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OPEN CONNECTIONS™

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Cover: During a shared experience between Open Program and Group I youth, the groups play a game of "If You Like." This game allows youth the opportunity to get to know more about their peers. During our last cheer of "If you love Open Connections," everyone ran to a new spot!

Right: Group III takes a 'brain break' and energizes with a team-building challenge involving passing hula hoops down the line.

Open Connections Magazine

Issue 83 | Spring 2023

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 Friends,

Spring has arrived again at OC, signaling the end of another engaging program year. Our campus is alive with youth spending even more time outside during their program days and with families hanging out together after program time, too. From my window in the Office, I see youth running past to the blacktop or the volleyball net for some kinesthetic explorations. Just yesterday I saw some of the Open Program youth fishing (successfully!) with stick rods in the pond. Looking forward to early June, we finally get to use the new pavilion for our yearly Pausing Ceremony! (waiting for the grass to grow around it feels a little like waiting for water to boil!) I love the positive energy on campus as facilitators and youth engage in the yearly tradition of writing Word Presents to each other.

This issue of the Open Connections Magazine is devoted to the creative process and how it is nurtured in our

programs. I enjoyed taking the time to really dive into what the creative process is and how thoroughly it is interwoven in all we do here at OC, and in my own life. This iterative process is everywhere! I appreciate hearing the voices of different writers here in harmony and appreciate the different lenses through which they reflect on their experience with the creative process.

Also within these pages you will find our regular columns and interviews, helping us to connect and get to know each other and our campus better. OC Alum, Trey duPont-Andrew shares his reflections on OC and what he's up to now. You can also read about the role the blacktop area at OC plays, allowing youth to explore various topics on a larger scale. Our Annual Giving drive this year is centered around a theme to encourage our community (and beyond) to Keep Exploring. How are you inspired to explore?

I hope you find inspiration in these pages.

With appreciation,

Margaret



Jack, Levon, and Lincoln created, directed, and performed a play for their peers during their day in the Open Program



Ruby sets up a scene in the miniature model bedroom room she has constructed as part of her independent project for Shaping Your Life. Her concept for this project is to tell a coming-of-age story through images of a room. While the model was created last year, she has continued the project by making small props for specific vignettes and experimenting with different lighting and photography techniques.



After adding shredded butter and milk to the dry ingredients of salt, baking powder, flour and sugar, Open Program youth, Crosby, carefully folds his dough. He then cut it into biscuit-sized pieces and baked them for 10 minutes. Yum!



Gwen, Holly, and Cataleia worked on their Gumbboot dance in rubber boots during Choice A: Rhythm and Movement.



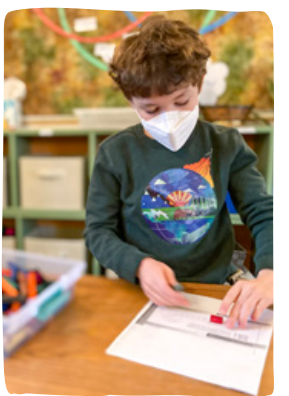
Brecken showed focus and determination while carefully stacking Kapla Blocks on top of each other to create a tower taller than himself during a day in the Open Program.



Nova, Luna, Scarlett, and Fina relax in the cozy space of the "Reading Nook" to share in some quality conversation during the Open Program.



Wally, Weston, Ollie, Indy, and Jett work together to play a game of chess, helping each other strategize and plan moves in Group I.



Taran tackles a Cuisenaire rod challenge in Group I: Red is between white and green. Purple is between red and white. The first rod is not the smallest.



During Group III, Elric and Thomas run a chloride test of a water sample from Little Pony Trail Creek, monitoring levels of salt pollution with the Winter Salt Watch community science project.



In Choice B: Documentary, Jay, Danny, and Locke pause for a photo op during the filming of their mockumentary, "Monster of the Lake," which was featured during the OC Storyfest '23.



Sian works to dig a water hole in the Sand Pit on a warm, sunny day in the Open Program. He tried out a variety of digging tools including shovels, trucks, and his hands.



Group IV members Evie, Indi, Jack, Locke, Søren, Jamie, and Elliot spent some time playing with models of 2 different types of catapults. Group members then worked together in pairs or threesomes to construct their own, larger versions for this year's Engineering Expo.



Jude, Silas P., Uma, Shep, Carter and Eli work together, strategizing to create a human pyramid, while waiting on the sidelines of a Group III game of Newcomb.



Ari returns to a favorite game of his, Mancala, to practice his small motor skills. This additional time and space is one of the many benefits of the open time available in the Open Program.



Annabelle uses paper towels, glue, and paint to create a wintry scene during some Group II time in the Art Studio. Manipulating the gooey paper creates texture and makes the painting three dimensional.



Hannah sets up a display as part of her Shaping Your Life Symposium presentation. The display mimicked a supermax prison's solitary confinement cell and had general information about the life of a prisoner in this type of facility.



During Open Program's Group time, Leo plays a song he has been practicing at his piano class. Leo shares, "I am developing my piano skills."



Setting can really help with the creative process. In Group II, Trey takes advantage of the beautiful weather and sits on the terrace to complete a watercolor painting.



Holly, Cassidy, and Marlon contemplate their cards and try to figure out where they can take the storyline next in this group storytelling game during Choice A: Storytelling.



Owen poses in the go-kart which he has been working on over many weeks during his time in the Open Program. Here he is preparing for his first test run.



Heather (Facilitator) provides a counterweight to brace a piece of wood while Elliot gets a feel for precision cutting with a Japanese style pull saw.



Shaping Your Life youth, Ella, shows off the quilt that she's been working on as her independent project since last year! Hurray!

The Creative Process

At Open Connections, the Creative Process is defined as an iterative process involving *imagination, creation, experimentation, reflection, and revision*. We often refer to this as taking time to “create and adjust.” This process works best when coupled with a culture that supports risk-taking, and views “failure” as a critical, and many times necessary, step towards the final product. Here in our community and programs we offer a safe place where a polished product is not the mark of success. This culture encourages the creative process and the valuable learning that comes with it. The glimpses into each program on the pages that follow will help illuminate the magic of embracing this process.



Harrison tries out different ways of stabilizing his marble run and getting the marble to roll smoothly from the top to the bottom during Group I.

Creative Process

in the Open Program

By Michelle Brockway, Facilitator



Above: Above: After taking their go-cart for a test run, Owen and Sam noticed that the front axle needed to be tightened and that the bolt was stripped. Here, Chris (facilitator) helps them cut it down and smooth it out. **Right:** Sam joins Owen in the go-cart they made in the Open Program for the first test run while Jack watches and cheers from the sideline. This was a great opportunity to see what worked and what changes needed to take place. After the test run and some problem-solving, Owen and Sam decided that the wheels on the back could use a one piece axle rather than two separate pieces.



to get it on the road as quickly as possible, they didn't want it to fall apart on the first run.

With each attempt to make the changes, the two showed grit as they worked through obstacles and frustrations. First they replaced the screws with longer ones, making the wheels tighter. This poses a safety risk, as the screws were sticking out of the wood. In the process of working on the wheels, they split their wood and had to take the time to measure and cut a new piece. After multiple alterations and creative solutions, wood slats were installed under the axle for wheel support, and the go-cart was ready for a test run. Although it rolled down the driveway, Owen and Sam decided to pause and continue another day, giving them time to reflect, revise, and make the changes necessary to get their go-cart moving at a faster speed.

By offering our young people the space to take risks and experience "failure" in a safe environment, we are allowing for growth opportunities in their abilities to "create and adjust."



On a warmish winter day in the Open Program, Kellen and Levon shared a wish to create a "pool" in the Sand Pit. Since the pump was not in service, as the water was turned off for the winter, they chose to carry buckets of water over from the pond. After filling large buckets with water, they realized that not only were the buckets too heavy to lift out of the pond when full, but too heavy to carry all the way from the pond over to the Sand Pit. The two paused for a conversation and worked together to come up with next steps.

In their next attempt, they used the buckets to slowly fill up a small wheelbarrow in hopes that they could carefully push it over to the Sand Pit. When time came to move it, the wheelbarrow tipped and toppled until it fell to the ground, dumping the water out into the grass. Kellen and Levon decided to fill the wheelbarrow half way so maybe they wouldn't lose any water this time.

Kellen and Levon collaborate to gather water from the pond and transport it over to the Sand Pit. The two work to create a water hole to dip their feet into on a warm day.



The two showed persistence as they slowly and carefully used buckets to collect water from the pond and fill the wheelbarrow to the halfway point. Levon and Kellen then worked together to steady the wheelbarrow to try to get the water to the Sand Pit. With each motion the water sloshed so when they made it to their destination there was very little water left. They came to the conclusion that the wheel barrow was too shallow.

Finally, they tried filling their buckets just enough that they could still pick them up. Together they carried water to the Sand Pit and dumped it into their "pool". With grit and determination the two found a creative solution.

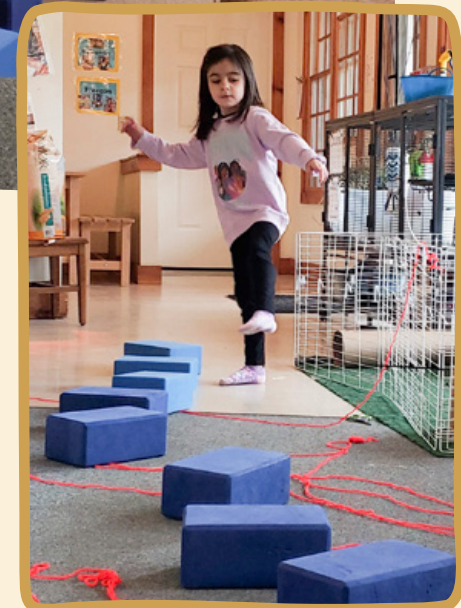
Rather than jumping in when I first noticed the buckets of water were too heavy for Kellen and Levon to lift, I sat back and gave the two an opportunity to problem solve and revise a plan for a creative, collaborative solution. If I had jumped in, I would have deprived them of the learning that comes from the iterations of the creative process.



On a rainy day in the Open Program, Natalia created a block course for the game "Lava Monster." Many youth were drawn to the excitement of this activity. Stepping from one block to the next, they worked to keep their feet out of the lava and worked to find creative solutions to make their way around each other without falling in. One youth chose to use the edge of the turf from the bunny cage as a bridge around one of his peers. Another used a shoe so his toes did not slip into the hot lava. Two others gave each other a hug and spun around until they switched spots.



Youth in the Open Program worked together to create a lava course with the yoga blocks. Youth work on balancing their bodies as they walk the course without falling into the lava. **Above:** Charlie and Kellen. **Right:** Natalia.



As more and more youth joined in on this game, it became more challenging to make their way around each other on the path back home. Frustrations arose as each youth shared a wish to walk the path in both directions. With support from a facilitator to pause and reflect, one youth suggested altering the course to create a circle so they could walk continuously without having to find their way around each other.

In the Open Program, we know that frustration, conflict, and disagreements are all important parts of the creative process. This allows for our youth to gain skills in advocating for their own wishes/needs, while listening to others, so together they can create a collaborative solution where everyone feels heard. ☺

Weston experiments with a design for his "Floatie-Ball Person-Carrier," in Group I.

Creative Process with FLOATIE-BALL PERSON-CARRIERS

By Jane Sleutaris, Facilitator

Group I has enjoyed reading *Fortunately, the Milk* aloud this year and our imaginations were captured by the "Floatie-Ball Person-Carrier" (FBPC), a playfully named hot air balloon in the book. One related activity demonstrates the iterative nature of the creative process. Youth were challenged to create a FBPC that could carry a passenger, and hover. Youth started with a helium-filled balloon and were invited to use materials from the program space to make their creation. The passenger could be a Lego figure or a stick person fashioned from a pipe cleaner. Youth used stopwatches to time how long their FBPCs could float.

Following the FBPC challenge, we took time as a group to reflect on each individual's creative process, exploring questions such as: What was my process? How did I work through challenges? What worked well? What didn't work well? What would I do differently if I were to do this again? What did I learn from this experience?

Josh: At first I thought this was going to be easy and then when I tried it, it was actually really hard. My balloon was low on helium so when I tried it with a Lego figure, it just fell. I realized I could never make a FBPC that added more weight than just the Lego figure, so I switched to a pipe cleaner person. Even this was frustrating and I never really actually got it to float. The longest it floated was 9.09 seconds but it was falling for that whole time. I learned that when you need to add weight, you shouldn't add too much weight.

Facilitator: *Is there a reason you didn't try switching to a material that was lighter than plastic for the person carrier?*

Josh: I don't know, I just tried cutting it back to see if that would make it lighter, but it made it too light. So I added more, and then less, and then more. I didn't want to waste the plastic by switching to another material.

Weston and Indy check the time on the stop watch to see how long the balloon hovered.



Wally uses a hole punch to create a hole that he can use to tie his balloon ribbon to his "person carrier."

Weston and Ollie each work on creating a "Floatie-Ball Person-Carrier" from a helium filled balloon and materials available in the Group I program space.

Josh cuts a piece from a cardboard tube to use as the "person carrier" for his "floatie-ball person-carrier."

Facilitator: *Did you feel frustrated or discouraged at any point in your process?*

Josh: I was very frustrated and I just wanted to give up but at the end it started floating a little bit and I got excited, but then it failed again. It was mostly just frustrating.

Ollie: It was very difficult because whenever I added more weight, it was too much weight, and whenever I tried to take some away it was too much. I tried a lot of different materials and my knots were never working that well either.

Facilitator: *Was there a time you felt like you wanted to give up?*

Ollie: Yes, the whole time actually. Well, there was one spot when I didn't feel that way... when the FBPC started to float up. I kept trying because there was nothing else to do.

Weston: The hard part [of the challenge] was the stuff that I added would always be too light or too heavy. I kept having to take material out or it would fall out. I started off adding cardboard and it was too heavy, so I took it out, cut a little off, and it was still too heavy, so I took it out and cut it again, and then it was better.

Facilitator: *What made you decide to try foam?*

Weston: I saw a piece of foam that Ollie cut off, laying on the floor and I thought...Oh, foam! Let's try foam and see how that works! And it did! I got the balloon to hover for 12.27 seconds.

Facilitator: *What made you keep going when it felt hard?*

Weston: When it worked and actually floated, it was fun, and I wanted to do it, but when the FBPC didn't float, it wasn't as fun.

Facilitator: *So having those little successes along the way kept you going?*

Weston: Yes. Every time, I just tried to get the FBPC higher and higher because it would work sometimes and it would still be fun. It got boring when it failed.

Indy: I kept on trying and I really wanted to give up but I realized that the foam worked so I kept trying it. Whenever I added more foam, the FBPC would sink, and when I added less it would go up instantly, so I kept trying and trying and trying and then I got tired.

Facilitator: *It sounds like maybe you weren't having enough successes to motivate you to keep going. Did you try switching materials?*

Indy: Yes, I tried pipe cleaners, but that didn't work well.

Wally: Josh and I started out working together and it didn't work. I waited for a while and tried on my own. I just tied my Lego guy to a piece of plastic and that piece of plastic was tied to a balloon. It kind of worked.

Facilitator: *What is something that you learned as you were working?*

Wally: I learned that you can't cut popsicle sticks with scissors, and that Lego figures are heavy.

Facilitator: *Did you get frustrated? How did you handle that?*

Wally: First I gave up, then I kept working, then I succeeded, kind of.

Facilitator: *What would each of you do differently if we were to do this again?*

Ollie: I would get a lighter piece of plastic and I would want to shape it like a box so I could put little pieces of scrap material in it to make it heavier and lighter inside instead of snipping pieces off and taping them back on.

Josh: I would make mine work. I don't know [how it would be different], but I would make it work.

Wally: I would do exactly what Megan did. I would make a basket like Megan's. I would use her design.

Indy: I would copy Megan's design and try to remake it, but I would make it a little differently. ©

Group II experimented with relief and counter-relief techniques as they hand carved rubber stamps.



Maggie, Cassidy, Lee, and Gwen watch with anticipation as their Lego zipline makes its way across the room during a Group II building challenge.



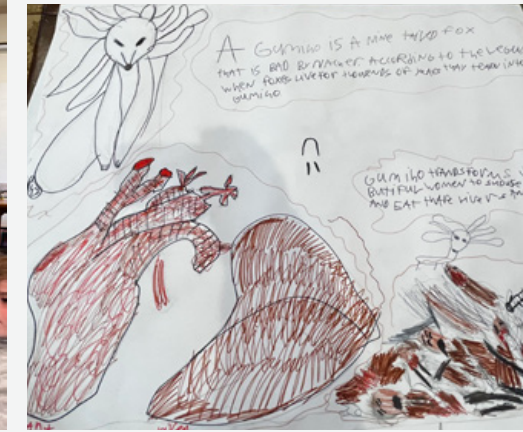
The artistic process can get quite messy, as evidenced by Lincoln's glue covered hands, as he creates 3-D tree art.



Gwen and Emmy launch their Lego zipline car while Lee and Maggie make adjustments to the landing platform.



As part of their study of the novel *When You Trap a Tiger*, Group II youth worked in pairs to create posters displaying various creatures from Korean mythology. This is the Gumiho, a nine-tailed fox that is a shape shifter.



Knife skills are something that Group II youth expressed an interest in exploring this year. A great way to get into carving safely is to carve soap. It is very easy to carve yet offers enough resistance to hone those skills.

Creative Process in Action!

By Michelle West, Facilitator



Catalaia and Emmy collaborate as they bring the vision of their maze to fruition: from conceptualizing to drafting to laying down the design in final form.



Marlon, Lincoln, Lee, Annabelle, and Henry collaborate to create pictures representing a theme they encountered in a Group II read-aloud book.



Nature study and art are a match made in heaven. During Group II, Christian mixes colors together to paint his 3D tree. Color mixing can be very finicky but when you get it, you get it!

Peek inside the Slate Room and it is easy to find evidence of the creativity that bursts forth from Group II's young people. Assorted materials in colorful, stacked bins beckon the youth, waiting for inspiration to strike. Cabinets are loaded with raw materials and recycled doo-dads, begging to be transformed. Completed projects are scattered on tables and shelves, displayed on the walls, and stuffed into cubbies in the coatroom. The magic of Open Connections, however, is not just found in the beautiful and surprising works created by our young people, nor in the abundant resources available to them. What sets OC apart is our approach to the creative process.

Nowhere is the creative process more on display than in the Art Studio. Although young people often skip out of this space proudly waving their art, the emphasis at the high tables is on

imagination and experimentation rather than on achieving a polished product. Group II youth this year have explored color mixing, shrinky-dinks, pencil drawing, watercolor painting, rubber stamp carving, leather working, whittling, shelter-building, journal making, glue painting, and more. They are encouraged to get their hands dirty, and try out their wildest ideas. While this often yields amazing results, first attempts often end up crumpled in the wastebasket and groans are heard when the execution can't seem to match the vision. In this space of frustration, facilitators are there to help. We can encourage a third try, or even a fourth. There is always more paper waiting, and always a mat ready to catch any spills.

To facilitate the creative process, it is often our role to encourage reflection and revision. Sometimes we do this by returning to

a project after a disappointing outcome. Rather than view a failure as the unhappy end of the project, we encourage youth to see it as a necessary step along the way to success. One collaborative project this year that was met with a lot of excitement was a Lego engineering challenge. The group's task was to work together to create two structures, ten feet apart, connected by a zip line. The zip line needed to carry two mini figures safely from one structure to the other. The struggle was real. Many ideas were implemented in isolation and none of the initial designs were able to meet the challenge. We gathered together to process the experience, air grievances, acknowledge a lack of communication, and we ended our day with a lot of sighs. The youth were surprised to find the Legos waiting for them again the next program day. With the second attempt, the group incorporated what they learned

from the initial setbacks. They recalibrated. They talked to each other and worked in teams. When various cars landed safely on the platform, young people were all able to celebrate a triumph made possible by failure.

So often in a traditional educational environment the emphasis is on a race to the end, and celebration is limited to those who finish first. An achievement-oriented, evaluative approach to learning can lead young people to fear failure. An emphasis on the creative process, on the other hand, encourages risk-taking. We celebrate all of the beauty that is made here at OC, but we also celebrate the innovation and creativity that is sometimes messy and ugly. ©

The Stages of Creative Process

By Kelly Dillon, Facilitator

Setting out to do something new can sometimes feel daunting. When a blank canvas, an unmarked piece of paper, an unsolved problem, or an unmet challenge is staring back at us, expectantly, we can feel immobilized. Where to begin? American composer and philosopher John Cage suggests, “Begin anywhere.”

In an article recently shared with me by a fellow OC facilitator, “Understanding the Four Stages of the Creative Process,” author Carolyn Gregoire contemplates creativity, and reflects on a theory penned by British psychologist Graham Wallas in his book, *The Art Of Thought* (1926). Wallas, like Gregoire, invested years in observing and studying innovators and artists. He developed a four-stage model detailing the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Creativity and the creative process can be found or applied in almost anything we do in life...from fine arts to writing to team-building challenges. With this thought in mind, let’s look at some Group III activities.

THE I-SEARCH PROJECT

The I-Search¹ is Group III’s annual research and writing project, and upon reflection, I find it fits into Wallas’ model, although not necessarily always maintaining a linear path. Stage 1 (preparation) involves choosing an I-Search topic of personal relevance. Youth start with some mind-mapping and peer feedback as they

each sift through sparks of interesting possibilities in search of one that might sustain their attention for the research and writing that lies ahead. Typically, this is followed by some initial, broad research that reveals directions for further investigation. Next comes Stage 2 (incubation) where reflection and contemplation lead to nurturing and refining a topic from the percolating possibilities. In Stage 3 (illumination) direction and clear purpose take hold, “I know what I want to find out, and have some ideas of where I might look for some answers.” In the final phase, Stage 4 (verification), analyzing, evaluating, and organizing information that supports and builds on the initial idea in question leads to sharing new learning with peers through a paper and a presentation. Naturally, dead-end resources, a need for further clarification, or perhaps an insightful interview may mean hopping back and forth between stages, resulting in a dance through the creative process, rather than a linear march.



Eli and Silas K. look over the boxwood seedlings planted by Group III youth—an activity prepared and facilitated by Silas as part of his I-Search presentation about bonsai.



Group III uses mind-mapping as a visual brainstorming tool to capture and/or organize ideas for an I-Search topic. Here, Carter captures possible points to research, both his own thoughts and some suggested by his peers, for an I-Search project about Dungeons and Dragons monsters.

MAGIC SHOES TEAM-BUILDING CHALLENGE

The creative process can be less clear and possibly overlooked in arenas outside of fine and applied art. How might the creative process stages be traversed within a team-building challenge? Following Group III’s Hot Lava experience (*Open Connections Magazine*: Winter 2022/3), youth tested their mettle in a similar fashion with a more complex collaborative challenge: *Magic Shoes*. The group’s challenge was to get the entire group across the 15 foot wide “poisonous peanut butter pit.” To aid the challenge, there was an imaginary pair of poison-repellant shoes at the group’s disposal, however, the shoes could only be worn once by each person, and in only one direction. Hmm. Where to begin?

In Stage 1 (preparation), some of the group started their mental wheels turning, gathering information as they imagined different scenarios in their heads. Others sought to gain insight by physically testing possibilities. Next came Stage 2 (incubation) where ideas were shared and/or demonstrated, and then reflected upon and contemplated, “Wait, let’s think this through.” “We won’t know if we don’t try.” Stage 3 (illumination) followed, “Piggyback is surely the solution.” However, Stage 4 (verification) quickly revealed that at best, the group would likely wind up divided on the two sides of the poisonous peanut butter pit. Huh. As author Brené Brown says, “There is no innovation and creativity without failure.”

After a group debrief (a return to Stage 1), where challenges and any successes were shared, further possibilities diagrammed, and next steps discussed, it was agreed that we would make the time to try again soon. During the interim there would be a return to Stage 2 (incubation) as youth pondered their experiences.

Several weeks later, Group III returned to the *Magic Shoes* conundrum in Stage 3 (illumination). They had an aha! to investigate: try carrying 2 people, 1 piggyback and 1 standing on the feet of the person wearing the ‘magic shoes’. With considerations of height, strength and personal space needs—this was easier said than done. However, with some waltzing among Stages 1 through 3 of the creative process, Group III entered Stage 4 (verification) and successfully danced the entire group safely over the poison peanut butter pit to victory on the other side. ©

¹The I-Search (Macrorie, 1998) empowers writers by making their self-selected questions about themselves, their lives, and their world the focus of the research and writing process—inviting them to learn about something that is personally interesting and significant for them—something they have the desire to understand more about. The strong focus on metacognition—paying attention to and writing about the research process methods and extensive reflection on the importance of the topic and findings—makes for meaningful and purposeful writing. (Adapted from <https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/promoting-student-directed-inquiry>)



Jude shares what he has learned about the evolution of video games in the Group III I-Search presentation he has prepared, including a slideshow supporting his research paper and an array of video game controllers.



Wearing the imaginary, poison peanut butter resistant shoes, Kaiyah carries Lyla on her back, and Everleigh on her feet as they partake in the Group III team-building challenge, *Magic Shoes*, one step at a time toward the finish line.

For this year's OC Story Fest, youth from Group IV and Shaping Your Life mixed together for the opportunity to work with different people. The youth were invited to reflect on the projects they created and share some insights into their creative process...

Ants Can Be Chill Like That

(A Live-Action Film)



Left: As part of a collaborative film-making project involving Shaping Your Life and Group IV members, Locke, Indi, Jamie, and Norah coordinate a shoot. This particular shot required multiple takes, as a high degree of teamwork was required to create the look the group desired; Indi and Jamie had to push back against Norah in a way that allowed her effort to look believable without overbalancing or ending up in the frame themselves! Right: Norah, Jack, Locke, and Jamie plan the sequence for their next shoot.

When starting our project, it was crucial that we cooperate and be open and flexible while brainstorming ideas. Being able to bounce ideas off one another allowed us to create a more complete and well-rounded film. For example, someone could offer an initial idea about a scene that would be shared and improved until the group was happy with it. Combining ideas and working collaboratively helped us to take the project in a positive direction that the entire group was happy with.

–Jamie, *Group IV*

At the beginning of this project, we thought we were going to make a film using a hybrid of animation and live action, but we decided that because none of us could animate, and didn't have time to learn, we would do live action. We also filmed some scenes that were not used because of changes that were made to the story through the filmmaking process. In the end I was satisfied with the final product, despite (or because of) the changes that were made.

–Jack, *Group IV*

One key element that impacted our film group's creative process was planning. We started by writing out each scene. Next, I figured out who was needed for each scene and where we would film them. We then figured out how we should use the remaining dates. We worked through making goals for each week to come.

I recorded all of the information and color coded it. While this may sound rigid and not creative, we built in wiggle room for the unexpected. The size of our group presented challenges, but the early and thorough planning was essential for us to stay on schedule and be able to complete the project.

–Norah, *Shaping Your Life*

During the process of making this film, everyone in our group played a part in keeping each other motivated, which made it very different from working alone. Whether it was making a joke, or finding a funny blooper, the humor we shared as a group helped us to keep our pace and finish this creative project on time.

–Indiana, *Group IV*

Creative collaboration was a significant part of our film as we had a five person group. Initially, there were many conflicting ideas to talk through and a lot of time was spent making decisions and plans. As we worked through the process, having many hands allowed us to do more with the time given to us. Editing was a prime example of this, because while some of the group was editing the footage, others were finding music and sound effects, and composing the credits. In the end, the benefits of collaboration far outweighed the negatives, as our final film reflected everyone's ideas.

–Locke, *Group IV*

Ironwater Manor

(Collaborative short fiction in 4 parts)

With the Story Fest project, four of us decided to write a short story that takes place in the same setting but at one hundred year intervals, ending in 2023. Working in a group aided my creative process because it allowed me to gain peer feedback/direction for my story and this gave me a basic framework for my writing. These limitations served as a structure, because I wasn't starting completely from scratch. This helped me find a starting point where my story could grow.

–Hannah, *Shaping Your Life*

I'm not very used to writing with other people. I usually just follow whatever idea catches my interest, but when this became a group project, the idea I was initially inspired to pursue was suddenly not an option. Instead there was an idea I was much less inspired to work with and I had to reverse my process. Instead of finding an idea I was interested in I had to find what interested me about an idea. This became an exercise that I found very fulfilling and produced a product I was proud to share with the community.

–Eliza, *Shaping Your Life*

I'm a devout believer in the power of imagination; the purpose of stories is to inspire new tales. When using mythology, research is key and is my favorite phase of the project. I love to write stories that fall well outside of my expertise. For this project, I chose Irish mythology, which I knew little about, and I did lots of research. Despite being virtually unknown, it doesn't get better than the ghost of a magic vampire dwarf. I loved writing and sharing my work with the OC community.

–Elliot, *Group IV*



Eliza, Elliot, Evelyn and Hannah brainstorm ideas for their collaborative writing project "Ironwater Manor" in which each of them will tell a story from a different time period at the manor.

Ella and Aminah built the set for their stop motion animation over the course of a few weeks. They are finally ready to begin filming "Skin & Bones."



Skin & Bones

(A stop-motion film)

When it comes to creative projects, I consider myself a dreamer: ideas and inspiration come easily to me, but it's less often that I actually pursue them. This is why it was helpful for me to work with a partner on the Story Fest project. I came up with the idea to do a stop motion animation, and immediately felt intimidated by the idea of doing it all myself. Thankfully, Aminah was able to connect with the project too, and her collaboration with the sets and other creative elements made the project less daunting and much more enjoyable.

–Ella, *Shaping Your Life*

I was sick on the day the groups were coming up with ideas for the Story Fest, so I joined Ella who already had an idea for a story but wanted help. She had the basic plot in mind, and when I joined her I got to help figure out what the set and characters were going to look like, and how to make them. I have noticed that sometimes I find it easier to work together and build upon someone else's idea, compared with coming up with one on my own.

–Aminah, *Shaping Your Life*

Choral Reading
Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout
 By Shel Silverstein

For our choral reading, we wanted to emphasize Shel Silverstein's use of language and humor. There was a lot to our creative process, but what stood out for me was the balance of teamwork involved and individual roles taken. Through lots of practice and discussion, we figured out who would say what line, when we would speak simultaneously, and how we would use our voices expressively. Norah took on the organizer role by highlighting everybody's lines, while Aminah worked out the choreography, and I offered feedback on our choices. Our final performance was a creative collaboration that was stronger than if we had worked separately.

—Evelyn, *Group IV*



Aminah, Norah, and Evelyn practice their choral reading of a Shel Silverstein poem in preparation for OC Story Fest '23.

Paranoize
 (Soundscape)

I have a fascination with sound in film and the often unsung role that it plays in storytelling. Previously I had heard various soundscapes online or in art exhibits, however all of these were more focused on creating an environment rather than storytelling. For Story Fest, I decided I wanted to make a soundscape that told a story. A few years ago, in a class on sound editing, I learned how to use tools like field recordings and sound libraries. These factors combined to inspire me, and gave me the confidence to take a risk and pursue this interest as a solo project.

—Ruby, *Shaping Your Life*

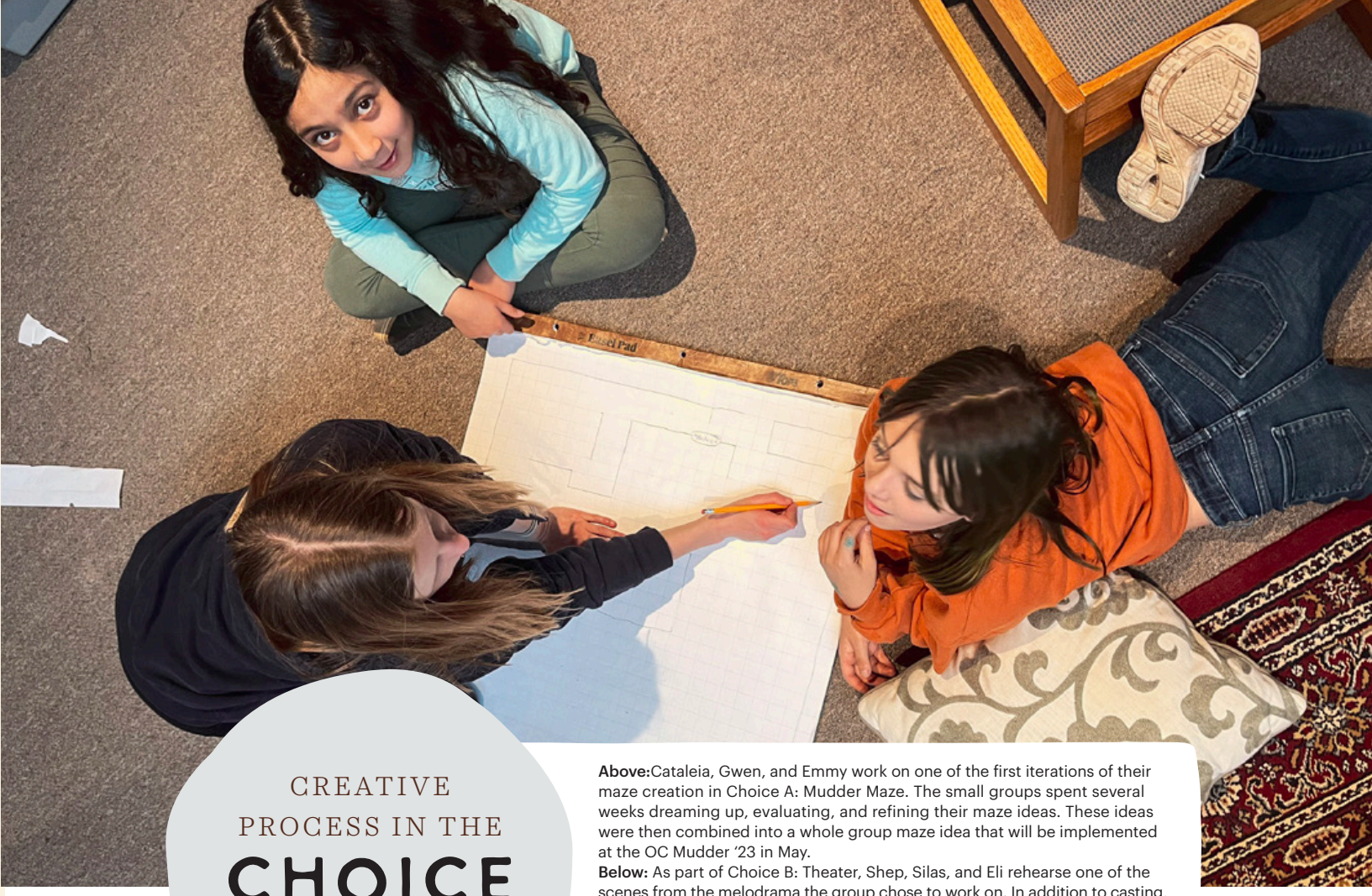
Søren adds hand-drawn animation elements to the live action mockumentary he created in collaboration with other youth.



The Monster of the Lake
 (Live-action Mockumentary with Animation)

I'm both a dreamer and doer when it comes to creative projects, although the dreamer side is stronger. I constantly come up with new ideas and I execute the ones I'm particularly interested in. With my group's Story Fest mockumentary, I wanted to animate two full scenes. Due to technical difficulties, I had to problem solve how to layer animation over live-action film, which ended up looking different than what the group and I originally imagined. While it may not have exactly matched my dream, I am glad that I persisted to figure it out.

—Søren, *Group IV & Choice B ©*



CREATIVE
 PROCESS IN THE
**CHOICE
 PROGRAMS**

Above: Cataleia, Gwen, and Emmy work on one of the first iterations of their maze creation in Choice A: Mudder Maze. The small groups spent several weeks dreaming up, evaluating, and refining their maze ideas. These ideas were then combined into a whole group maze idea that will be implemented at the OC Mudder '23 in May.
Below: As part of Choice B: Theater, Shep, Silas, and Eli rehearse one of the scenes from the melodrama the group chose to work on. In addition to casting, blocking, and rehearsing the scenes, group members raided the attic and other corners of campus for costumes, various set pieces and props!



Taking square stock and making it round sounds pretty simple but Lincoln found out things aren't always what they seem. He tried a block plane and even sandpaper but could not get the results he was looking for. After some discussion Lincoln decided to give a spokeshave a try. New learning is always exciting, especially when it works!



Max works on creating a topographic map of Mount Potato in Choice B: Where Am I? This involved shaping the potato into a landscape of his choice, cutting it into slices of even thickness, and then tracing around those slices to create the lines showing the same altitude on the potato. This photo shows his second attempt that includes some hills and a ravine. He was able to build on what he learned from working with his first, simpler potato mountain and from observing others' efforts in order to create a more complex topographic map.



Choice A:
WOODSHOP By Chris McNichol, Facilitator

In the wood shop, the Creative Process starts with an idea or a design concept that the young person wants to bring to life. The youth will then begin to sketch out their idea on paper, taking into account the size, shape, and type of wood they plan to use. Once the design is finalized, they select the appropriate tools and materials to begin crafting their piece. As they work, they may encounter challenges or make changes to their design along the way, allowing their creativity to evolve and adapt as they go. The end result is a unique, handcrafted piece that reflects the young person's vision and skill.



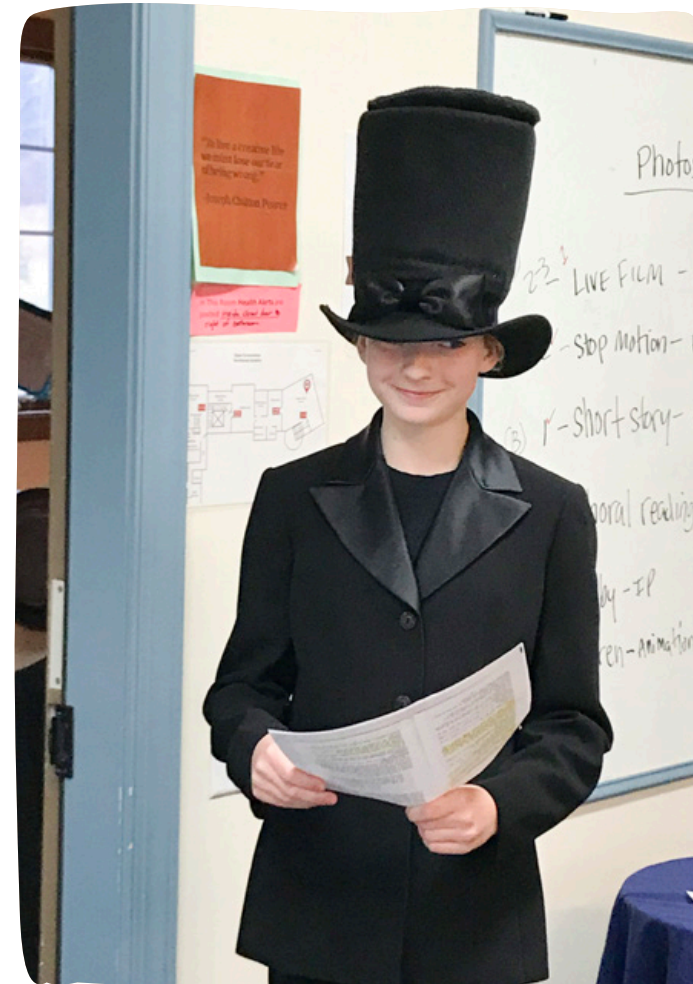
Josh displays his half pipe ramp he built for his Tech Deck skate park during Choice A: Woodshop. Josh was having trouble figuring out how to curve the wood for the ramp. After briefly exploring the possibilities of soaking and bending a board he figured he could use short strips of wood he found in the scrap bin. Josh attached the boards across the ramp and was able to follow the curve without having any gaps.

Choice B:
WHERE AM I? By Heather Gosse, Facilitator

One day in Choice B: Where Am I, youth used either one angle and one distance or two angles to accurately locate trees on a map in relation to a baseline fence. Each group made multiple attempts as they developed their understanding of the process. Depending on the group, this involved practicing skills, learning how to scale their real-life measurement down to map size, and experimenting with the different methods to understand how each worked to produce an accurate map.

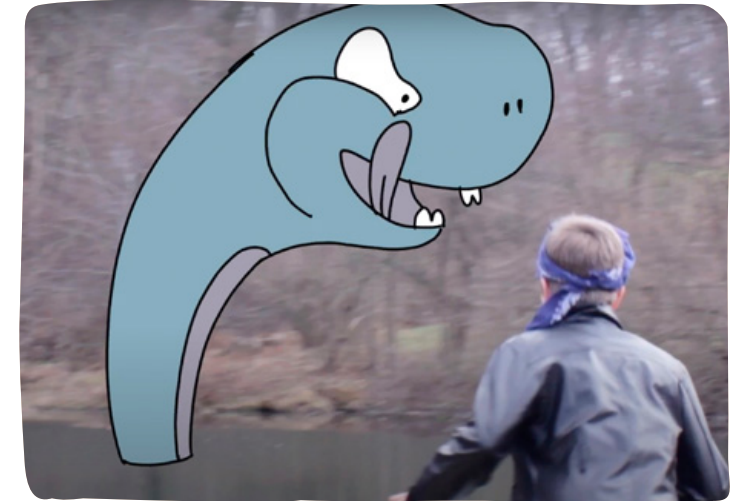
Choice B:
THEATER By Heather Gosse, Facilitator

Choice B: Theater incorporates a large amount of creative process! Although certain elements of the production are clearly determined by the playwright's words, the group takes ownership of the production as a whole. New ideas bubble up constantly, then get tested and refined. How should we make the scenery? Can we add musical accompaniment? Should we have someone entertaining the audience during scene changes? The group enjoyed turning the words on the page into a multidimensional theatrical production which they shared with the rest of the Choice Programs on the last day of the session.



Character development is one aspect of creative process explored in Choice B: Theater. Here, Everleigh sports her villain outfit as she experiments with how best to enact this key character. Melodrama in particular gives a chance to try out various larger-than-life stock characters, such as this villain, who is crafty, evil, vain, and also a bit blundering!

Danny interacts with an animation in a scene from "Monster of the Lake" featured during OC Story Fest '23. This scene was one of many that was revised and edited as new discoveries were made during Choice B: Documentary.



Choice B:
DOCUMENTARY

By Sarah Becker, Facilitator

Youth in Choice B: Documentary start by exploring some of the most common elements in documentaries. Soon, they were crafting their own films! While many of these pieces took a turn towards fictional mockumentary, the creative process was ever-present. A group would plan, film, and then edit a scene, only to recognize that it was the wrong angle or too lengthy, leading the group back to the proverbial drawing board. Due to the length of the choice session, people were able to engage with this iterative creative process over the eight week session. Some wonderfully produced documentaries made their way into the OC Story Fest '23, and are great examples of the fruits of the creative process.



During one of the last weeks of Choice B: Documentary, Evelyn and Uma work on editing the final cut of their documentary, "Finding Tree," which was featured during the OC Story Fest '23.

During Choice A: Find Your Way with Clay, Emmy finds inspiration in an example building that has lived for many years on the shelves in the Art Studio. She used the piece to create templates that she could then cut from a slab, and assemble into something similar.



Choice A & Choice B: FIND YOUR WAY WITH CLAY

By Kelly Dillon, Facilitator

There is a lot of weaving in and out, and back and forth, within the various stages of the creative process during both Choice A and Choice B: Find Your Way With Clay choice offerings. It can look and feel like a dance, sometimes fluid and sometimes intermittent or contradictory, between what is imagined and how it takes shape. Beginnings can start with an image on paper, or something pleasing that happens as a bit of clay is pinched or coiled. Progress can be concrete, with a clear sight on what's next, or more ambivalent; "I'm not sure where I'm going with this." Generally, the innovative, creative growth sweet spot is found within the balance of inspiration and implementation.



Choice B: Find Your Way with Clay kicked off with instinctual, intuitive pinching. Pinching techniques have a long history, with evidence that this was the means that early hominids used to make the first pots. We explored more hand-building techniques, providing youth with skills to craft unique ideas from their own imagination, or replicate something they have seen and admired.

How do you determine the volume of the Barn? The Choice B: Think How, Think What? group divided up and took on different tasks. While part of the group measured the outside perimeter of the building, Evie, Danny, Søren, Silas, and Locke tackled the challenge of the peaked roof. How would they measure the height of the roof peak? Their final solution (one that didn't disregard personal safety) used a ladder, large measuring tape, and a long metal pole.



Choice B: THINK HOW, THINK WHAT?

By Rick Sleutaris, Facilitator

How many grains of rice are needed to fill the Barn? Youth were given only a bag of rice and an open invitation to ask for whatever they needed. Over the course of two hours they requested various items including a ladder, large measuring tapes, architectural maps and measuring cups in an effort to find the "answer." Just as important, they documented the assumptions they made along the way. After multiple twists, turns, and false starts they came up with an approximation—we would need 11.2 trillion grains of rice to fill the space! ©

“There are forward and backward approaches to finding our way in the making of things: starting at the beginning and making our way toward the end, or sometimes beginning at the end and finding our way back to a place we might start.”



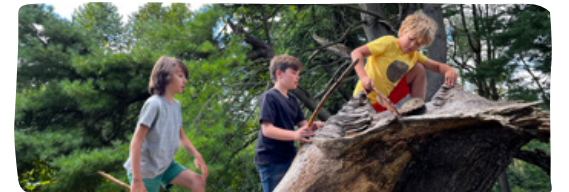
Levi shares a warm smile and loving snuggles with one of the bunnies the Open Program is raising.



Spring foraging challenge! Group III gathers to inspect a number of specimens of plants growing just beyond the doors of the Group III program space. After reviewing identification, they will each gather a small portion to make a cup of tea.



Violet, Cealy, and Gracie take an opportunity to explore the creek while building friendship in the Open Program. Here they are in front of "Bug Hotel," where they used rocks and plants to create special spaces and vary the water flow of the stream for creative play.



Group II youth, Marlon, Lee, and Cassidy search for the perfect location for the shelter they will build for Blobby the robot. They need an understanding of scale, resourcefulness, and creativity to keep Blobby dry.



Levon and Nico engage in a game of Chess, an Open Program favorite, while Jack watches and waits for a turn.



This spring pairs of youth from Group III visited Group I during morning self-directed time to facilitate different games. One week, the Group III pair facilitated a classic OC conceptual development game using attribute blocks which inspired Group I youth Jack and Josh to explore it again the next week. Creating and solving challenges using attribute blocks and Venn Diagram circles develops the skills of identifying sets through logical and deductive reasoning.



During a Shaping Your Life group check-in about independent projects, Aminah takes us through her process of making the stained glass artworks that she's been working on since last year.



In the Open Program Reading Nook, Maks hones his reading skills and shares a story with Mattis and Luca. This is one of the many benefits of our multi-age programs.

Negotiating use of the blacktop space during lunch game time leads to a variety of outcomes, and this particular day the result was a rousing game of Team Handball including players from the Group III, Group IV, and Shaping Your Life programs. Here, Locke looks for an open teammate for the next pass.



Campus Corner

by Sarah Becker,
Facilitator and Assistant Director

Uma, Everleigh and Kaiyah collaborate to create a large Venn diagram with chalk on the blacktop that will be used in a group experience for Group III.



The alternative and innovative uses of The Blacktop at OC are where fun and play collide with the engaging program offerings. The synergistic magic of this outdoor space shines.



Left: Group III folks take turns asking questions with given choices, and reply by positioning themselves within an area of a Venn diagram that aligns with their response. The experience can reveal commonalities and areas of uniqueness. Below: Basketball has been a hot sport with the youth at OC this year and Group II is no exception. Henry, Maggie, Gwen and Emmy play a wet but spirited game of Knockout on the Blacktop.



The Magic of the OC Blacktop

Behind the Barn and down the hill is a flat area that was first a garden and then a tennis court when this property was owned by the Hare family. Part of the flat area has since been paved with asphalt and while it may not look like anything special to the average bystander, the community here at Open Connections can attest to this space being so much more than just a bit of pavement. On any given day, you might see a rousing game of basketball, handball, or dodgeball; sometimes there is a full court game occurring while two separate games of four square are also underway. The Blacktop definitely allows youth to explore various traditional kinesthetic activities, get exercise, burn excess energy, and also practice important interpersonal skills. The alternative and innovative uses of The Blacktop at OC, however, are where fun and play collide with the engaging program offerings, and where the synergistic magic of this outdoor space shines. Let's take a peek!

This year, Group III kicked off the start of the program year with a Venn diagram activity. To better illustrate the use and applications of this graphic tool, they headed to The Blacktop with chalk in hand. After the first set of three circles were drawn, youth started to investigate the intersectionality of topics, concepts, and preferences. Each

of three intersecting circles was assigned a specific attribute: for example, baseball, basketball, and hockey. In this example, youth sorted themselves into which sport(s) they would prefer to play. As the activity progressed, more questions were posed, and the complexity of the topics increased. Eventually, we started to discuss the three broad life skill areas that are central to our philosophy at Open Connections. Looking at our Venn diagram, we wondered, where certain skills belong? For example, does the creative process belong in the impersonal circle or the interpersonal circle? What about the I-search projects that Group III works on every year; where do they fit in this Venn diagram? Breaking out of the program space into an arena where we are more free to use a kinesthetic approach to learning can help some youth to grapple with these more abstract concepts.

In another program, the Choice A: Mudder Maze group spent the first few days of the eight-week session planning maze designs so that we would be able to scale them up for the upcoming OC Mudder '23. In order to get a sense of the size of the mazes, as well as to problem solve around any trouble spots in design, youth headed down to The Blacktop to use it as a proving ground. When youth were able to engage with their designs to-scale, it put their projects into perspective. Comments varied from how small their designs were in real life to the astonishment of seeing their framework laid out in such a huge format. This exercise also proved to be a bit of a reality check for the amount of work and labor involved in designing a life-size maze. The creative process around maze design takes some time!

From play and games, or synthesizing new concepts, to envisioning the design of a maze and beyond, The Blacktop at Open Connections brings people together and helps to form and strengthen the foundation of Open Connections: our community. ©

COMMUNITY DAYS

BY PARENT CONNECTIONS



Winter Marketplace



Egg Hunt



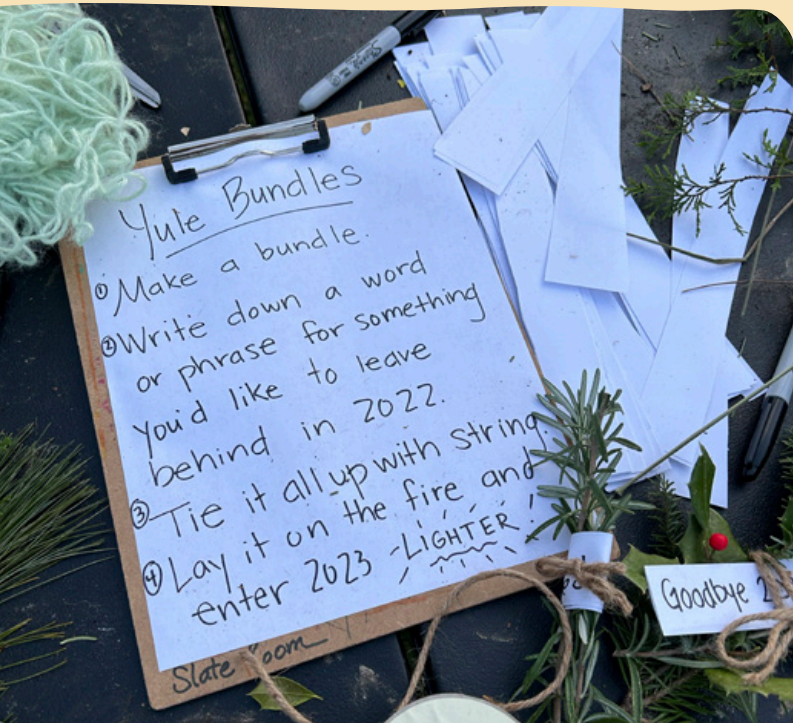
Solstice Celebration



Group Games



Youth Projects





A DAY IN THE LIFE OF *Eliza Copeland*, OC teen

My days away from OC don't usually have a specific schedule, but there is a set of things I tend to do. I usually start my day with a cup of tea and spend some time reading before getting dressed. Creative expression through clothes and makeup is important to me, so I often spend a good amount of time figuring out exactly how I want to present myself for the day.

After that I move on to my schoolwork. My academics this year have been primarily focused around getting the remaining credits I need to graduate from high school. I have been taking online classes in Geometry, Government, and an SAT preparation class, but I have also found space to pursue my interests while still fulfilling credit requirements. I have been doing a self-created course to do a deep dive into one of my favorite authors, Charles Dickens, by reading several of his books and studying his life for a literature credit. I have also been completing a self-created poetry elective consisting of reading and writing different types of poetry.

We all know that homeschooling looks different for everyone. We want to know what our community does on days when the youth are not running around Open Connections. Here is a glimpse of how one OC teen handles her days. Eliza attends OC on Tuesday and Thursdays in the Shaping Your Life program. Eliza is a long-time homeschooler.

Another consistent part of my life is writing. Though I don't have it scheduled into my day, I always find at least a brief moment to work on one of my many writing projects. I like to work in lots of different media and genres from poetry and science fiction to novels and mystery. Recently I've been exploring the medium of short stories, specifically horror stories, using the art of Andrew Wyeth as inspiration.

Most days I will spend time with my parents, such as taking a walk with my Mom, or eating lunch with my Dad. By the time I am finished with all of this, I take a few minutes to clean up my space and move on to evening activities, which often include spending time with my family or friends in some manner. I usually end the day with some more reading or by watching a light TV show to unwind, and that's a day in my life! ☺



During the Open Program, Violet and Luca closely observe tadpoles that they caught from the pond, before releasing them back into their habitat.



Group III youth, Everleigh, Elic and Silas P. research animals who will be competing in the 2023 March Mammal Madness. The insights gained from research will aid in making informed choices for the brackets they are preparing for the event.



Open Program youth, Addy, Fina, and Deililah share in conversation while watching chickens run and relaxing on the porch swing.



Group IV members visit the rope aisle at Home Depot to see what they have to offer and do some hands-on comparison of the different options. This trip was part of researching building supplies for their catapults for the Group IV Engineering Expo.



Theo, Gracie, and Lila check the incubator to see if our chickens have hatched. To their surprise, a little beak was poking out of its shell, getting ready to break free.

ALUMNI INTERVIEW

Trey duPont-Andrew



What led you/your family to OC?

My parents were looking for an alternative to traditional schooling because they disagreed with some of the practices traditional schools follow. However, they still wanted the social aspect that school offered of being around other people my age, so full-on homeschooling didn't seem like the right option. I did go to a preschool/kindergarten for a little while before finding OC, but OC seemed to fit my family and my interests much better. From as early as I can remember, I spent a lot of time outside at the park near our house or going to the local library, zoo, or museum to explore and learn. I think OC's mission of learning through creativity and exploration appealed to us because that's what we were doing before we'd even heard of OC.

At what age did you start at OC? What programs were you involved in?

I was 5 years old when I started in the Open Program. Over the years I did The Naturalist program, all the Choice programs and Group Programs, and eventually Shaping Your Life. In short, I did most of OC's programs between age 5 (2005) and 18 (2018) when I graduated. I think my favorite programs were The Naturalist and some of the Choice offerings. I always loved the woodshop and survival skills offerings with Chris McNichol. The Art of the Disc offering one year is what spawned my love for ultimate frisbee, leading me to join my college team freshman year, and compete until I graduated.

What have you been up to since leaving/graduating from OC?

After OC I went to college at Susquehanna University in central PA. I graduated in the spring of 2022 with a bachelor's degree in environmental science, and some great memories. Since then, I have been working for a conservation corp doing conservation work in southeastern and southwestern United States. I was in Asheville, NC, for 3 months and am currently in Flagstaff, AZ. This entails living in dormitory style housing on off days with the rest of the corp members, and then backcountry or front-country backpack camping during work projects. The work consists mostly of working with/for the National Park Service or the U.S. Forest Service building and maintaining trails in national parks and forests, as well as doing invasive species management, historical renovation, and habitat restoration in historic sites, national monuments, and public lands.

How did OC impact you?

I spent 13 years of my life from wee lad to full blown teenager attending OC so I'm sure it impacted me in more ways than I can imagine. I know for a fact it was a big part of why I chose to pursue environmental science and conservation in college and after. As I mentioned, The Naturalist program was one of my favorites but that was far from the only thing that impacted my later decisions. Just having the opportunity to spend time outside on and around the OC campus almost every day was huge. I remember a few field trips to an arboretum, a farm, and a bird rescue/research area which all added to my interest in outdoors and conservation.

The Science Lab in the Barn also definitely had an impact on my college experience. Sue Wenger (former facilitator) and the science programs she offered were some of my favorites. Not only did I major in EENV, I also worked throughout college as a water resources/geophysics lab TA, an environmental science department assistant, and a summer scientific research intern. As mentioned, OC got me into ultimate frisbee which resulted in some of my best memories and friends, as well as getting the opportunity to travel around to play other college teams on the weekends during the spring and fall seasons.

What did you find useful about your time at OC?

I think the broad range of subject matter I was introduced to at OC was very helpful for me after I graduated. The variety helped me narrow down what I was and was not interested in, and helped me enjoy and do well in (most of) the different subjects I had to take as part of a liberal arts college education. I think



the freedom that facilitators gave us was also really helpful when it came to my time in college. It put a lot of the responsibility on the young person to put in and get out as much as they wanted to, which is very similar to what's expected in college. I learned that I had to take the initiative not only during class, but also on my own time if I wanted to make the most of my experience. In short, the sooner you learn how to prioritize things and use your time wisely, the less soul-crushing stress and anxiety you'll go through when you get thrown into higher ed or work. That doesn't mean hold "schoolwork" above everything or spend all your time on it, rather, learn how to get what needs to be done accomplished so you can have more time to do what you want.

How did OC hone your Self-Understanding, your Intrapersonal Skills?

I think OC helped me gain self-confidence because the environment was fairly non-judgmental. I felt comfortable pursuing my interests without changing them to fit the "social norms," plus there were usually other people at OC who had similar interests. As cliché as it sounds, OC also showed me that I was capable of so much more than I thought. There are plenty of examples I could give, but the Symposium we were required to do before graduating is a big one. I remember dreading it ever since I first heard about it. I'd always been introverted and hated public speaking so standing up in front of a bunch of people by myself and talking for what felt like ages sounded absolutely miserable. I figured there was no way I could get out of it so I decided to just practice enough to make sure I didn't make a complete fool out of myself. I chose a topic I was interested in so it felt less like work, and practiced my speech over and over again. In the end it

turned out well; I surpassed my very low expectations and when it was over I wasn't as relieved as I thought I'd be. That experience undoubtedly helped me when I had to present my senior thesis in college and all the other presentations I had to give after graduating from OC.

How did OC help you grow your Interpersonal Skills?

Compared to just homeschooling, which was probably the alternative if we hadn't found OC, OC was much better for growing interpersonal and social skills. I learned how to work in small groups, lead when I had to, and contribute as a member when I didn't. This helped me in college but especially in the conservation job I am working now. When we are out working on trails or making dinner at camp, being able to work with other people, both people you've just met and long time friends, is very important. In Shaping Your Life we worked with Middle Eastern refugees a couple of times as well as people from a nearby retirement home. It was a great way to make conversations and connections with people of more diverse backgrounds than were present at OC. Even though my closest friends were made outside of OC, I still keep up with a few friends from my time there and I have some great memories of the time I spent with them both at and away from OC.





How did OC help you develop your Creative/ Implementation Skills, your Impersonal Skills?

The problem-solving skills I learned at OC have helped in many ways. I realized in college and at work that being able to figure things out by yourself or bring good creative problem-solving skills to a group is invaluable. Not only does it often result in better end products, it also saves time, which is great when you're working on a class project, paper, work assignment, or really any everyday challenge you don't want to spend ages on.

I also think one of my biggest assets is that I'm well rounded in a lot of things. I may not be great at any one thing, but being able to do many things decently well has been much more helpful. I reckon OC had a lot to do with that. You get to learn and experience so many different things during programming time and in the extra time you get when you're not in programming.

If you had not gone to OC, imagine how you might be different.

It's hard to imagine that seeing as until I turned 18, I had been at OC for as long as I could remember. I don't want to repeat myself but I think many of the skills I picked up along the way that I've already written about would not be as well developed. I can't say

if I would have done strictly homeschooling/unschooling or gone to a more traditional school, but either way I think OC (which is kind of a mix of both) was the best option.

What advice would you give to youth just starting out on their OC journey?

I'd say stick with it and give it a chance. I remember it took me a little while to really appreciate all that OC had to offer and actually start to enjoy it. Just being able to go to OC is a privilege, so give it a real try but ultimately do what you think is best. Also, don't worry too much about how OC might affect your chances of getting into college or a good job in the future. I remember I was worried when I first started looking into college thinking that not having the traditional classes, GPA, and transcripts would hurt my chances. In reality, I had no problem getting into the college I wanted to and getting a solid academic scholarship to boot. The colleges and jobs that I think matter are looking for someone who is smart practically, can communicate, work hard, and get along with others. Plus, you can (and probably should to an extent) always supplement OC with online or book learning for subjects like math and English or whatever you feel is lacking.

What wisdom could you offer to parents of new OC youth?

Same thing I said to the youth, give it a chance, don't be too worried about future chances of them getting into colleges or jobs, and utilize everything OC offers. It's really an individual decision though so I don't want to encourage or discourage you. I think traditional school is the right choice for some people, homeschooling/unschooling, OC, or a mix of them for others.

What favorite memory of OC would you like to share?

There was one choice program about the history and culture of skateboarding. That was by far one of my favorite offerings, right up there with Art of The Disc. I remember one day our group went out on the blacktop with our boards and set up some features to skate. That and the OC Mudder every year, great times with a great group of people. ☺

ALUMNI

June 3rd is the 2nd Annual OC Alumni Connections Summer Shindig!

We will be firing up the grill and busting out the lawn games. We look forward to you and your family joining us on campus to connect with old friends, and make new connections. We'd love to know you're coming. You can use the QR code to RSVP. Questions? Please email alumni@openconnections.org



Development Corner

Campus is literally buzzing with activity right now as we are all preparing for the end of the program year, Pausing Ceremony, our second annual Summer Alumni Connections Event, Camp OC, and all of the wonder that these warmer months bring.

Our Annual Giving Campaign, Keep Exploring, is progressing well and we are getting close to our goal of \$20,000. At the time of this printing, we have met just over 86% of our goal. We are so grateful to the supportive OC community for contributing to the success of this campaign. Community members have engaged with "Keep Exploring" in a myriad of ways: from financial contributions, to volunteering and beyond. We are continuing to explore ways to extend the reach of the OC mission and to create connections beyond the borders of campus. Through contributions to our development efforts, we will continue to empower our community to create and live their lives full of purpose and fulfillment.

Several other development efforts at OC show the way that the community supports each other. In December, the annual OC Winter Marketplace brought together community vendors and shoppers. The Group IV program took on the task of organizing the whole event this year, as well as making OC merchandise to sell. As in the past, all vendors committed to donate a percentage of their proceeds to our Sustainability Fund and this year the donations totaled over \$1,000! This fund ensures a secure future for the organization and allows OC to provide tuition assistance to those in need.

A second event that was warmly supported by our community was the Silent Auction, a fundraising event hosted by the teens in the Shaping Your Life program. The event was so prosperous that not only were they able to fully finance their youth-planned trip to Salem, MA, they were also able to fund a trip to Philadelphia for the day where they explored the Mütter Museum and the Barnes collection. The ways that this community shows up to provide the most robust and rewarding learning experiences for the youth continues to astound and enchant me.

Throughout the rest of the program year, the Development Committee will continue to raise funds towards Keep Exploring. We are so grateful for every contribution to this campaign, regardless of the size. We love being able to show potential outside funders, to whom we are applying for large grants and major gifts, that we have a strong and committed community.

I hope that everyone has a fantastic summer and I cannot wait to connect and keep exploring our world together with you soon. Thank you again for your support, commitment, and enthusiasm for lifelong learning and Open Connections!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah E. Becker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Becker and the OC Development Committee



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Choice B: Interactive Art members pose with various electrical components that will be used in their creations during the eight-week long offering. Back: Søren, Logan, Danny, Locke, Front: Shep, Silas, and Ollie.



Youth in Choice A: Mudder Maze program their Lego robots to navigate one of two mazes. Lots of problem solving and collaboration were required to navigate the mazes, but all were successful in the end.



Sometimes the creative process leads us to unexpected places. In this picture Lincoln started this game with a short sentence but as you can see it quickly escalated!



Group III lines up and dribbles basketballs during a series of basketball drills facilitated by Elric as part of his I-Search project presentation about his growing interest and investment in the sport.



Willfully squishing everyone onto the same slide is the object of the game "squeeze the lemon." Kai, Wally, Nova and Jack enjoy a successful game in progress during a sunny Open Program day.



Wally dresses up as the cat for the Group I Story Fest Film "The Cat Came Back."



FREEDOM *to*
LEARN *and*
CREATE

