

## WOLFEBORO NEWS

# Serving children and families since 1974



Our Executive Directors. From left to right: Susan Whiting, served as Executive Director 1997-2017; Edie DesMarais, served as Executive Director 1974-1977; and Teri Ann Cox, served as Executive Director 2017-present.

COURTESY PHOTO

**WOLFEBORO** — Forty-five years ago, a survey given by the American Association of University Women identified an unexplored need in Wolfeboro and the surrounding communities. Working parents, men and women, were looking for day-to-day childcare help and support. They needed a safe place for their children to go while they secured a livelihood for their families. As a result, the Wolfeboro Area Children's Center was born and local families were finally offered the opportunity to have high quality, affordable daycare.

Over the past almost half century, The Children's Center has relied on primarily three women in the executive director position for its creation, legacy, and continued success. Only three. Meaning, that the first two executive directors each served for over twenty years. (Barbara Bald temporarily served as Executive

Director 1977-1978.) The commitment and dedication these women have shown to the Center shines through and speaks volumes for the organization and what it represents in the community.

Visionary founder and first Executive Director, Edie DesMarais, gathered supporters and resources to open the doors of the first program at the American Legion Hall in Wolfeboro in September 1974. At that time, both parents entering the workforce was becoming more commonplace. More than 36 million women worked out of the home more than 30 hours a week. The Children's Center was a perfect fit in this growing community.

Two years later in 1976, The Children's Center became the first mainstreamed Preschool Special Education Program that was certified by the New Hampshire Department of Education. Reflecting on this milestone,

DesMarais tells the story of a mother whose child was involved in the Preschool Special Education Program. Her son was on the brink of graduating from the Center and moving onto Carpenter Elementary to further his education. The thought of dropping her son off on the first day of school kept this mother up the entire night before. She was ridden with nervousness about her son being in a new place with unfamiliar children the next day.

DesMarais recalls the mother coming into her office after drop-off.

"She said she had barely gotten onto the grounds when a group of his Children's Center friends came running over, excited to see him and grabbed his wheelchair to take him off onto the playground to show him around! He barely said bye to his mother. She was so relieved she had come to tell me!" DesMarais relates.

During the initial years of startup at The Children's Center, Susan Whiting was hired and ultimately served for most of the Center's forty-five-year existence. She served many roles for the first twenty-two years of her career: Special Educator, Preschool Teacher, Kindergarten Teacher, Commercial Bus Driver, Cook (in a pinch), Morning Program Coordinator, and Group Center Program Coordinator. Her commitment and devotion to the Center led her to naturally ascend to becoming the second Executive Director where she served for twenty years, 1997-2017.

Whiting thinks back on her time spent at the Center and reflects on the most rewarding part of her job which was, commenting "Working together with staff members, parents, board members and trustees to ensure that our community's children and families have access to the resources they need to grow strong and thrive."

Her adoration and appreciation for the Center is simple and pure.

Teri Ann Cox, the third and current Executive Director, is the natural next step in the Center's pro-

gression. She joined in 2017, and brings professionalism and creativity that will help bring this organization into a new era of ideas regarding early childhood education. One such idea involves working with horses to promote human physical and mental health. After being at the Center for only a year, she collaborated with Granite State Adaptive in 2018 to bring their Equine Therapy program to children at the Center who could benefit.

Cox is passionate about the well-being of all the children who attend the Center and talks about this in bi-weekly meetings she has with her staff.

"I remind the staff that while keeping the children safe is a critical component of their job, they also have the essential role of teaching social and emotional skills to each child. We talk often about the expectations of being kind, being respectful, and being responsible," she explains. "In the end, we recognize how helping each child have special moments during their week with us will be a part of the story of their childhood. I challenge the staff often to make a meaningful difference in every life, every day."

This year is the 45th anniversary of the opening of The Children's Center, which has been serving the needs of children from ages 6 weeks to 12 years old since 1974. Its mission is to enhance the well-being of families and the community by meeting the needs of children through comprehensive, affordable, high quality child and family services, and to collaborate with other agencies serving these needs. By working to provide each child and every family with the resources they need to thrive, The Children's Center remains a pillar in the community for past, present, and future generations.

To learn more about The Children's Center or how to support them in their pursuit to provide childcare services to the local community, visit The Center's website at [thechildrenscen-ternh.org](http://thechildrenscen-ternh.org) or call the Office at 569-1027.