



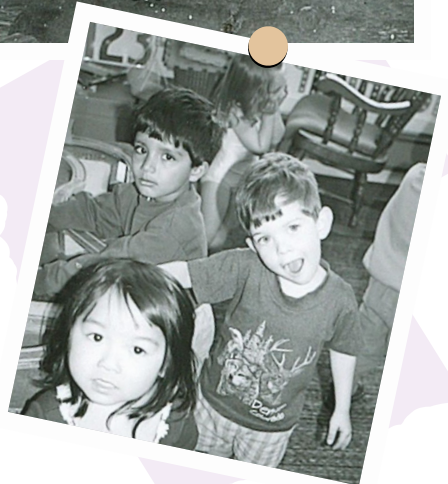
Palo Alto Community Child Care

PACCC Celebrates 50 Years of Childhood Education and Care!



Palo Alto Community Child Care (PACCC) is celebrating its 50-year anniversary and while a half-century is impressive longevity, this milestone is about something much deeper: *Creating community.*

- By Katie Love



History in the Making

PACCC's history is a shared history with Palo Alto's families; a story that could only unfold through a joint commitment for a future where all children are given the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

This story began in 1974, when six forward-thinking mothers recognized the growing demand for quality, affordable child care in their community and presented this need to the City Council. The Child Care Task Force was then formed by the Palo Alto City Council, which recommended that the City take an active and supportive role in the provision of child care education. Their first directive was that a non-profit corporation be established to implement and coordinate the Task Force's recommendations. That original vision and advocacy became the blueprint for PACCC's current programs and serves as an inspiring legacy for their team of dedicated educators, caregivers, and board members.



Former Board Member, Nancy Peters, who served on PACCC's board in the late 1970s, shared how the family dynamics in Palo Alto were rapidly changing at that time. As a result of economic and social changes, women were no longer just stay-at-home moms, but rather, began joining the work force. With both parents not as readily available as they had been in decades past, the need for after-school child care became an absolute necessity.

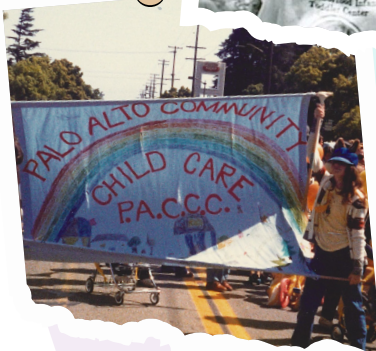
A mother herself and newly divorced, Peters recalls, "The City predicted what was going to happen – that mothers were not going to be able to do what they were doing, and saw that there had to be more well-funded and well-staffed child care." Reminiscing on the 50-year anniversary, Peters noted, "What took place in this 50-year period – where women were no longer able to count on, or even choose to have a world in which they were only mothers – well, they [The City of Palo Alto] predicted and prepared for that."

PACCC's Mission

PACCC's mission to be “a community leader in Palo Alto, partnering with families and regional agencies to provide and advocate for exceptional and accessible childhood care and education” is evident through its relationships in the community they serve.

“From the very beginning, it was always the children's needs first,” said former Center Director, Susan Dansker. “I was hired in 1975 and I started the afternoon Children's Center in the First United Methodist Church. It was a small program – just licensed for 15 [children]. The idea was that kindergarteners would walk over from the Downtown Children's Center and then they could have afternoon care.” But soon after that, Dansker says there were more and more children in need of afternoon care. “I don't remember where they all came from, but there was a packed bus and I used to meet them at the gate and they would come in, and I would spend the afternoon with them.” Dansker, who was employed at PACCC from 1975 to 2018, shared what stood out most to her about those early days, “What I loved about PACCC, was that the organization wasn't just budget-driven. From the very beginning, they were trying to meet the needs of the children and families.”

Dansker shared the importance of inclusivity in early child education and care. “I've always felt that it was important to have an inclusive program and to try, as much as we possibly could, to include children with special needs. In the early days at the Children's Center back at the Methodist Church, we had a child who was deaf, and we had such a close relationship with the parents who taught us how to understand him and how to relate to him and help him.”



During the 2023-2024 school year, PACCC's inclusivity efforts served a number of children in need, including 126 Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) spots, 116 Government Subsidized spots, and 25 PACCC scholarships.

PACCC's roots in the community have grown even deeper over the years with more sites throughout the City of Palo Alto than any other agency. The After School Kids' Clubs are located onsite at 11 of 12 elementary schools in the Palo Alto Unified School District, and also serve as a main source of training opportunities for other child care providers in the community.



PACCC's Vision

PACCC's vision is to be a “community where children thrive, educators are valued, and families are supported.”

PACCC's deep roots in Palo Alto are due in large part to their dedicated educators – some of whom have been teaching and caring for PACCC children for more than three decades. Dave Carlson, currently serving as the Facilities Coordinator in the Main Office, and former Assistant Director at Addison Kids' Club, was hired in 1989. Virginia (Nena) Zavala, Teacher, Infant-Toddler Center, was hired in 1995. Both educators shared the philosophy that PACCC is a “home away from home” and that the caring and educating of children “is not just babysitting.”

“We are better educating teachers – not just the teachers that are in the programs currently, but the ones that are coming in – that this is so much more than what people think childcare is. Our philosophy is to always explain why we do the things we do so they get the child's perspective...because it's more respectful that way,” said Zavala. Carlson shares this philosophy, affirming the importance of respecting children as individuals and that being an educator isn't being “stuck in their own ego of having to do it their way, [but rather], letting the children explore themselves.”



A Legacy of Caring and Compassion



Both Carlson and Zavala have seen the PACCC legacy firsthand, having taught children who return years later as employees or volunteers. Carlson sent his own three children through PACCC programs, who were also under Zavala's care. When asked what the most important thing they do on any given day as educators and caregivers, the answer was unanimous, "The biggest thing [we do]," affirms Carlson, "is true caring and compassion."

Currently, PACCC serves the child care needs of more than 775 children daily; providing care for children from as young as two months old through fifth grade at 19 centers throughout the city, 52 weeks of the year. Their non-profit mission includes making quality care accessible to all of Palo Alto's residents regardless of income, thus, approximately 32% of PACCC families receive financial aid or scholarship support either from the City of Palo Alto, the State, or from PACCC itself.



Child care is really the lynch pin that keeps the economic engine of a community running.

- Minka Van Der Zwaag, Human Resources Manager at City of Palo Alto.

PACCC actively works to eliminate barriers to access and advocates for affordable and accessible childcare options for all its families. In late 2023, PACCC opened 126 afterschool care spaces for PAUSD's Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P).

"I appreciate their [PACCC's] commitment to families who have challenges paying for child care through their management of the City and State subsidy programs and their extensive fundraising to support tuition assistance programs," shared Minka Van Der Zwaag, Human Resources Manager at City of Palo Alto.

"Quality, available and affordable child care is an essential service to local families," continues Van Der Zwaag, [for] those who come to commute to the City to work, and for the businesses that rely on an available workforce. Child care is really the lynch pin that keeps the economic engine of a community running."



A New Generation of Childhood Education and Care

Creating Community Through its Most Precious Asset

"PACCC is building and investing in 21st Century education and care that will serve the changing and growing demographics of Palo Alto and surrounding communities for years to come," shared Lee Pfab, PACCC's CEO. "It is my privilege to help build that community through Palo Alto's most precious asset – its children...and to do so with unwavering determination."