

The Campaign for North Chapel Focusing on Children and Families

The North Chapel strategic plan, "Our Future in Focus," laid out an exciting vision for our spiritual community and for our contribution to the wider Woodstock community and world in which we live. One goal that emerged from North Chapel's discussion of the future is the importance of engaging and supporting children and families.

Since that time, participation and programs have grown for children and parents, thriving under the direction of Geraldine Fowler, Spiritual Exploration and Outreach Coordinator.

As one example, new after-school programs focused on holistic health are planned at the Norman Williams Public Library, in collaboration with Artistree, Change the World Kids, and other groups. Geraldine will coordinate this program, drawing on the expertise of local professionals. In addition, the Ottauquechee Health Center and the North Chapel will work in concert with some of the same organizations to offer a program at Safford Commons this summer.

We invite you to join us in the Campaign for North Chapel, as we preserve the North Chapel and expand our ability to serve and support present and future generations of families in our community.

Spiritual Education for Children and Parents—An Expanding Community Collaboration

Formally called Religious Education, the Spiritual Exploration program offers diverse spiritual programs for elementary school-aged children during the school year and nursery care for pre-K children each Sunday. Children in kindergarten through third grade are introduced to Unitarian Universalist principles through yoga, mindfulness, creative arts, music, community service, and connections to the natural world. In fourth through sixth grades, children explore these principles further and begin to provide community service, working with adult teachers and leaders from the Change the World Kids.

In the fall of 2017, our Sunday program will expand to create a youth-driven Middle School program.

North Chapel is also one of a few organizations involved in a coalition founded by Mount Ascutney Hospital to bring a pilot program to the Windsor and Woodstock area, based on the principles of Dr. Hudziak's Vermont Family Based Approach of the Vermont Center for Children, Youth and Families. This pilot program, associated with the University of Vermont Medical Center and College of Medicine, is a clinical and public health paradigm that applies evidence-based strategies for health promotion, prevention, and intervention from the family perspective.

This year, the North Chapel is also working with the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Norwich, Vermont to offer Our Whole Lives (OWL) to children in the fourth through sixth grades. OWL is an age-appropriate sexuality education curriculum that helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior.

North Chapel also provides programming and support for busy parents and caregivers, with classes and activities designed to stretch Spiritual Fitness, including Guided Imagery, in partnership with ArtisTree, a community art center, and Yoga with Phoebe. Programs are free or by donation, and childcare is provided. There is also a weekly Walking Group and a monthly Book Group where parents discuss books on spirituality.

Working with Mother Up! Parents Exchange for Change, the North Chapel participates in the organization's parent networks to join in—and lead—climate justice work. As part of Mother Up! Lobby Day at the Vermont State House on April 4, 2017, North Chapel families headed to Montpelier to learn about issues related to environment, and how to work with legislators and leaders to bring about change. As this effort gains traction, Geraldine hopes to have a monthly family-friendly gathering including a family-style meal, childcare for younger children, children's enrichment offered for the elementary aged children, and a social-justice presentation, discussion and action planning for older children and adults.

North Chapel also conducts Story & Yoga Time at the Norman Williams Public Library, which includes storytelling, yoga, movement, meditation and more for young children and their caregivers. This program has been very well received, with more children taking advantage of the safe and nurturing environment. This program will expand from once-a-month to once-a-week during the next school year. The program will also be offered at Safford Commons this summer.