



Annual Report 2021

Dear Friends,

I can't wait to share some of the highlights of 2021, and I hope when you read through your impact this year, you feel proud.

Your support, kindness, ongoing generosity and belief have fueled us and together we have accomplished great things for little people.

Let's start with the best news of all. This year our first group of children left the program and entered kindergarten. We conducted an exit assessment with each child, and not only did they meet **ALL** kindergarten readiness requirements, but they even demonstrated 1st grade readiness! Read on for more details.

We also put play to work to help mitigate trauma, partnering with LifeMoves to serve the 1,000 unhoused children in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Experiencing homelessness as an adult is traumatic; for a child it is that and more. We were honored to create a vibrant, delightful play space at one of LifeMoves safe parking lots, bringing play back into the lives of children who have lost so much.

Play has always been Learning Home Volunteers' secret sauce. Play = Learning. Creating playful, open-ended opportunities for learning for our children requires special skills – and our volunteers have them! This year they designed, tested, manufactured, and boxed 26 learning sessions containing 182 multi-faceted, open-ended activities for the learning sessions. Below you'll see some of these great ideas and the range of play and learning that resulted from just one of the activities!

Our Mission

We prepare low-income children for kindergarten, by empowering, equipping and supporting their parents to emphasize the excitement and joy of learning and discovery with their children through joyful play.

Our Board

Victoria Shoemaker

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On my most recent visit with the families, children shared what they were learning - one child counted to 100, another read me a book, one told me his favorite team's shirts sometimes were white and sometimes were grey, and another introduced me to the new baby and reminded me to be quiet! Child-directed, open-ended play is alive and well in our families' homes!

During 2021 as we planned for growth, it became obvious we needed a better space to create. We found the perfect spot!

All we had to do was move there. With 400+ boxes, a professional organizer, hundreds of hours of volunteer time from young and old, and some partner help, we relocated into our new home on November 1st. We'd love to show it off! Please come visit us.

We closed the year with the exciting news of our partnership with Ravenswood Family Health Network. Read more to learn about pediatricians there referring families to our program. Happily, our new space comes just in time to support our goal of enrolling 100 new learners in 2022!

Thank you for all your support. We are so excited for what's to come.

With gratitude,

Vicky

Victoria Shoemaker, Executive Director

Our Staff

Camila Ostolaza

Fernando Tercero

Our kids enter kindergarten ready!

Our proprietary exit assessment is play-based, aligned with leading normed assessments (e.g., Brigance, DRDP, ESI-K) and accounting for recognized developmental milestones (e.g., AAP). The assessment measures 7 domains of learning: math, language, literacy, cognitive, social emotional, gross motor and fine motor skills. It is designed as a fluid, free-play session and is conducted in the child's preferred language, with the parent present as an observer who can participate if the child initiates that.

	Kindergarten Ready	Low Income Kids	LHV Kids
Know a few letters of the alphabet	✓	✗	✓✓ All 26!
Count to 10	✓	✗	✓ and higher!
Add & subtract small sets	Maybe	✗	✓ and more!
Recognize own name	✓	✓	✓
Write name	✓	Maybe	✓
Name 4 colors	✓	Maybe	✓✓ 9 or more!
Gross motor control (balance, hop, jump)	✓	✓	✓
Fine motor control (scissors, drawing)	✓	✗	✓
Enjoy books	Maybe	✗	✓
Persist in problem solving	✓	Maybe	✓✓
Love learning	Maybe	Maybe	✓✓

To provide some perspective on our results, locally in the Ravenswood School District, 79% of children entering Kindergarten in 2017 scored below average. Nationally 52% of low-income children score as 'not kindergarten ready,' but many of the supposedly 'ready' children still score well below the average. Low income children are at great risk of starting – and staying – behind in school. **Embracing play-based learning, LHV families are rewriting their future.**

How does the program work?

Each Learning Session is built around a theme and has two goals: 1) to delight the children and 2) to illustrate more techniques and tools parents can use with their child.



Here are the open-ended materials for our flower learning session. Each box sent to the home contains about 5 to 7 learning activities. In this session children were invited to work with:

- Flower Exploration: real flowers, magnifying glass, flower cards, recording sheet, dowel
- Petal Counting: paper clips and flowers with print numbers
- Flower Painting: easel, paint, flower stamping, pom pom brush
- Flower Drawing: stencils, colored pencils
- Paper Flower
- Flower Sachets



The most powerful part of open-end materials is how each child uses them to meet their needs.

Look at the focus of this 4 year old girl. According to her parent teacher, she had already been working with these materials for 45 minutes! She created all three of these pieces - moving from one thought to the next.

First at the bottom, she used stencils to make the perfect yellow flower. Her next creation was fireworks with the big boom image in the middle and the little shots of light drifting and falling. The last is a flower garden and here you see her making new flowers out of actual flower pieces.

Take a look at what child-directed play can produce. This 4 year old boy used the materials in this learning session to continue the explorations he started in our earlier lesson on symmetry. Because he was still working through the ideas, he used the flower materials to build symmetrical pictures like this one. Check out the planning it takes to create this, and notice the depth of the reflection. Amazing work, and really only possible when parents support their child leading the learning.

Why is it working?

[Research has long shown](#) that play-based learning is more effective than direct instruction for cognitive and social-emotional development. And that is true across the world. A recent example is the 2021 Unicef-LEGO report showing [26 different studies from 18 different counties](#) have found significantly greater learning gains in language, literacy, motor and social emotional development. Play-based learning can be further enhanced when the child plays with a caring adult. Early learning is strengthened by relationships and what stronger relationship is there than your parents?

Another key feature of our program is that our play is child-led. The children choose what they want to play with, what they want to do with it, and for how long. As with all skills, the more time you spend on a cognitive, academic or social-emotional skill, the better you get at it. Our trained parents follow the child's lead and add language, encouragement, and academic ideas. Allowing the child to control the play is a magical message. It says "You are important, your choices are perfect." The power for learning is that attempts in the play are all owned by the child - successes and failures. A great combination for building self-motivated, confident learners!



LifeMoves

We were honored to partner with LifeMoves to support their families' return to stable housing. COVID brought on economic devastation for many of our neighbors and put them on the street. Many of the newly homeless are families – 1 in 3 beds LifeMoves provides is taken by a child.



LifeMoves provides temporary shelter, food, clothes and services while the family returns to a permanent home. Children who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have learning issues, health issues and deep trauma. Play can relieve some of those effects, so we planned and built a play area for children living in the safe lot. With huge help from Beth Am's men's group, we constructed a sound wall, ball wall, and huge chalkboard! We also provided arts and crafts materials which were used during their summer camp.

To return a little bit of play for children during their time with LifeMoves, we created 80+ intake kits. These kits fit in a pencil box and are designed to be played with by a child as young as 2 and as old as 10. The child keeps the box and can use it to hold their little treasures during their stay with LifeMoves.



Our new home

Our creative, play-based learning sessions are inexpensive because they include simple materials that we create and put together. That takes time, for which we rely on our fleet of talented volunteers. It also takes space to prepare the materials for dozens of children at the same time.

To enable our planned growth, we needed a larger space to support the manufacturing and distribution of our learning kits. We also needed space for our volunteers to create, and room to store our resources, books, and custom learning activities.

After a few months of looking, we found a great spot — a warehouse located in San Carlos. Check it out!



What's to come?

Through the generous support of donors and volunteers, we are ready to grow significantly. And just in time!

We are thrilled to have recently entered into partnership with the Ravenswood Family Health Network. The pediatricians there are now recommending our program to each parent of a child between the ages of 2 and 5 – that's 400 young children! In 2022 we hope to accommodate 100 of these children. How exciting is that?

We could use your help to help us support all those new learners and give them an equal start at school. There are so many ways you can help. You can support us through a gift of [time](#), donations [materials](#) and books, or [financial support](#). We are grateful for whatever fits into your life.

Your gift is transformative and will change a child's life, after all the gift of learning lasts a lifetime.



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