



WELLSPRINGS FRIENDS SCHOOL

The Little School with the Big Heart

Spring, 2020

Newsletter No. 34

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Wellsprings Friends School is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. EIN 93-1123932

Wellsprings Adapts to Governor Brown's Orders for Distance Learning

March 13th was the last day that our students physically attended school on the Wellsprings campus. In anticipation of what was coming, teachers prepared students with remote learning instructions and sent home Chromebooks and other school materials. So when Governor Kate Brown announced that students would not be returning to school for the last term of this year, Wellsprings was already on our way to an extended period of remote learning.

Teachers report that it is going well. Students are expected to check in two times a week in addition to working on their various subjects. The students and staff remain in good spirits and are making progress in subject areas as well as learning new tech platforms to assist with learning.

Our teachers have given valuable feedback regarding the whole process:

- We're all learning
- Everything we're doing will make the program stronger in the long run
- Students seem happy to engage
- 1-1 guitar time is really nice
- We are learning what to expect timewise
- They (the students) have been trying really hard

Everyone, of course, misses being together but students have been reporting back on the projects they are working on outside of school time. They have been finding industrious and creative ways to fill their time.



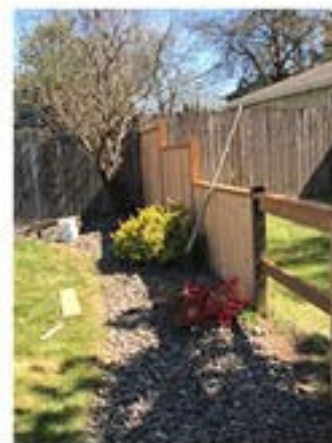
Jonathon put a new alternator, starter and hoses in an old truck.



Ashton baked his cake for his 15th birthday.



Sara is learning how to care for her new bearded dragon.



Saint built a fence at his home.

NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL: As you can read above, the students and staff of Wellsprings adapted really well to the new circumstances. The relationships we have with one another, so much the core of our program, really helped us work things out early and effectively. We're still learning and adapting while keeping it "Wellsprings" in essence. We even have a "Virtual Circle" where we meet for updates and laughter each Wednesday afternoon!

Among all the changes, Graduation (June 13th) likely is going to be very different this year. Plans are still evolving, but we will somehow continue to have students wear their multi-colored caps and gowns, have a teacher speak about each graduate's journey, and whatever else Graduation-related that we can maintain through technological re-imagining!

An Interview with Dennis Hoerner, Head of School

Leaving a Legacy of Love and Leadership

After 20 years of leadership Dennis Hoerner will be leaving Wellsprings at the end of June. His warmth, kindness and gentle leadership will be sorely missed at Wellsprings. The following interview is a look back and a look ahead and demonstrates the deep love Dennis has had for Wellsprings and the education of young people.

What initially attracted you to Wellsprings?

When I was 25, I had been hired to teach in what was called a 'free school'. Unfortunately the school was unable to get started. I eventually returned to graduate school and spent almost three decades in higher education, but I had always held in my heart that I wanted to work with kids, in a setting of more freedom, more self regulation, more responsibility on students to be who they are and to focus education around real needs and interests. A short time after I had moved to Eugene, I learned about Wellsprings and was very excited when I was hired in July 2000 to be part of this wonderful program. My life had come full circle!

What was your education and background prior to coming to Wellsprings?

When I was a college freshman, I had a required social science class that led me to look more broadly at the world around me and to see that there were a lot of inequities, and I also was introduced to radical ideas about education. Later on, after getting my PhD, I taught for 13 years at a Japanese university. There the students were starved for the possibility of self-expression. I encouraged discussion in class, which they had almost no experience of. After returning to the States, I taught at a liberal arts college in rural Kentucky for six years. That was a good experience but it wasn't really fulfilling me

Can you describe the impact you've seen over these twenty years that the WFS mission has had on students, families and the community?

That's what's so exciting about Wellsprings. We provide a kind of stable home for students which allows them to flourish. We have seen so much transformation in so many students' lives. We once had a student who hid behind his hair. He wore it down completely covering his face and spoke so quietly you had to be very close to him to hear. After being at Wellsprings he eventually pulled his hair off his face, began talking readily with others, started playing guitar, and became a truly transformed young man. Lots of our students come with manifest anxieties, and Wellsprings is a very safe and supportive place for them.

A parent once said that Wellsprings doesn't just save students, Wellsprings saves families. The impact of the changes we make with students also helps family dynamics. Parents see their kids suffering in their school environment and they don't know what to do. They discover Wellsprings

and their youngster gets grounded and everything is so much happier in the family. Or we've had students and families with a lot of tension. One anecdote I have is of a student who had lived mostly with his mother but came as a teenager to live with his father. His dad had no clue how to deal with this 14-year-old taller than he was, and they were butting heads all the time. The whole first year this student was here he was withheld and surly—but he was here, he was in our environment. The father often asked us, "What can I do?" He learned from us about how to cope with another strong personality and sort out what the needs were for the both of them. They eventually established a good rapport, and the student became an outgoing and very caring person who was a significant member of our community.

As small as we are, we've had almost 300 graduates and these people go out into the broader community and bring energy and a savvy understanding of interpersonal dynamics that comes from our program and from being cared about. Issues get talked about here and it doesn't matter what your perspective is. To be knowledgeable, to be talking and sharing, these are the things we emphasize and that's what the students take into civic life.

Wellsprings is about the people inside its walls, who are the people you have met here that have most influenced or touched you?

That's quite a question because over 20 years I'd have to say it's hundreds! The constant impact of individual students on me has been like rainfall, coming and going, refreshing sometimes, stormy sometimes, but always each precious drop nourishes me. It's even harder to talk about the staff that I've worked with over the years. I've been profoundly influenced by Bob and Paul who have been here almost as long as I have and by Chanci who has been here for "only" 15 years. They've been my teachers! The impact they --and their colleagues past and present-- have in terms of the heart and the skills they bring to teaching, and the way they establish whole person relationships with our students, is so remarkable and enriching.

Of the many trustees who have served this school and influenced me, I have to mention Hanna Still, a founding trustee who passed away in 2012. She understood struggling young people and loved them unconditionally. She would spend time in the school and ask students to sit down and talk with her. They hardly knew her but trusted her; they felt her connection with them, her focus on them in those moments of conversation.

One of the things people, students especially, have commented on about Wellsprings is that things are real here. We have real relationships. You get touched and you also get frustrated. You get all of the emotions that people have. It's a richness - the emotional richness of this

Thank you Dennis for 20 Years of Service to Wellsprings Friends School!

Interview with Dennis continued....

environment. Right now we are doing "distance learning." It's very different, yet everyone's adjusting and there is a lot of personal interactions, not just academics. The Wellsprings spirit is still going strong

What are you most proud of looking back at your service to Wellsprings?

When Helen Park and her staff and board founded Wellsprings, they created a core program of individual attention with an emphasis on being part of a community. They even established "Community Building" as a class. One thing I'm proud of is to have continued and kept developing the core of the school. Wellsprings very intentionally fosters thinking about and focusing on valuing what is good for the community as well as what is good for the individual. Also, being a healing environment had its roots in the early days of the school, but I think I and the staff have brought it out even more as a focus. Sometime along the way, I invented the slogan, "The little school with the big heart." To me that truly sums up what the school is all about: academics and personal growth, through love. That's what I'm proud of - with my leadership we have kept the core, we have expanded the core of what Wellsprings is about, and together we have kept it going into its 26th year now.

What are your hopes for what Wellsprings can achieve in the future?

Nowadays there is a buzzword in education, "social and emotional learning." Wellsprings has been doing that since day one and we know how to make that work. I hope we can do more to get the word out - getting the Wellsprings program better known in all different circles in our community because we have contributed so much, we are such an asset to the community. Along with that, I hope enrollment can reach capacity.

What 'words of wisdom' would you like to share with Wellsprings students past, present and future?

Well, I guess I'd start by saying, don't listen to anybody's words of wisdom, find your own! However, I do have things I hope for our students as they go forward. Many students have said over the years, "I can be myself here" and again it relates to the being real that I talked about. Real affirmation of each individual and allowing the range of personality to be experienced. And so my word of wisdom would be to stay true to yourself. Hold on to the confidence to express yourself fully and take that into whatever realm of life is ahead of you. At the same time, bring into your life and your family and the world around you, the sense of community that you have experienced at Wellsprings. Community building doesn't stop when you graduate, community building is a lifetime effort for everyone. Being fully yourself while also enjoying your connections to the different communities you're part of, that's how you will find your greatest happiness.

Hiking with students in 2004



Receiving the Peace Builder Award in 2011 on the behalf of Wellsprings



Speaking at the 2019 graduation ceremony



Just a few of Dennis's accomplishments over the last 20 years...

- Steadfast advocacy for students
- Stability of the program and staff
- Non-hierarchical leadership and encouragement of staff autonomy
- Worked with school districts on referrals, bringing students from 15 of Lane County's 16 school districts to attend Wellsprings at various times
- Active fundraiser; secured many major gifts
- Led the establishment of the Wellsprings Friends School Endowment
- Co-established our annual Toast 'N' Roast fundraiser gala event
- Instrumental role in the 2011 purchase of our building and property from the Eugene Mennonite Church
- Improved outreach and public relations to make Wellsprings better known through two website overhauls, print and electronic newsletters, group presentations, events including Peace Festivals, and more
- Initiated and planned the 15th, 20th and 25th Reunions and 2011 Housewarming Celebration
- Worked with architects and a stakeholder group to develop a concrete model and vision of a functional and sustainable school

Wetlands Update!

In our Fall Newsletter we told you about the removal of invasive species and trash from the two acres of wetlands on the Wellsprings campus. The next step was to install a perimeter fence in order to:

- Keep our school a safe place by discouraging transients from camping on the property
- Allow for natural restoration of the wetlands
- Improve water quality coming off the wetlands.

With the help of a grant from the Department of Environmental Quality and over \$7,000 in individual donations we were able to erect the fence in February. Thank you to all who contributed to our fence construction!

We still hope to integrate the wetlands across our curriculum from science to art to writing and service projects by constructing a boardwalk and outdoor classroom. Stay tuned!



Our New Website Has Launched

Downtime has meant that administrative staff has been able to focus on the completion of the long term project of creating a new web page for Wellsprings. Please take some time to peruse our new design and features!

www.wellspringsfriends.org



Calling All Alumni!

Our alumni have gone on to do many great things. They are entrepreneurs, musicians, artists, comedians, designers and so much more. And we want to highlight their endeavors!

Our new website has an Alumni page. We would like to fill it with information about alumni businesses, studios, bands or whatever other enterprise they are involved with. By creating a hot link from our page to our alumni's pages, we hope to promote what our graduates are doing while proudly showing off the creativity and ingenuity of our former students.

So, alumni - and parents of alumni - let us know what you (they) are doing. Either fill out the contact form on our alumni page or email Kari Welch, kari@wellspringsfriends.org with your name, year of graduation, what you are doing and a link to your website or promotional facebook page.