

Open Connections

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Open Connections Magazine

Issue 77 | Summer 2021

Mission

Open Connections Magazine is a print publication devoted to extending the work of Open Connections, Inc.—our non-profit organization—beyond the physical boundaries of the Open Connections Village—our education center located on a twenty-eight-acre farm in a western suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The work of Open Connections, Inc., is to promote an approach to human development that we refer to as Open Education. It includes: an emphasis on self-directed learning (as opposed to a compulsory curriculum); experiential learning (doing something vs. only hearing or reading about it); conceptual development (valuing comprehension more than memorization); flexible thinking (the ability to innovate and create solutions when conventional answers aren't sufficient); collaboration (vs. competition); real work (vs. make-work); and process consciousness (an awareness of how the quality of process impacts on the probability of success in any sort of undertaking).

Open Connections Magazine exists primarily to espouse this approach to Open Education in general and OC's process consciousness in particular. We welcome submissions by writers devoted to exploring the importance of Open Education in their own lives and/or in the lives of their young people. 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).

Staff

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LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN: Jacey Lucas

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in this issue

Teen Perspectives on OC Philosophy	4
Words Presents from our 2021 Graduates	14
Family Connections	18
Campus Corner	25
Introducing the Weller/Hurley Family	28
Development	31
Alumni Profile	32

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Margaret Welsh



Spring and Summer are times of visible growth in the natural world - the green leaves, the flowers, the baby animals. We are also seeing new growth in our community - new families are joining the OC Community and we look forward to getting to know them as we travel this life-learning path together. We also welcome into our community a new assistant director who brings with her a wealth of experience in the world of self-directed education.

As we continue to seek to understand ourselves and our mission, we look to our teens who have spent much of their youth at OC for their wisdom. Members of the Group Tutorial IV and Shaping Your Life programs wrote about the impact of the OC philosophy and process on their lives. Another testament to the impact of participation in OC programs comes to us from an alumna who

appreciates OC for encouraging her curiosity and helping her see how interconnected all disciplines are.

The OC Family Connections group has continued to connect and energize the community this year with additional gatherings on campus for clay-work, basket weaving, baking, Earth Day, and community gardening. The most recent Community Day coincided with the 8th annual Group Tutorial IV Science Expo. These teens were well spoken about their research and appreciated the chance to share their research with the broader community.

Other treats in these pages include an interview with a current OC family, Word Presents to OC from our 2021 graduates, and a new Campus Corner feature.

As always, we hope that you enjoy the articles and pictures in this magazine and welcome your thoughts and possibly submissions!

Happy Reading. *Margaret*



Group Tutorial IV teens shared the results of their scientific research with the community during our May Community Day and Science Expo.



Everyone gets a chance to try out the VR experience by playing Beat Saber with Oculus Quest 2 during Thomas' Peer Facilitation on Virtual Reality in Group Tutorial II.



Hannah sketches a tulip tree leaf and documents changes in "her" tree as a part of her interdisciplinary spring phenology project for Group Tutorial IV.



The Shaping Your Life team unloads an Intermediate Bulk Container from a pickup. The container will be used in the construction of a biogas digester that they have designed.



Lee and Miles, carefully place and glue family photos onto the accordion pages of their Family Culture books, which reflect their family's unique culture. Thursday Group Tutorial I explored different aspects of culture including recreation, food, home, language/story telling, music, tradition, and clothing.



Open Program youth, Nova and Luna, experiment with clay while building fine motor strength. All clay sculptures will be fired in the kiln and then be ready to be glazed.



During an afternoon spent on the Blacktop with Group Tutorial III, Elena sketches out a drawing that will explore the illusion of perspective in a 3D chalk chasm.



Madelyn, Cataleia, Lila, and Bronwyn enjoy a picnic lunch inside the outdoor fort space created by youth in the Open Program.

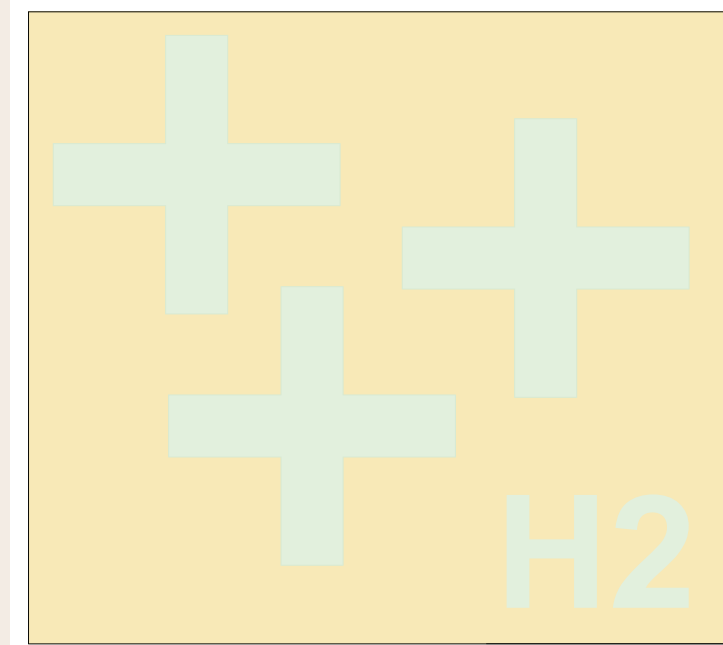
Teen Perspectives

on OC Philosophy

The years spent at Open Connections are an incredible time of metamorphosis, of gradual transitioning from early childhood to young adulthood. Our community is privileged to be able to observe youth undergo this change over the years we spend together and we see core OC concepts and values wind up as integral parts of their fully realized young adult selves. We asked the members of our teens in Group Tutorial IV (GTIV) and Shaping Your Life (SYL) to reflect on how the OC philosophy has helped them develop the perspectives through which they experience the world. We hope you enjoy seeing the value of Open Connections through their eyes.

"Since we couldn't exactly use a scale on something stuck in the ground, we had to get creative and spent the morning discussing what types of math we would need to use to figure out the solution. There were so many steps like measuring the tree stump, finding the density of the specific type of wood and then applying different equations to that data."

—Caroline, SYL



Graphic by Seda

Balanced Response

by Seda, Shaping Your Life

Growing up at Open Connections (OC) has been an amazing experience. It has taught me many skills that I have been able to use in my life outside of OC. Using Balanced Responses in OC programs to give balanced feedback on the papers, projects, and presentations that my peers have created is one of them. When I started my classes at Delaware County Community College* (DCCC), there was a bunch of work that I had to do, but it was fun and very much worth it. In my second semester at DCCC, I decided that it would be exciting to take an English composition class. My expectations of the work that we would have to do were fairly accurate, much reading, and even more writing; however, we also had to give a lot of peer review and feedback on papers, questions, and observations made about the reading. The feedback was something that I felt comfortable with because of OC and even had an outline to go off of, so during that class, I used the balanced response format (at least 3 pluses and then possible improvements phrased as "How to..." to give feedback to my peers in the class. It was great to be able to bring something that I learned at OC to another part of my life, at DCCC in my English class and other classes that I have taken since then.

*Many OC teens combine OC programs with also taking classes at local community colleges.

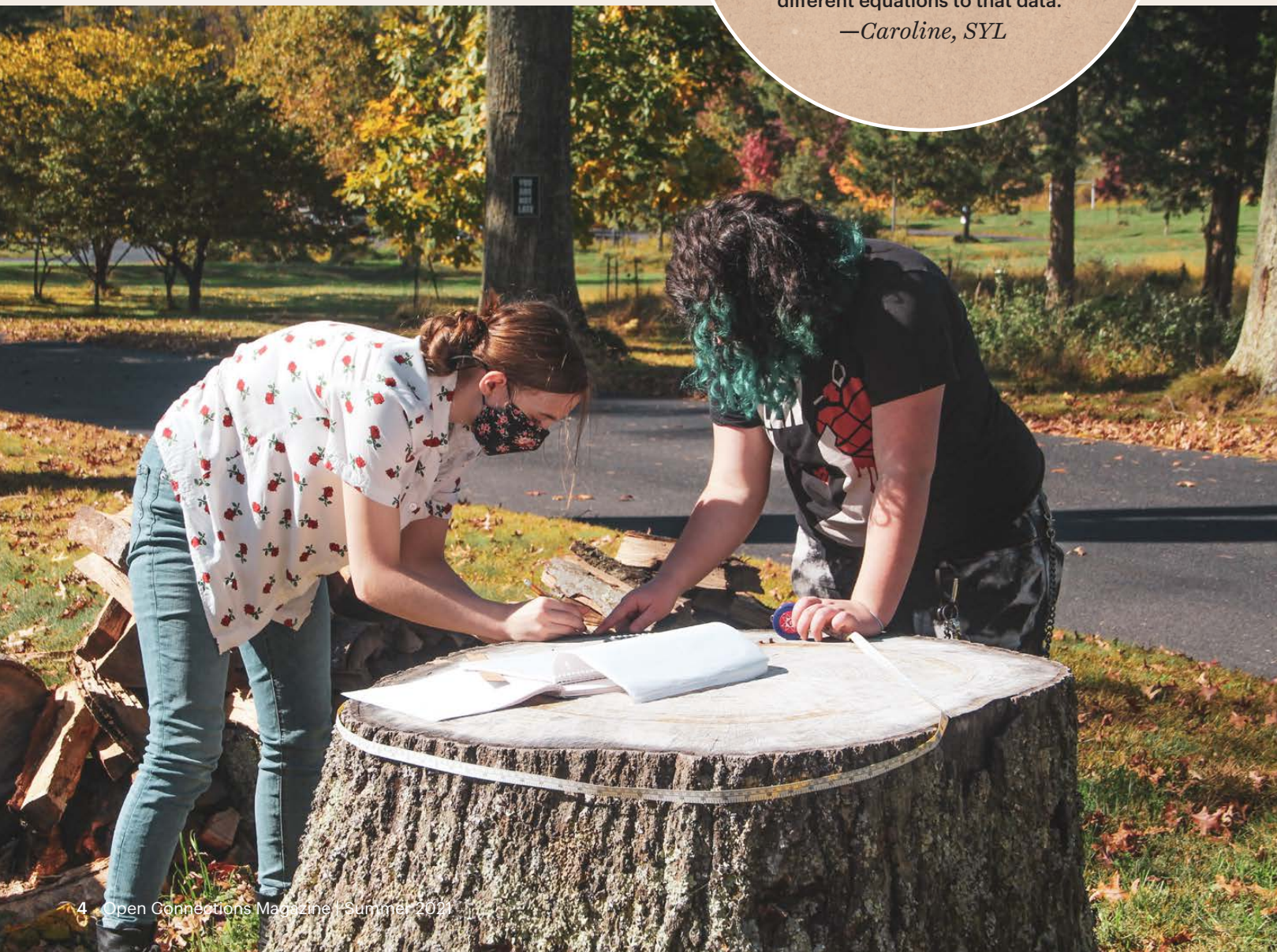
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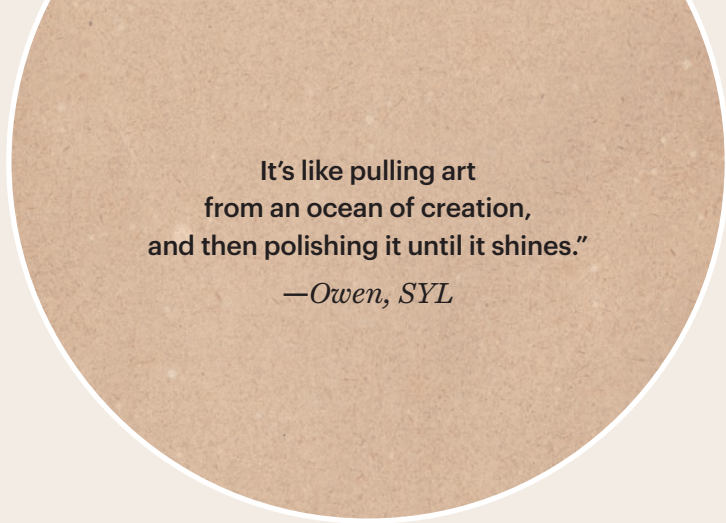
—Seda, SYL

Process Consciousness

by Caroline, Shaping Your Life

One of my favorite aspects of OC is the emphasis on the process of a project rather than just the end result. It really helps me to have a more in-depth understanding of a problem and to value the brainstorming and problem solving process. Earlier this year, SYL members needed to move slabs of a tree trunk down to near the tree platform [dreamed, designed and built by the SYL members over the last 3 years]. While doing this, we wanted to find out just how much the actual stump of the tree weighed. Since we couldn't exactly use a scale on something stuck in the ground, we had to get creative and spent the morning discussing what types of math we would need to use to figure out the solution. There were so many steps like measuring the tree stump, finding the density of the specific type of wood and then applying different equations to that data. It was so fun to start from zero and end up with a solution for a math problem we were having to make ourselves. Everybody in our group had different knowledge and ended up being able to contribute something different to the problem. I feel like I learned so much that day and we had so many "aha!" type moments which were really satisfying. I really love those moments where everyone in our group (facilitators included!) gives their all into figuring something out and I think those will always be some of my favorite times with SYL!





It's like pulling art
from an ocean of creation,
and then polishing it until it shines."
—Owen, SYL

Flexible Thinking

by Owen, Shaping Your Life

Flexible thinking—how your brain is able to make anything out of everything; the balance between your freeflow instinctual filter and your previous knowledge; how things that you create concepts of relate to one another. Your precision thinking will identify (from previously gathered information) what you are looking at/thinking about, and your approximate thinking will attempt to relate new information to precursory discoveries in order to create new concepts. These new concepts are then filed away for later use. Flexible thinking is the balance of the two. It is how we are able to make something out of nothing, and is the basis of creativity. If given *anything* we could turn it into something new through the process of flexible thinking. This can be used to solve problems, and is extremely useful for the creative process.

I like to play with the balance of approximate and precision thinking through art. It is all on a scale, from absolute expression and abstraction to precision and technicality. I am partial to making chaotic nonsense, and I think I wouldn't be able to make what I make without the use of approximate thinking. I am always able to make something out of (seemingly) nothing. I can take a mark on a page, and through approximation, I can turn it into whatever I want, and create something that has never even been made before. Then, through the use of my precision thinking, I can refine this new idea into something complete and interesting. It's like pulling art from an ocean of creation, and then polishing it until it shines.

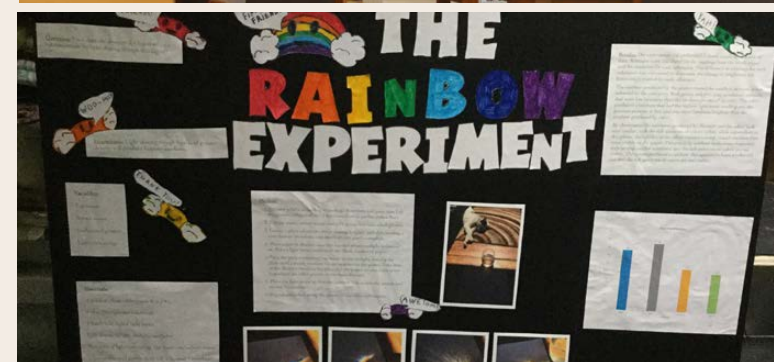


Illustration by Owen

Self-Directed Learning

by Ruby, Group Tutorial IV

As a young person, one of the things that I've always cherished about being at OC is how self-directed I'm allowed to be in my learning. All of the group tutorial programs (including SYL) tend to have at least two big self-directed projects each year: traditionally these include a research based paper with a presentation and some sort of scientific experiment. Within the varying parameters for the projects, you can choose to do each on whatever subject you choose. I, like many other young people, have always had interests that are not traditionally perceived as academic (such as movies or comic books), but through the self-directed nature of these projects I have been able to explore topics that I am passionate about or interested in and view them in an academic context. Not only have these projects allowed me to gain further insight on my interests, but they have also created a way for me to develop skills like researching, writing, and presenting my thoughts and findings in a way that is fun and engaging.



Appreciations

by Norah, Group Tutorial IV

OC has included appreciations during programs for as long as I can remember. It has definitely affected my thinking and attitude during certain situations so that I can hold them in a more positive light. For example, I think appreciations have affected my work life in a great way! Even after having a rough or long day at work, I try thinking about things I appreciated during the day. Whether it is seeing someone I know outside of work come in and I get to talk to them, or a customer that I always enjoy seeing coming in, appreciations have helped me realize not everyone is having a great day. I try to think about that when a rude customer comes in. I try to be as nice and pleasant as possible and hopefully I can lighten their day and be something they appreciated during their day. OC has always taught things that youth can carry with them forever and appreciations are something that will forever live in my heart!





Open Education

by *Ella*, Group Tutorial IV

I have been a youth at OC since I was 5; I've practically grown up here. I'm almost 16 now, and I love how learning is open and flexible. I've never attended traditional school, but from what I know about it, I think OC's approach to learning is much more valuable to me as an individual. Throughout the years OC has offered a place for me to laugh and learn in a welcoming and flexible environment. I am very interested in drawing, and feel I'm encouraged to follow my interests and incorporate them into the projects we do, such as the Comprehensive Project in GTIV. I really appreciate learning in a space that lets me embrace my interests, and find new ways to learn while also pushing me out of my comfort zone. My time here has allowed me to practice critical thinking, open mindedness, kindness, and so much more.

Open-Ended Questions

by *Lisa Huis*, Facilitator & Alumni Parent

Sometimes I go to my son for advice. He is 23, spent 14 years at OC, and I trust his judgement. One day I asked him his thoughts on the gist of a conversation I was planning to have with his brother. I figured that he knew us both well enough that he would have some insight. He thought for a moment, looked at me and asked, "What is your goal?" His question went well beyond the opportunity for a "yes/no", and really invited me to pull back and examine my motivations, my goals and even my process... and come to a better understanding and outcome.



Illustration by Lisa



Collaboration

by *Aminah*, Group Tutorial IV

"We decided to make the theme about 'a museum heist', and then come up with clues to fit the theme. That took about a week and a lot of talking, brainstorming, and figuring out how to execute our ideas. We then had to make our clues using the different resources from OC, like the Art Studio and Makerspace."
—Aminah, Group Tutorial IV

Last year in GTIV we built an escape room. It was a project that took about 6 weeks to complete and was presented to the rest of the OC community on a Community Day where people could participate. We had to discuss the theme of the escape room, what clues to do, and how we could make them. We decided to make the theme about "a museum heist", and then come up with clues to fit the theme. That took about a week and a lot of talking, brainstorming, and figuring out how to execute our ideas. We then had to make our clues using the different resources from OC, like the Art Studio and Makerspace. The clue I was working on involved making a paper mache sculpture to hide a key in. I also helped on making some paintings for the room for another clue and some just for decoration, and I had help from others putting the paper mache on the sculptures. I enjoyed this project and how it made us think and collaborate in our own mini-groups as well as on the bigger picture of making an escape room with other people. ©





Wally gently cradles a newly hatched chick that was incubated in the Open Program. Introducing youth to animals nurtures the interpersonal skill of treating living things with respect and care.



Tuesday Group Tutorial II youth, Shep and Thomas work to clear a section of trail that will connect the White Pines area to The Blacktop.



Group Tutorial II and III youth and their families brave the cold water of the upper pond during the annual "24 hours of awesomeness" campout.



The Open Program youth add natural decorations to their outdoor fort in the woods. Among other natural specimens, they collected acorns for planting a tree garden.



Margaret and Jean join Owen and Sue in learning about the clay that the Shaping Your Life harvested and processed. Shaping Your Life members shaped the clay into various creations which the group will harden in an open fire pit.



Emmy and Gwen collaborated on a structure during Thursday Group Tutorial I in response to the challenge "Choose a material and construct a structure you can go inside of."



Jack, Luke, and Wally joyously test out an obstacle course made by another youth in the Open Program.



Elliot, Elena, Aria and Locke test the strength of the model of a DaVinci bridge design that required patience and grit to build in Group Tutorial III.



Norah and Ruby chat with each other while measuring the circumference and diameter of everyday objects to derive the value of pi.



Silas carefully places screws into pre-drilled holes to secure hinges onto his wooden picture box during Tuesday Group Tutorial II.

During the Open Program, Leo adds several layers of different colors of paint to create colorful paintings with lots of depth using this spin art machine made from an old box fan box.

Indiana and Declan prepare to launch native wildflower seed bombs (with their peers in Group Tutorial III) into an area that will in time become a meadow to support pollinators.

Inspired by another youth who added light to a creation, Lila expressed a wish to illuminate a three dimensional plastic sparkly star she found in the recycling center. She achieved her goal by using materials we always keep on hand in the Open Program—copper tape, a coin battery, and an LED bulb.

Lily searches through material from a Group Tutorial III 'biocube', placed near the lower pond, for specimens to catalog and identify.



Gwen, Lincoln, Emmy, Miles, Catalia, and Brendan pose for a photo during their play rehearsal. Thursday Group Tutorial I will share their play with all Thursday programs in late May and then with the entire community at Pausing Ceremony in June.



Lincoln, Henry, and Lincoln develop their kinesthetic skills exploring in the White Pines.

WORD PRESENTS FROM OUR 2021 *Graduates*



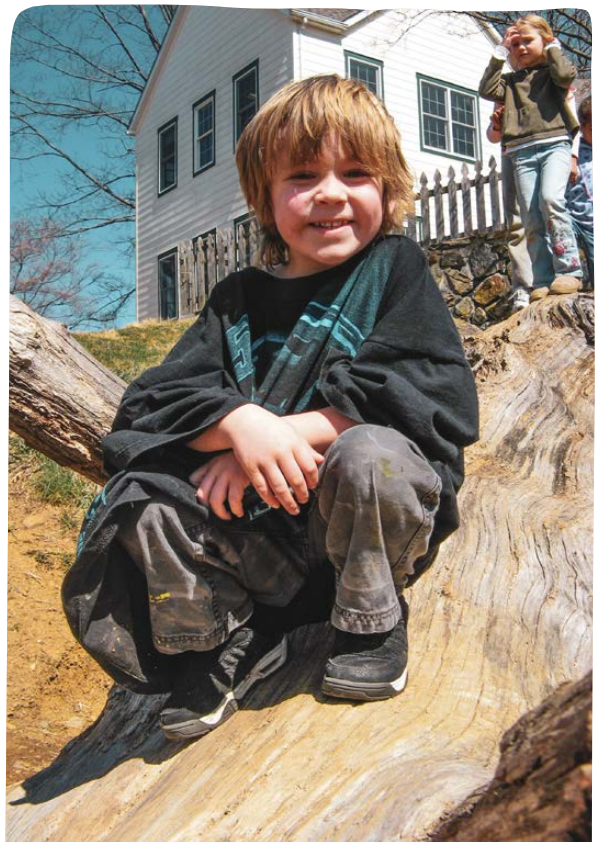
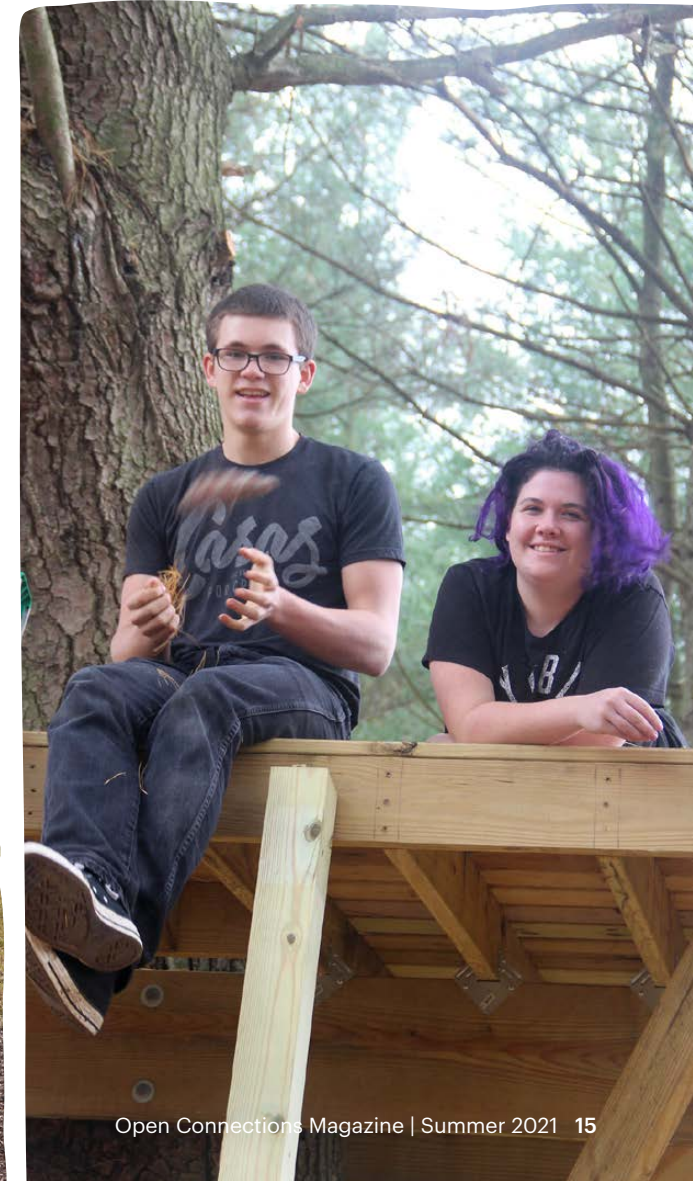
A Word Present for OC

I love Open Connections and am sooo happy that I have been able to participate in programs for the past 14 years! OC has allowed me to explore so many different interests and hobbies as well as different academic pursuits. I love all of the memories I have from my time at OC, from the Open Program to Shaping Your Life. I remember being in the Open Program and running a ping pong ball through a maze by blowing on it through a straw. I remember working in the OP woodshop and learning how to use the tools that were available. I remember the Poetry and Clay After-Program with Mollie. Learning to use the clay wheel and make pinch pots was so much fun, and, I love that some of my clay dishes went into the Outdoor Environment!

OC has helped to prepare me for life after OC. I have taken and enjoyed more Choice Programs focused on cooking than I can remember, from the science of cooking to cooking around the world. OC has helped prepare me for adult life with a Shaping Your Life choice on personal finance that I loved, where we got to set up a financial budget. Additional “adult skills” came from a Choice Program offering called Worst-Case Scenario where I learned how to check tire pressure, change a timer and check my oil.

I love the OC staff who I have gotten to know as I have grown up at OC. Current and past staff and OC families have been so kind and supportive as I have grown and learned more about the world and who I am. As I go to college next year, I will miss the OC community alongside my family the most. I will look forward to visiting OC next year when I am on break!

-Seda





Dear OC,

How are you here? You were born a dream, and still are, to many, and have grown through the concrete, truly becoming more than the sum of your parts. That is where your spirit lies, the flowing conceptual goo that is dreamt of and thought of by all those who go there. What you are, at your core, is a collection of silvery wisps, dreams, that knot together like the ivy that so grows on your campus, and blooms in the light of creation and creativity.

How have you become you? Can I walk through the halls of your memory? I would like to see all of the young people who have seen your campus as the haven it is for free thinking and imagination. I would like to see what you looked like before the Barn was built, before more could come to see what you will have become. Take me back to when the “sandigon” still existed and tell me what it was like to grow up.

Mystical energy flows through this place. Legends seem to spring up as naturally as milkweed. I think of the labyrinth of autumn olives that formed the pathways for playing an original game - stealthy overalls - and the way the entire campus turns into a formidable obstacle course when time comes for the mudder. And who could forget the OC ghost? Many have tales of the friendly, sometimes mischievous presence that lives in the Farmhouse. I myself have been there after dark and not felt alone. And the “teen library” that sits tucked away in a room that is warmed to a perfect temperature by the bay windows. The spirit of OC (I think) cultivated that room specifically to be the most wonderful place to read. Then there’s the culvert down near the blacktop that was one of my first adventures I ever went on at OC; I still have the picture of me crouched in the tube, feet soaked, but nonetheless invigorated by the feeling of discovery.

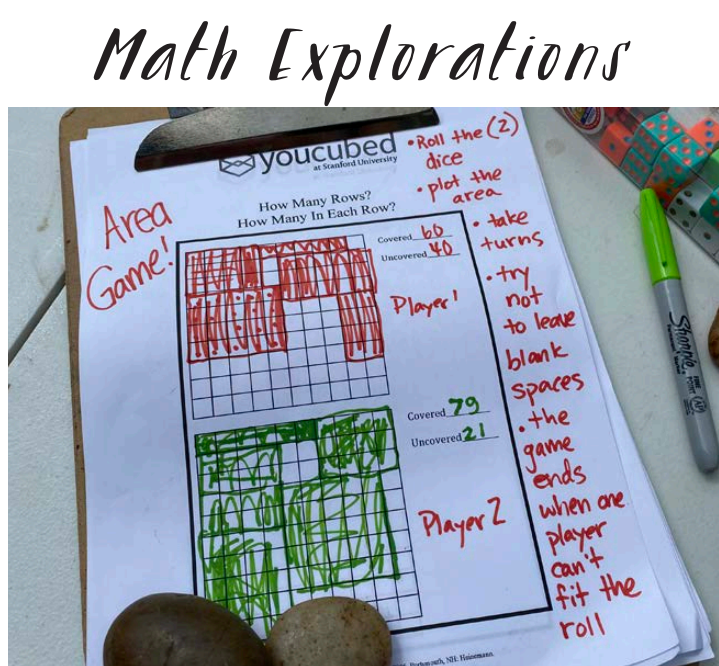
OC, you have been the home to so many ideas, how could I thank you enough for being there to help me express what it is I need to explore? I can’t think of another place in the world that has a music room, a fully equipped lab, a haunted old farmhouse, 2 ponds, a (definitely) haunted basement, some magnificent trees, the greatest wealth of outdoor space to explore, and to top it all off, a group of facilitators who love it there just as much as I do.

I could spend an entire book reminiscing about all of my favorite times at OC, but in the end, it is really that I am thankful for the people I have met along the way through my OC journey, who share this “OC dream” we all hold on to. It’s something magical when the OC community comes together. We are all truly more than the sum of our parts.

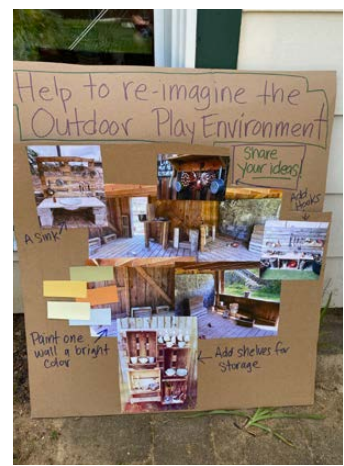
Love,
Owen



Family Connections events



Clay creations



RC Cars

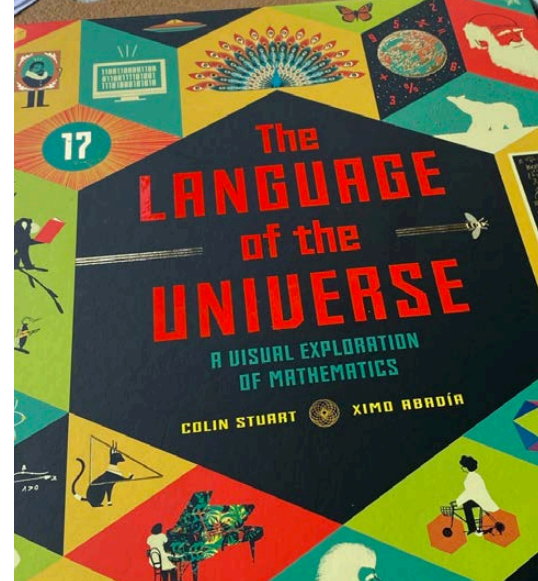


Baking classes



Basketweaving





Earth Day

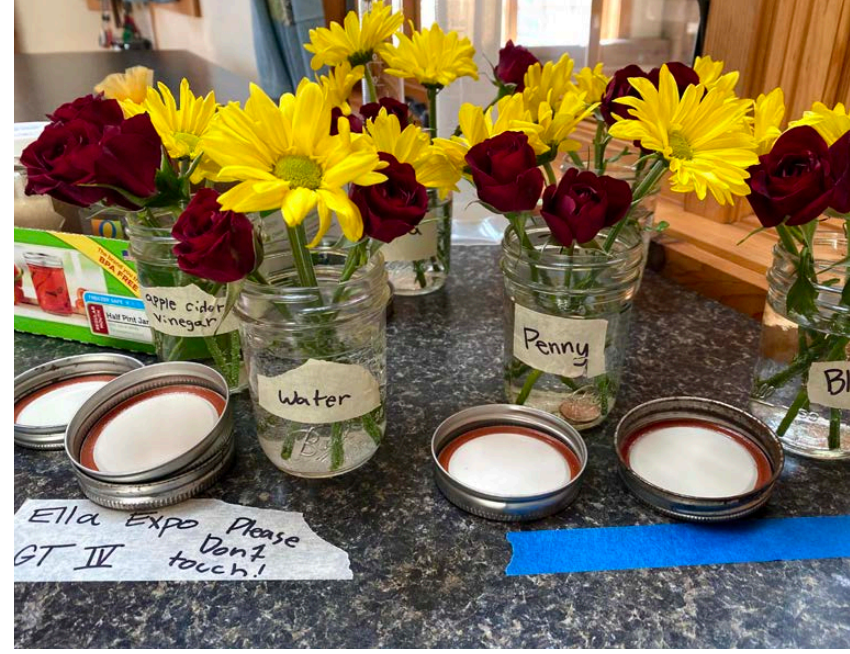


Community Garden





GTIV
Science
Expo



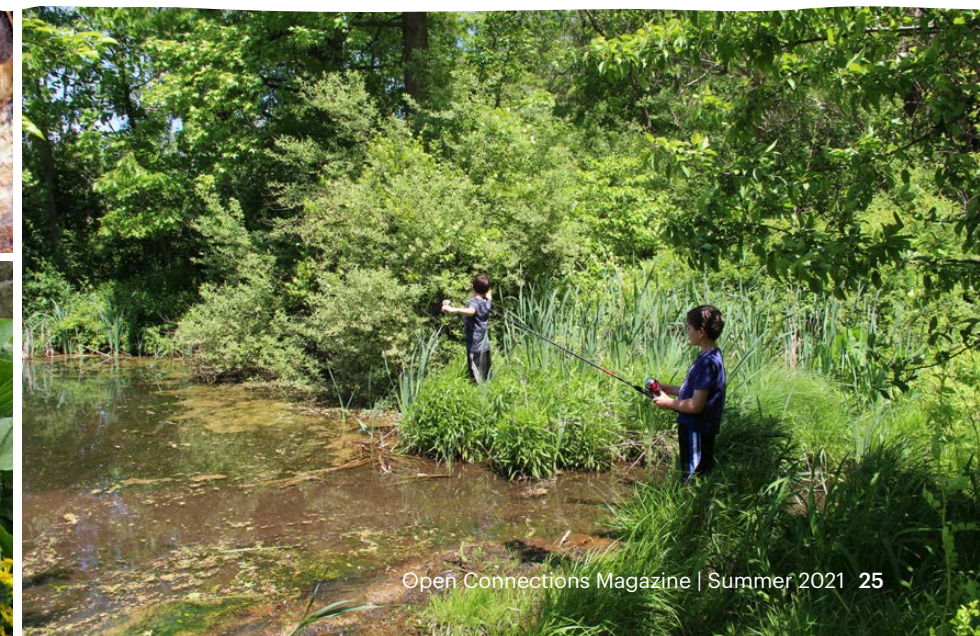


Introducing *Campus Corner*

This will be a place where Property Manager, Chris McNichol, will spotlight a different part of campus in each magazine. A little history, a little science and a lot of fun.

The Lower Pond

There is nothing like early spring in a pond. My heart jumps every time a frog does. Before the Blacktop was The Blacktop it was a tennis court and before that it was Mr Hare's garden. Mr Hare was an avid gardener and built the lower pond to irrigate his garden. Today it is used to explore the wonderful world of pond ecology, test "boats" and other floaty things, as an obstacle for the OC Mudder and much more. The lower pond is a hotspot for turtles, frogs and snakes. Every summer snapping turtles come out of the pond to lay their eggs, usually on one of the hills behind the Farmhouse. Spring ephemerals grow all around the pond including Trout Lily, Spring Beauties, and Bloodroot. Young folks can be seen in rubber boots with nets in hand seeking the next treasure the pond is willing to give.





Henry completes a cuisinaire rod challenge in the Open Program.



Seda uses the laser cutter to etch a sign that will hang on the newly finished Tree Platform. The sign acknowledges all of the Shaping Your Life program youth who worked on the project over a period of three years to transform it from a concept to a reality.



Bronwyn finds a sunny resting spot while exploring the White Pines during Open Program.



Hannah supports Choice program youth Thomas and Max, filming them as they act out scenes from the script they have written.



Locke and Indiana are pleased with their progress on this Choice project—here they proudly pose with the prototype and model for the RC bus they have designed, loaded with fun features. This project has made use of the many tools available in our Makerspace.



Eli participates in a Group Tutorial II activity, exploring the challenges inherent in translating a three dimensional globe into a flat map. Distortions are inevitable!



Thursday Group Tutorial I youth created a collaborative mixed media mural that shows the order of action in our play "The Strongest One." In this step group members paint in the background with watercolors.



Jack responds to Flexible Thinking questions which will be included in his end-of-the-year Open Program Keepsake Book.



Tuesday Group Tutorial IV searches in Little Pony Creek for rocks and minerals to take back to the Lab to identify.



Lincoln presents his mini Peer Facilitation on Percy Jackson in Group Tutorial I.



Caroline stirs up clay that the Shaping Your Life group harvested from Ridley Creek State Park. As part of the process of refining the clay, it was suspended in water in order to separate it from the organic material.



Elric kicks off this year's Group Tutorial II Peer Facilitations with a presentation on The Aztecs.



Albert and Søren observe their robot during Group Tutorial III as they test the program they have created to successfully navigate the maze.

INTRODUCING

The Weller/Hurley Family



Please describe your family constellation: Parents, names and ages of young people.

Sam, Heather, Lily (13), Ollie (10), and Emmy (8).

How long has your family been on this path of self/family-directed Open Education?

Our family has been homeschooling since 2014, though in different capacities. Lily started in first grade after attending a small kindergarten program. Ollie chose to come home from preschool and started

in kindergarten. Emmy went back and forth between the two for a year before coming home full time.

What led you in this direction?

When it came time to sign Lily up for 1st grade, it felt like a loss of so many things. With school focused on benchmarks and test scores, we feared she would lose her “zing”. Instead, we wished for the excitement and energy of discovery to continue for her...and for her siblings. And so, we tried learning alongside one another...just for a year. We played outside. We hiked our woods. We explored the creek in our backyard. We did math on the trampoline. We spent hours reading books together—on the couch, coloring in a hammock, by the fire. It was something we didn’t want to give up. We wanted to continue learning this way as long as it made sense for our three children. And so our year turned into seven and counting.

How did you get involved with Open Connections?

Not long after we moved from Pittsburgh, I was searching for homeschool connections or co-ops and happened upon a Facebook post about OC. I was intrigued, booked a tour and signed all three up that same day. Opening Day was three weeks away at this point. A last minute save in every sense of the word.

What programs do your young people attend at Open Connections?

Lily, Ollie and Emmy all attend various Group Tutorial programs 2 days/week.

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

All three enjoy spending time outside and exploring new ideas and experiences

together. As a family, we have been watching shows, gardening, hiking on a regular basis, and snuggling our two cats, Rorric and Ragnar.

Lily has embraced self-direction this year. She becomes intrigued with new ideas and jumps right in. Some of her newest pursuits include interior design, zine making, writing/poetry, yoga, and meditation. She is obsessed with the Warriors book series and recently finished The Hunger Games series. She also loves music, especially Taylor Swift, Megan Thee Stallion, and Gregory Alan Iskakov.

Ollie is also a voracious reader, choosing a wide variety of books to either read or listen to. He was part of a book club this year exploring social justice themes and really enjoyed it. He loves being a part of a baseball team and is happy practice has started again. Dungeons and Dragons with OC pals has been a high point of his pandemic year. New this spring, he is taking karate which seems to be a great fit for him.

Emmy has gotten into books this year, as well. A new favorite series is The Keeper of Lost Cities. She continues to love creating art whether for process or product, it doesn’t matter...she just needs to make! When not at OC, she loves playing with her siblings, making up new games, visiting her grandparents and playing with friends. Karate and horseback riding are two new activities she is trying currently.

What are some of the key pluses to this educational approach for your family?

Time. We have been able to take this finite commodity and use it in a way we think is most beneficial to our kids. They have spent more time with one another; they are each other’s (mostly) favorite playmates. They have been able to use their time to their own advantage —speeding through a new audiobook without inter-

ruption or slowing down to review something that was confusing in math. We hope to give them space to actually develop and know themselves before other people influence them. Another great advantage has been the flexibility to be on our own timeline both as learners and as a family unit. Quiet beaches in September, wide open museums and playgrounds during the school year, West Coast adventures in mid-winter...these are some of our favorite things!

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

When we chose homeschooling, our goal was to provide what each individual child needed and to evaluate those needs flexibly. So, of course, there have been challenges.

All our challenges seem to pale in comparison to this pandemic year, as our community has changed. Navigating the loss of friendships and families we looked forward to growing alongside has been painful, sometimes heartbreaking. This may have been our “core curriculum” for the year. In our family we have had many hard conversations and they continue. Again, here is another advantage to this path—we have time, our family is doing it together and we are finding understanding and acceptance. We are all growing.

What is your approach regarding academics?

Because of my background in teaching, I have been pretty traditional in tackling academics while giving a creative twist to outcomes. Process and communication of ideas is a core component of our home learning—just as it is on campus. While we use curriculum as a learning guide and we remain pretty true to grade level stan-

“Our rhythm in the year usually flows from very structured to more unschool-y depending on energy levels and enthusiasm. If there are particular interests, we have the time andz are open to them.”

dards, there is a ton of flexibility in how and what we study—especially since we are weaving three different levels together on a daily basis. We are literature heavy, structured in math learning (i.e. we follow a curriculum), and wide open to the feast of ideas out in the world to round out any other subjects. There is also a great focus on art and what is happening out in the world. Our rhythm in the year usually flows from very structured to more unschool-y depending on energy levels and enthusiasm. If there are particular interests, we have the time and are open to them.

Resources:

Our only constant resource is books. Books and audiobooks of all genres really are the best and most reliable curriculum in our learning. The foundation of our learning relies on tying other ideas into whatever we are reading. BraveWriter has been a great resource we have used consistently as well as Math Mammoth and Zearn for math instruction. This year we also found a wonderful writing mentor as well as a tutor for some subjects.

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

Ollie: We are constantly exploring new things. I like that there is structure to our learning but that can change depending on what the young people want.

Lily: Because it is such a small community, we become so connected to each other. There is always someone to interact with;

“This year we have just been motivated to SHOW UP and it has paid off in strong connections to others and the community, at large.”



another kid to play with or an adult to have a conversation. OC is small and that makes it a tight knit community. Learning together in a Group Tutorial, we become friends quickly, we connect and everyone is accepted. We are all in this together.

Emmy: That we can do plays and act alongside friends. I love using costumes from the attic and imagining I’m someone else.

What could OC do to further enhance their OC experiences?

Ollie: I think there should be more biological studies.

Lily: I would have loved my Group Tutorial group to have more opportunities to socialize and connect.

Emmy: I’d love to go to the Art Studio more and get open time to do whatever I wanted there.

What helped your family become more connected to the OC Community?

Traveling any hardship together cements bonds; while we were already active members of the community, navigating the past year alongside such amazing people has been such a wonderful surprise. We so appreciated the many gatherings organized by parents, youth, and staff. This year we have just been motivated to SHOW UP and it has paid off in strong connections to others and the community, at large. Most memorable were our discovery of East Goshen playground, the awesome Group Tutorial III meet ups in Media, and our pie making adventure with Lisa on Zoom! Community Days have been invaluable to us as we have gotten to use or work on campus in so many different ways—using the cob pizza oven, pit firing clay, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day are all bright, beautiful memories from the year (among so many others!).

What could OC do to further your experience, help you reach your un-met goals or pursue them in a more effective or enjoyable manner?

Open Connections has introduced us to such a wide variety of ideas, experiences and people that we would have missed out on otherwise. We feel grateful for each opportunity OC has provided for our family! ☺

Development

Annual Giving Progress Report:

We continue to be incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support for OC during this challenging year. We have heard not only from current families, but also from grandparents of current families, alumni families and long-time friends of Open Connections. We appreciate your dedication to furthering our mission of helping young people and adults develop the tools needed to create the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment.

Having a high rate of participation supports our community AND proves to outside donors and grant-makers that, beyond a reasonable doubt, OC is an organization that is supported by it’s community. So far this fiscal year, 70% of current families and staff have given. How high can we reach by June 30th which is the end of our fiscal year? 100% of our Board of Directors have donated!

We thank everyone who has already contributed and invite those who haven’t yet, to join us as you are able. Your donation, regardless of the size, helps and is greatly appreciated. Donations can be made via our website at:

www.openconnections.org/support-oc/make-an-online-donation

or checks can be mailed to:

Open Connections | 1616 Delchester Rd | Newtown Square, PA 19073

Thank you for valuing Open Connections—the staff, the young people, the community and the mission.



New Assistant Director

We are delighted to announce that Sarah Becker joined OC as Assistant Director on May 24th! As the Assistant Director, Sarah will be working to further the mission of Open Connections through her work, primarily focused on Admissions, Marketing, Development, and Information Technology.

Sarah is no stranger to the world of self-directed education. Her early influences were as an undergraduate when she was helping care for youth in a self-directed family. Sarah comes to us from Villanova University where she has been working in information technology for the last 8 years, focusing primarily on multimedia production and marketing.

Sarah herself is a lifelong learner who has continued her education most recently through earning two master’s degrees, one in Peace and Justice (with a focus on making self-directed education accessible to more families) and the other in Public Administration (with a focus on non-profit management). Sarah is involved with supporting self-directed learners in the Philadelphia area, including her own youth. She currently serves on the boards of two self-directed learning organizations, the Philly Free School and Philly ALC, and has been involved with several initiatives, from fundraising to marketing and beyond.

We are delighted to have Sarah and her family join the OC Community!

ALUMNI PROFILE

Teaghan Rose

What led you/your family to OC?

Before OC, I attended an online charter school for three years. I found that staring at my computer for most of the day was not how I wanted to spend my time, especially at 15. My younger brother and sister were already attending OC so I decided to try it for a year and ultimately stayed until graduation.

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

I started attending OC when I was 15 in the Shaping Your Life Program.

What favorite memories of OC would you like to share?

I volunteered in the Open Program (4-8 year olds) once a week during my time at OC. Working with younger children was a grounding experience and gave balance to my time in Shaping Your Life. I remember fondly playing in the creek and forest and enjoying the natural areas of OC with the Open Program.

What have you been up to since OC?

My first stop after OC was studying at College of the Atlantic, Maine, for 4 years where I earned a degree in Human Ecology and focused on food systems and foodways. While at College of the Atlantic I took a range of fascinating courses, worked with migrant farmworkers, and was an Acadia Scholar Fellow in Acadia National Park for a summer. I also took advantage of a study abroad opportunity in Spain where I studied foodways around apple cider and cheese in the Cantabrian Alps.

I have been living in Rome, Italy, for the past two years and completed my MA in Food Studies in December 2020. I have just completed an internship with USAID's Forestry and Biodiversity Office and Bureau for Resilience and Food Security and am preparing to start working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' Office of Emergency and Resilience with a focus on Yemen.



How did OC impact you? What did you find useful?

I found the independence that OC gives you in terms of managing learning/academic work to be helpful, especially once I started college. I remember many of my peers struggled with time-management during my first year of undergraduate work but I was able to manage my time in a healthy way thanks to my experience planning aspects of my academic path in conjunction with my programs at OC.

How did OC hone your Self-Understanding?

Being able to explore what I was truly interested in at OC was important as I discovered both myself and—down the road—what I wanted to do as a career. Today, I have many interests and I can thank OC, in part, because I was supported in learning about any interest I had.

In fifty years, what five things will you remember about OC?

1. Open Mic Nights
2. Working on my Symposium speech in the Loft
3. Shaping Your Life spaghetti fundraiser nights
4. Sitting on the bridge over the stream with the Open Program youth
5. Assisting Mollie with After-Program Ceramics Program

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

As I have gone through my formal education and now starting my career, I have been hearing more and more about the value of being interdisciplinary, both in education and in my field. OC instilled in me a solid understanding of the benefits and value of an interdisciplinary understanding which I don't think I would have embodied in my knowledge of my field, to the extent that I do today, if I had not attended OC. Understanding the interdisciplinary nature of the real world and solutions to global issues is becoming more important and having such a strong background in the concept has been an advantage. ©



