

News from WECAN

Susan Howard and Joan Almon, Co-chairs

Our Name

What's in a name? We've been asked "What happened to the "A" at the end of Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America?" We started out as WECANA but the shorter version sums up our nature as a will-filled organization, serving children in the first seven years, the time of the will: WECAN!

WECAN Board Meeting

WECAN held its annual board meeting in the first weekend of November. We met in Wisconsin, at the new site of Cynthia Aldinger's Lifeways Center. Four years ago Cynthia began talking to us about her longing to establish a multi-age childcare center to serve as one model of how to best meet the needs of day care children on this continent. Last year her actual work with the children began. It was wonderful to see it in action.

There are two "family suites", little apartments in a former motel. Walls were knocked down to create the suites, and between the two is a large kitchen, an office and a small play room which houses a parent-child group one morning and a kindergarten group three mornings. Some neighborhood children come to the kindergarten, but at present it is made up primarily of kindergarten age children from the child care. This gives them a chance to do crafts and other activities that are challenging to manage with babies and toddlers on hand. Each family suite has about seven or eight children on a given day, and their ages range from a few months to six years. It is a warm and beautiful environment, and the children look healthy and happy.

At the board meeting we were joined by Ruth Ker, a founding kindergarten teacher of the Sunrise Waldorf School in Duncan, British Columbia on Vancouver Island. Ruth shared her experiences with children today in a kindergarten that is part of a school. She also gave us pictures of the work in Canada, as well as insights gained from her three summers bringing Waldorf craft making and other courses to teachers in Russia. She has also begun offering summer courses at west coast trainings in Sacramento and British Columbia. As the weekend progressed it became clear that Ruth would be a wonderful new member of the board. She has accepted our invitation to join the board, and we look forward to working with her.

Ruth joins the six other board members: Cynthia Aldinger of Lifeways in Wisconsin; Carol Cole of the Sophia Project which serves homeless mothers and children in San Francisco; Janet Kellman of the Rudolf Steiner College; Rena Osmer, who is focusing on birth to three work and is working at the Cape Ann School in Massachusetts, helping them to establish their new center for young children and families; and co-chairs, Susan Howard of Sunbridge College, and Joan Almon who serves as coordinator of the U.S. Alliance for Childhood.

Therapeutic Education for Children Under Seven

During this meeting we focused on questions of therapeutic education for children under seven. In response to this year's questionnaire, teachers expressed the greatest need for publications, conferences and courses on this subject. We were very pleased to have Bonnie River of Gradalis Seminars in Boulder join us as a guest. Bonnie spent many years as a kindergarten teacher and also as a class teacher. Throughout her teaching life, however, she also studied remedial education and developed a private therapeutic practice, as well as a training in educational therapy. Most recently she and others at Gradalis have developed a therapeutic training for kindergarten teachers. Bonnie freely shared her insights about children today and their needs. We hope to include more articles by her and others on this theme in future issues of *Gateways*. WECAN will work with trainings and regional groups to develop more conferences

and courses on appropriate therapeutic approaches for the children we meet in our kindergartens. In Upcoming Events you will see that some courses are already planned for this year.

Birth to Three and Child Care

Our study this time focused on the first lecture of the *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity*, where Rudolf Steiner describes how the child before the age of three has a very special relationship to the spiritual world:

In childhood we work on ourselves with a wisdom that is not in us, a wisdom that is more powerful and comprehensive than all the conscious wisdom we acquire later. This higher wisdom works from the spiritual world deep into our body... Our ideal (as adults) must be to approach an ever closer relationship with the forces that worked on us, without our awareness in the first years of childhood.

We found this lecture by Rudolf Steiner to be a source of true inspiration for our work and recommend it heartily to readers with an interest in the young child's relation to the spiritual world.

Many Waldorf kindergarten teachers are recognizing the need to provide extra nurture for the very young child. Well over half of the Waldorf schools in North America now offer parent-child groups which are a great help in meeting this need, especially as it brings the parents fully into the process of protecting and nurturing their children in a new, more conscious way. Yet these programs do not address the needs of the working parent, and it is these children who are of particular concern. Thus far, Waldorf schools have not found a way to provide care for infants. The result is that some teachers who feel called to do this work have left their schools to create home based programs or small centers. We would like to explore the full range of options for helping young children within our early childhood movement, as well as with school colleagues and with AWSNA. Is it imaginable, for instance, that a Waldorf school adds to its usual offerings of parent-child programs, kindergartens and grades, a child care component which includes infants and toddlers? What would be the impact on the school? Would it be helpful for older students, especially the adolescents, to be in the presence of infants and toddlers and learn about their development? This is what we would like to explore during the coming years.

In addition, we recognize the burning need for conferences, courses and perhaps also trainings to help teachers better serve children under three in parent-child programs as well as children of all ages in child care. The development of adult education in these areas will be a focus in the coming years.

Publications and Finances

Within WECAN, Joan Almon and Patti Regan, our new Administrative Secretary, will soon take up their work on new publications. We will be replacing the pink and blue compilations of articles from past issues of the Newsletter with five new volumes which will contain the original articles plus new ones which have appeared in recent years. The collection will be divided by themes: The spiritual nature of the child, child development, activities in the kindergarten, fairy tales and stories from around the world, and festivals from around the world. Bronja Zahlingen's booklet, *Plays for Puppets*, is also being enlarged into a full volume reflecting her wonderful work as a kindergarten teacher.

In addition, companion volumes to Helmut von Kügelgen's *Spiritual Insights* will also be published. In the end there will be eight volumes in the "Little Series". Our recommendation: Save up your Christmas and Hanukah dollars so you'll be ready to buy new volumes in the new year!

On a practical level, we studied our upcoming budget with some concern. WECAN's activities are growing, but our basic operating revenue is not keeping pace. Therefore, we will work more intensively on membership this year to try to increase the numbers of organizations and individual members. We will also continue our annual Valentine's Day fund appeal and will seek some larger gifts to help cover this

year's projected deficit of about \$5000. We do not want to cut back on services to kindergartens and individuals just at the time when the work most needs to grow. Rather, we want to grow the organization to support the work. Your suggestions or offers of help in this matter will be most appreciated.