

# The Family Connections Chronicle

FALL 2010



## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe we are almost through 2010. Family Connections (FC) has had a truly remarkable year. We have launched our center wide initiative *Healthy Connections*, a holistic approach to supporting our families in raising healthy children. We finished a build

ing renovation that turned a funky old garage (500 square feet) into a beautiful, sunlit program space for children, families and the community. And lastly, we have an incredible team of dedicated professionals to serve the needs of Portola and Excelsior families. There is much to be

grateful for. We hope that you'll participate in our mission by volunteering or donating this year.

Sincerely,

Maryann Fleming  
Founder & Executive Director  
Portola & Excelsior  
Family Connections

## Open House: Building Renovation & Healthy Connections

Portola Family Connections would like to warmly thank the Bothin Foundation, the Cowell Foundation, and the Mayor's Office of Community Investment for their generous contributions towards our improved building. We are so pleased that the fresh, bright colors of our building now reflect the warm sense of community within. Our Studio (the recently renovated garage) is open as well, allowing us to expand programming for the Portola District.

On Wednesday, October 20th, Portola Family Connections opened its doors to the community to welcome our supporters and



Healthy Connections Program Manager -  
Anna LeMon

FC also introduced a new organization-wide initiative called Healthy Connections. This initiative focuses on better integrating information and activities in four different areas of health: disease prevention, nutrition, mental health/stress reduction and exercise. Demonstrations on different aspects of the initiative engaged our visitors as they toured the new space, met with staff and parents and learned more about the many programs offered.

Delicious and healthful snacks were donated from both Casa Sanchez and Yummy Bowl. Thank you to everyone who participated to this fun and informative evening!



Blood Pressure Screening

We had a great turn-out for the Family Connections Health Fair on Saturday, September 25th. Over 100 participants enjoyed nibbling on healthy snacks, spinning the nutrition and pedestrian safety wheels of fortune, and listening to Jumpstart

## Family Health Fair

readers at story time. The asthma workshop and Gymboree and karate sessions were packed to the brim, and the group eagerly gathered on three occasions in the hopes of winning one of the fabulous drawing prizes.

We offer our sincere thanks to the Parent Advisory Board for their integral role in planning and executing this fun and educational event! The group purposefully planned this health-themed event to coincide with the launch of Healthy Connections. Parent participation and leadership is funded in part through a Parent Action Grant from First 5 of San Francisco. These funds are awarded to

encourage parent empowerment through community building and leadership development. Please contact Anna Le Mon at 415.715.6746 x103 to join our Parent Advisory Board and contribute to the mission and vision of our centers!



Martial Arts Workshop

## Programming at Excelsior Family Connections

Excelsior Family Connections (EFC) continues to expand its programming to serve the needs of the neighborhood. In response to community request, the Excelsior branch will be offering a second session of Next Steps, a 3-month program for families with a high need for strong, supportive and specialized developmental assistance for their 3 to 4 year olds. More about this great program on the

opposite page.

EFC will also be offering another session of its Computer Literacy Classes starting in January. This program has been fully enrolled since its inception due to the community need and innovative structure of the classes. The 10 week program is designed for adults who have little or no computer experience. Topics include basic keyboarding, Microsoft Word, creating an email,

using search engines and exploring the internet. Each class is taught by a computer literate and ESL-certified staff member. Child care is included to accommodate parents and care-givers who might not otherwise be able to attend.

To register for the upcoming sessions of Next Steps or Computer Literacy Class, please contact the EFC staff at 415-333-3845.



### Lemos Farm Trip

Children in our CPDI, Next Steps, and Pre-K programs, along with their parents & caregivers, had a wonderful time on our annual field trip to Lemos Farm in Half Moon Bay on October 13th. At the farm, families had the opportunity to feed baby goats, ride on ponies, take a haunted hay ride, walk through the pumpkin patch. Often times, our families are not able to explore parts of the city they live in, let alone areas

outside of the San Francisco, due to a lack of money, time, and energy. At Portola Family Connections, we provide at least two field trips per year where we rent a bus and travel to neighboring areas. This provides an opportunity for families to try new activities and explore new places. During other times of the year, we take families on MUNI to local places such as the San Francisco Zoo, the California Academy of Sciences, the Randall Museum, the Civic Center playground, and the Embarcadero farmer's



Staff and Students enjoying the field trip



Pre-K Students at Lemos Farm

market.

Check our website for the next family outing!

<http://portolafc.org/>

### Read for the Record

On Thursday, October 7th, Portola Family Connections presented their first family literacy event for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. We are pleased to say that Family Connections is a consistent host for this national literacy event, which takes place every year during the fall season. Jumpstart's Read for the Record, is presented in partnership with the Pearson Foundation. This record-breaking campaign brings children and adults together to read

same book, on the same day, in homes and communities all over the world. Read for the Record also kicks off Jumpstart's yearlong program, preparing preschool children in low-income neighborhoods for success in school and life.

This year's selected book was "Snowy Day", which was read to over 40 families who attended. During the event, families participated in creating various crafts and joined in the read aloud lap-

sit with our local Portola branch librarian. As a giveaway, each child who attended received a free copy of the "Snowy Day" book in Spanish, English, or Chinese.

Because of our agency's commitment in promoting and developing literacy skills at an early age—both at school and in the home—Portola Family Connections makes it a priority to hold at least one literacy event per month.

For more information and dates, contact **Bee Moua**, Learning Program Coordinator at 415-715-6746 ext. 170 or by email at: [bmoua@portolafc.org](mailto:bmoua@portolafc.org)

# Program Spotlight: Next Steps



One of Family Connections most innovative programs is Next Steps, a pre-school family readiness course for 3-4 year old children and their care-givers. Next Steps quite simply is magic. It holistically supports the development of children, educates parents about their child's development and allows staff to observe and assess children who might be in need of additional help for special needs. Overall, it prepares children for success in Pre-K and eventually elementary school. In Next Steps, children and parents blossom into more supportive and healthy family units, a process that is observed regularly by teachers as children and caregivers move through the 3 month program.

Results for Next Steps are consistently positive and often amazing. Because caregivers stay on site during the program, they are participating in their child's learning and growth. Next Steps is as much a learning process for parents or grandparents as it is for the children. Parents observe their children grow in many areas:



- language skills
- better socializing with other children
- basic knowledge of numbers and letters
- increased independence
- fewer behavioral problems such as tantrums and physical aggression

Seeing these positive changes in their children, along with the regular progress assessments and reports from teachers, helps caregivers to grow themselves. These are just a few of the caregiver/parent benefits:

- a better understanding the value of play in their child's development
- knowledge of different ways to deal with negative behavior
- skills for supporting their child's independence
- an appreciation the importance of pre-school as a tool for their child's future academic achievement

One of our most prominent goals is Pre-K placement. 85% of children from Next Steps go on to enroll in a Pre-K program, a huge step in ensuring a bright future for these children. This innovative approach to child development has made Next Steps one of our most important programs, one that we offer at both our Excelsior and Portola sites. If you're interested in finding out more about this program, please don't hesitate to contact Next Steps Teacher Leslie Pang at [lpang@portolafc.org](mailto:lpang@portolafc.org) or (415) 715-6746.



## Family Connections Mission Statement:

Family Connections exists to develop strong, healthy families and to build thriving communities in the Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods. Family Connections provides opportunities for people of different backgrounds to work together cooperatively, sharing values, knowledge and resources.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP!

### Volunteer Needs

We are always looking for enthusiastic volunteers from the community to help us fulfill our mission. Here are a few ways you can get involved at Family Connections:

- ***Volunteer at the Family Connections offices:*** Do you have office skills that you'd like to volunteer? We are always in need of help for computer work and mailings. Call Mimi Ly at (415) 715-6746 for more information.
- ***Join our Board of Directors:*** Our board members are strong leaders and advocates for our work in the community. Do you value our work? Do you want to help us grow and continue to serve our neighborhoods better? For more information on joining our Board call Executive Director Maryann Fleming at (415) 715-5108.

### Funding Needs

Family Connections provides critical family support services to the community members of the Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods. We rely on your generosity to support our work and mission. Every donation we receive helps us to provide excellent and responsive services for the community. Giving is the best way of ensuring that the important services and programs we offer will continue to be available to everyone in the Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods.

***Give today to support thriving, healthy communities in Portola and Excelsior!***

### **Family Connections Board of Directors**

Mollie Ward Brown, President • Ann Kung, Treasurer • Suzanne Gautier, Secretary • Maryann Fleming, Executive Director  
Angela Chau • Kent Chiang • Kelenia Olsen • Monica Treanor • Patty Zevallos

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