she has ever known, but she still has perspective enough to appreciate it. “If education is treated properly,” she says, “it may become the key to unlocking every door. Community Montessori is a perfect example of a group of people trying to do good by giving each and every learner the resources they need to change the world.” Indeed, this belief that education can change the world motivates Fondren and everyone else involved in bringing her vision to reality, from the dedicated Teens’ staff, to the families populating the school, and, of course, the teens themselves. The common link within the “community” of Community Montessori is the belief that for education to change the world, the world first has to change education.

# Heroic Journey Challenges, Rewards by Jasmine Franz, Typhoon Studio

Many adolescents face the challenge of growing up and being responsible for themselves. Through the media and entertainment teens everywhere are exposed to spoiled and irresponsible teens and are pressured to be like this. It's getting more and more common to see young adults relying on parents to care for them. In many cultures children start to prepare for becoming an adult when entering their teenage years. When they are ready to become an adult they have a ritual or ceremony as a rite of passage to show they are now an adult. Today, teens in America don't have any special tasks to prepare them for becoming an adult, and they don't have any rite of passage ceremonies to symbolize their transition from childhood to adulthood.

The Heroic Journey is a rite of passage that teens in the natural disaster studios have been participating in for this school year. It's also an exploration of ourselves and who we are. The purpose of the Heroic Journey is to provide a program to meet the needs of teens to test themselves as they experience major life changes to adulthood. We are faced with personal challenges and responsibilities, and when we have completed our service projects, established a connection to allies, overcome obstacles along the way, and shown personal growth through meeting goals, we know we have successfully completed the Heroic Journey. The name Heroic Journey fits because it really is a journey when you are making that transition from a child to an adult.

This year I have done multiple activities for the Heroic Journey. During the annual camping trip everyone joined a "tribe." All the tribes made a flag, a chant, created a skit about how our tribe began and went to the opening ceremony for the Heroic Journey. During the weeks following the camping trip, everyone set a personal goal. This goal wasn't supposed to be of an academic nature, but rather a goal that would teach us a skill or something that could better our lives. Then, everyone chose an ally who could support us in completing our goal.

My studio also did a project where we had questions about ourselves, and we got in a group with the people who had the same answers as us. This really showed everyone that we

had many things in common with people who, we thought, we would never have anything in common with. After this activity, we got into small groups with some of the people who had similar interests. With those groups, we began planning school service projects. We are all planning to raise money for some aspect of the school. We wrote business proposals for our project. This will help us deal with different companies and jobs when we are older.

The hardest part of the Heroic Journey would have to be finding out what your abilities are. You can't find what you're capable of unless you really put forth an effort. You only get out what you put in. I think the most valuable aspect of the Heroic Journey is that we can find out so many things about ourselves. We find that we have many capabilities that we thought weren't possible. I think that it is so important for someone to find what they are capable of and to use that for their advantage in life. The Heroic Journey has helped me with this so much. I'm glad I have been able to experience this rite of passage. When you look at adolescents that have started preparing to become an adult, they mature faster and become extremely responsible. Imagine what would happen if generations to come could go through a rite of passage like this and become so much more mature and responsible.

## ~ Spring Testing ~

NWEA ("grades 2-8") April 5-16

ECA's (some teens) April 26-June 9

ISPTep+ ("grades" 3-8) -

Applied Skills, March 1-10

Multiple Choice April 26-May 5



Make sure your learner gets lots of rest and has a nutritious breakfast!

## FAMILY FUNDRAISING UPDATE!

THROUGH FEBRUARY 2010

Market Day	\$790.95
Recycling	\$58.85
Meijer	\$188.52
Target	\$230.74
Box Tops	\$873.00
Kroger	\$752.65
eScrip	<u>\$11.46</u>

**\$2906.17**



Your opportunity to get involved!

Please contact PIP at [pip@shiningminds.com](mailto:pip@shiningminds.com) if you'd like to help with this project:

### Book Fair and Book Swap

Volunteers are needed to work at the Book Fair May 10-14. The morning shift is 8:30-noon, afternoon shift is noon-4:00.

We also need several volunteers to sort the Book Swap donations the week of May 3-7.

## Teens and the “Core 40” by Brent Drew-Wolak Typhoon Studio

Core 40 is a program designed to help guide students through high school and provide extraordinary opportunities to earn all the credits you need to graduate. Core 40 is used throughout Indiana in various school systems, but no other schools use it like we do. At Montessori, we strive to be independent and self-motivated learners, and, with the Core 40 system, we can do just that.

Every student has the freedom to choose some of what they learn based on personal interest, but we are all required to earn credits in English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education/health and wellness and electives that include world languages, career/technical, and fine arts. There are a few different paths you can choose to take with earning each credit. You can either get a ‘general’ diploma, a ‘Core 40’ diploma, an ‘exceeds with academic honors’ diploma, or an ‘exceeds with technical honors’ diploma. This all depends on what you study and how many credits you set out to earn.

At the beginning of each year, every Core 40 student sits down with their advisor and decides what courses they are going to take that year and the methods with which they are going to earn their credits. For each credit earned, there is a little leeway as to what goals you choose to satisfy that credit. Everyone learns differently, so this is a perfect way to do what you need in order for you to be successful. One of the most needed and useful planning resource is the *Indiana State Approved Course Titles and Descriptions*. It lists all the goals you need to cover in order to earn your credit; then, with our system, you can decide on your own how you want to study those subjects. Most students earn their credits through seminar work, online classes, independent work, and sometimes through real world exploration. One of the most advantageous aspects of Montessori is that there are so many ways you can tie Core 40 courses into fun activities. For example, I am studying German as my foreign language, and for German class next year we are taking a trip to Germany. By going on this trip, I am getting real life experience speaking German, instead of just learning about it in a classroom.

Each student is set up with an advisor at the beginning of every year. Your advisor is there to support you, and help keep you focused, so that you can accomplish all of your goals. Having this one-on-one relationship is very beneficial because it allows you to be independent but still have someone there helping you plan and stay on task. You meet with them once a week and go over your progress. Every student is different and some may need more attention from their advisors, while others are more independent. No matter what your learning style is, you need to have someone there to help with such an involved process. You typically have the same advisor for three years, which allows the two of you to build a special bond. Your advisor is able to understand you, so they can know how to help you learn in a

way that is productive.

One of the biggest difficulties in Core 40, and in Montessori schools in general, is self-motivation. You have to want to succeed and do your best without always being told what to do. If you only strive for a teacher’s reward or praise, then you won’t get anywhere in a Montessori school; it has to be your drive to succeed, and you have to work for your feeling pride once you accomplish something.

This year, Core 40 changed drastically and is now much more organized. We now have a comprehensive seminar schedule and office hours, during which time we are able to work with other students who we normally couldn’t work with, as well as consult with advisors besides our own. It also gives us a chance to get to any other work we couldn’t accomplish in our three hour work cycle. All the seminars are designed along the Core 40 curriculum and are made to help us pass the ECA tests which we need to take in order to graduate high school. For some students, core 40 may be a stressful experience that feels like a lot of work, but it is truly a great way to blend traditional high schools with the Montessori philosophy to create the ideal learning environment.



### WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Would you know what to do if you came upon an injured or ill person? What would you do in a medical emergency? Would you know who to call or how to give first aid? The exciting news is that a group of our teens, supported by Emily Ross, Monsoon Teen Advisor and Linda Kueber, Health Services Coordinator, are learning these skills.

In March 2010 participating teens will have completed their Red Cross First Aid Certification course. They will learn how to recognize emergencies and how to provide first aid care until professional help can arrive. Many skills such as accessing an injured person, controlling bleeding, caring for burns, applying splints for muscle and bone injuries, as well as recognizing sudden illness will be mastered in this class. This course will provide our teens with hands-on experience to support them in being competent and confident first aid administrators.

Would you know what to do in a medical emergency? Ask one of our teens!

## Teens Program Not All Work and No Play by Synthia Estep, Oak Studio

The Teen's Program here at Community Montessori is a lot different than at other Middle and High schools. We have a lot more responsibility for our education. We have to plan out what courses we need to take, along with our advisors, and how much to do at a time to get finished before schools out. We have to be responsible enough to know when to study and when to have social time. Sometimes we do both!

After individual work time we can work with friends on projects. The best time to hang out is Teen Activity Night...when we all rock the dance floor! We have Teen Activity Night in the MAC (Multi-Activity Center) and we have snacks, (such as cookies, chips, pop, etc.) We play Rock band and Guitar Hero, Wii and a lot of other fun, cool things. But I think everyone's favorite part is the music and dancing...We listen to the hottest tunes while rocking out with our friends!

This year will be the first Prom for Community Montessori. One of things that makes our prom different is that we only had three teens on the committee (Sarah Gaudet, Synthia Estep and Chris Uresti)! They planned the perfect prom to be at the Cul-



bertson West Mansion on May 8<sup>th</sup> for "9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> graders". While they are living it up at prom, the "6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders" will be partying at the "The Disaster Masquerade", dressed up in semi-formals and wearing beautiful masks in the MAC on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Don't just think that's it for Community Montessori teens; along with the rest of the school we also are able to participate in Enrichment Programs that include Ballet, Violin, Dodgeball, Guitar and more. We have those enrichments after school, it's a great way to have fun, build on our skills and hang out with friends...maybe even meet new ones! We also have clubs that we are able to join including KUNA (Kentucky United Nations Associations), The Readwood (The Teen's Program newspaper), prom committee and we can write for the school newsletter for the whole school to see!

While to outsiders it seems easy to be a CM teen, is very difficult to juggle all our activities with Core 40 work, Seminars and ECA lessons that will help us to graduate and pass the tests. All I can say is "good luck" Community Montessori Teens and Advisors!

### Ivy Tech Career Camp Collaboration

This spring Community Montessori and Ivy Tech Community College are offering our teens the opportunity to explore career choices and college life at the first CAREER CAMP COLLABORATION. Teens from the Cypress and Oak Studios will participate with the support of Ryan Higgins, Cypress Teen Advisor, Linda Kueber, Health Services Coordinator and Barbara Burke Fondren, Director.

Participating in this two day event along with their Ivy Tech student mentors, teens will tour the campus, receive certification in Heart Saver CPR, attend a presentation about the educational opportunities offered by Ivy Tech, as well as attending Mini presentations about the Health Sciences Program. They will observe demonstrations of health program equipment and have the opportunity to ask questions from an Ivy Tech panel.

By providing this experience Ivy Tech is offering a great resource for our teens to use in determining if a health care career may be right for them. This also gives our teens insight as they prepare to select their internship sites.

While this is the first CAREER CAMP COLLABORATION, we hope it is not our last. Community Montessori wants to thank all of the staff and students at Ivy Tech who are contributing their time to make this an exciting and unique experience for our teens.



### 21st Century Scholars Program

The Twenty-first Century Scholars Program began in 1990 as Indiana's way of raising the educational aspirations of low and moderate-income families. The program aims to ensure that all Indiana families can afford a college education for their children.

Income-eligible 6th, 7th and 8th graders who enroll in the program and fulfill a pledge of good citizenship to the state are guaranteed the cost of four years of undergraduate college tuition at any participating public college or university in Indiana. If the student attends a private institution, the state will award an amount comparable to that of a public institution. If the student attends a participating proprietary school, the state will award a tuition scholarship equal to that of Ivy Tech Community College.

Students and their parents must complete and return the application by June 30 of the 6th, 7th or 8th grade year.

**For more information on applying and program requirements for 21st Century Scholars visit the [Indiana Department of Education](#) website.**

**Forms will also be available at enrollment and Parent Partner Conferences.**

Visit [here](#) for other state grants and scholarship information.



# Disconnecting—One Family’s Journey Back to the Future

by Crystal McConnell

My last cellular bill was a real eye opener. The amount due was the same (astronomically high) number, but the total of my teen’s text messages had reached an all-time high of well over 16,000 in a month! What?!

Do the math: my son has his phone about 9 hours a day, times 30 days in a month, times 60 minutes an hour...that’s 16,200 minutes a month he has his phone. So he is either sending or receiving a text message every minute. To put it in perspective, my husband gave this example: Imagine you are at work and every 60 seconds someone reaches over and pokes you.

This prompted a lot of conversation between us regarding the amount of screens and screen-time in our house, and the effect it is having not only on our children, but also our marriage and our family as a whole—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

And it was not just texting, but TV watching, computers, video games and iPods (they’re not just for music anymore!), too. Our household inventory:

- 4 TV’s (all with DVD players, 2 with satellite service),
- 3 video game systems hooked to TV’s,
- 3 handheld video game players,
- 6 iPods (there are only 4 of us!), two of which are iPod touches and so have games, or apps, on them as well.

All this plus three cell phones, one desktop computer and three laptops.

O M G.

It was obvious our family had a problem—we were addicted to our electronics. It had snuck up on us, and slowly stolen our family time. We were four people who mostly co-existed, rather than **lived** together. Admitting it was the first step; so now what do we do?

In our case, we decided a detox was in order. Two weeks with no screens at all with the following exceptions. First, computer is OK at work and for school assignments, but there can be no surfing for personal reasons, checking personal email, Facebook or other online sites. Second, my husband must use his cell phone for work, but would only use it during work hours. Before and after hours, his staff was instructed to call our house, if necessary, and his phone would be surrendered when he arrived home at night. Last, negotiated by my nine-year-old, if you are at a sleepover, it is OK to have screens because you are their guest, but if someone is sleeping over at our house, our detox rules apply.

We all agreed, gave one week for people to make any necessary preparations and notifications, and then we tuned out.

So what happens when the screens go dark?

Surprisingly, a lot!

We worked a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle and played cards and board games.

My daughter read 5 books, my son 7 over the course of the two weeks.

We rode our bikes around the neighborhood—the four of us together!

We ate dinner at the table together every night.

My son “coached” my daughter at soccer to help her hone her goalie skills.

My husband and I took long walks so we could get some fresh air and alone time.

We cooked together, shopped together, cleaned together, and we talked to each other. And talked. And talked.

It was absolutely amazing to see how disconnecting from our electronics reconnected the four of us to each other in a real and powerful way.

Was it easy? Some days more than others. And I’m not saying there was no cheating, either. We were on our honor, but we did bust our son on the Playstation in his room. (In all fairness, he coincidentally was diagnosed with mono three days into the detox, and spent every day of it at home, sick. In that situation, I might have cheated, too!) I am guilty of looking at my online bank statement to see if the tax refunds had come in, and my husband emailed me from his work account on occasion.

But what the detox really did was put into perspective how much we rely on that quick look-up or text message, and how little we actually communicate with the people around us. There were several times we met as a family to discuss ending it early. Once we even voted, voting to end it 3 to 1, my husband opposing on the grounds that we’ll never know if we’ve learned all we need to know unless we finish it out. And you know what, we did finish it rather than stop.

In the end, we made some changes. Have we sworn off screens altogether? No. But we dropped HBO and added DVR service to our satellite. We cancelled our Sirius radio subscription, cancelled and blocked text messaging on our phones, and dropped our Netflix back to one movie at a time. Most importantly, we all made a commitment to keep screens to a minimum, and to hold each other accountable.

And we’re still eating at the dinner table, together, every night.

Some interesting links:

[Frontline: Digital Nation](#)

[Texting and Teen Development](#)

**TV Turnoff Week is April 19-25!  
Will your family take the Challenge?**

