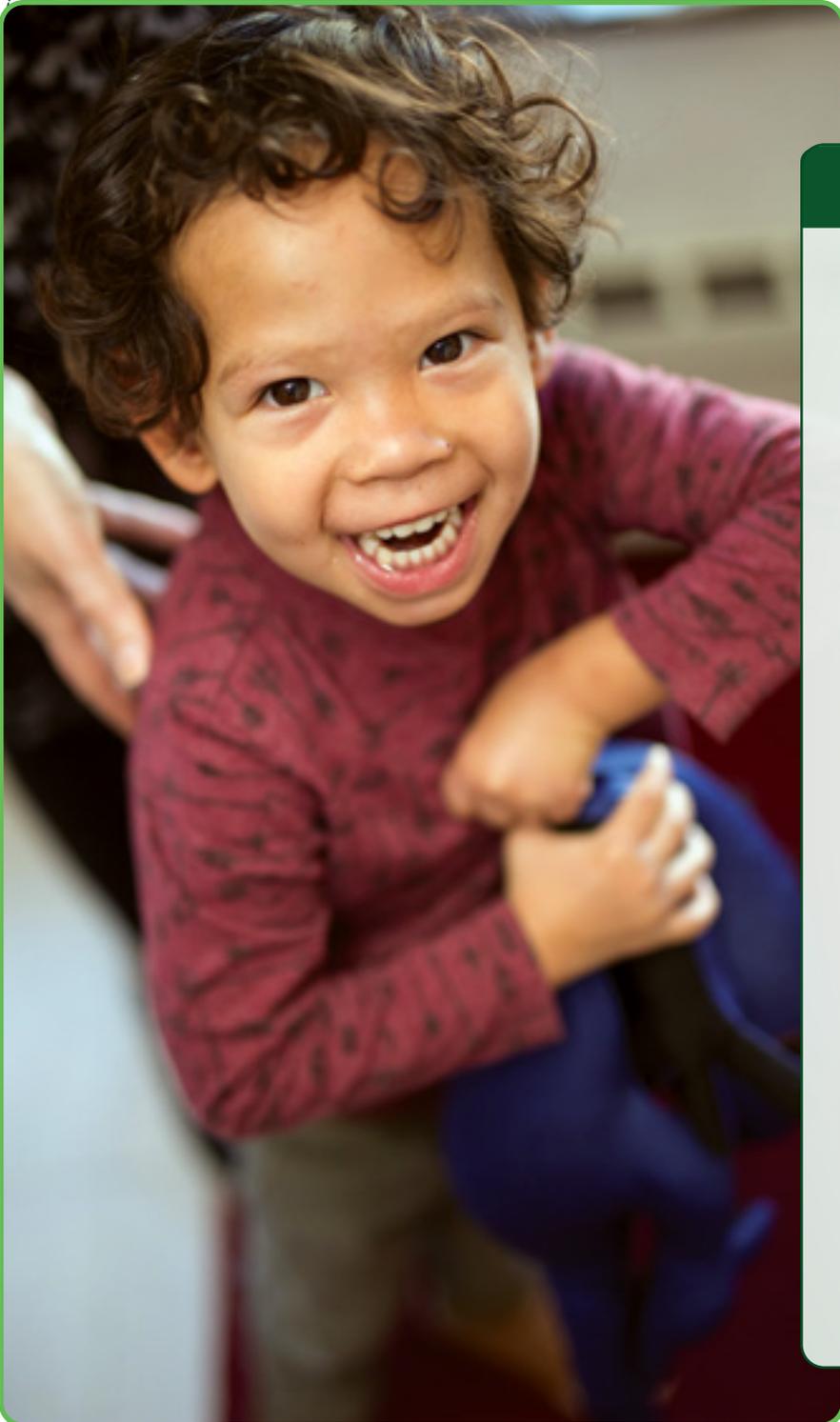




Rivendell READER

W I N T E R 2 0 1 9 / 2 0 2 0 • V O L . 2 3



Dear Friends of Rivendell,

This edition marks and celebrates the 25th anniversary of the founding of Rivendell School in 1995. That year, Rosalie Woodside's vision of an agency that would champion excellent and inclusive early childhood education became a reality. Starting first by providing evaluations and special education itinerant teaching services for children attending neighborhood preschools and day care centers (including a center housed in homeless shelter) in New York City, Rosalie broadened Rivendell's influence when The Children's House of Park Slope, known to us all today as Rivendell Preschool, became our model inclusive preprimary Montessori school. A look through this edition of the Reader underscores Rosalie's vision for Rivendell, an agency that continues to thrive and grow despite the impact of shrinking public funds for the special education services that help make our mission of inclusion so successful.

The publication of the Reader also signals the traditional beginning of our Annual Appeal for your very generous support. Scholarships to Rivendell Preschool, additional staffing for children who need

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No Better Spot

CATE LAFARGE SUMMER

Rivendell Parent

Maybe if we hadn't toured a dozen and a half schools before Rivendell, we wouldn't have found it so extraordinary. The staff and teachers wear their expertise so lightly, you could almost mistake it for an ordinary preschool. A beautifully set up school, a warm school, a place with deeply skilled educators, but maybe not extraordinary.

The first clue was that—unlike the preschools and elementary schools we'd toured for our older son—the majority of our Rivendell tour was spent sitting outside each classroom, simply watching the work happening inside. We weren't announced or really even noticed. There was no overlay of a tour guide telling us what we were seeing; at the threshold of each classroom, Shelly made sure we were comfortable and then said, "I'll be back in fifteen or twenty minutes." It's an approach that now seems very much like Rivendell itself—wise, a little understated, and wonderfully effective. More than any Q&A could have, this time to observe helped us understand how well inclusivity can work for everyone.

We knew that we'd see children with a range of abilities, and that some differences might be more obvious than others. But once we started watching, we weren't dwelling on any differences—there was too much of a busy, happy flow happening. A lot of singing, some getting wet and dirty. Nothing was missed—no dropped cupcake, no accidental push—and no one was hanging out on the periphery. The teachers gracefully moved the children through different stations, attuned to the varying attention spans of each child and what kind of help each needed. Before sitting outside that classroom, we had worried about what our son Hooper's school experience might look like. But it was shockingly easy and fun to imagine him here.

Another clue came with Hooper's own first trip to Rivendell, for his play visit. It was a Saturday morning and all four of us came. Since we were the only family there, Katy—with her naturally inclusive spirit—said, "Why don't you all come into the classroom? There's plenty of room." So there we were: Katy, Shelly, a teacher, and two parents sitting on the floor of Classroom One while both boys set out to explore. Hooper had a lot he wanted to see and do, and no one blinked an eye at his style of navigating around. We'd gotten accustomed to reporting on Hooper to doctors and people evaluating him for various services—all necessary, but it sometimes ended up pathologizing his every move. Here, we didn't need to explain anything. They picked up on his fascination for the way the hands move in "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" and on his sneaky sense of humor. They saw how obsessed he is with his big brother. That hour was like a balm for our nervous systems. All four of us could have hung out all day.

Even before Hooper started school, Katy and Shelly started giving us spot treatments of support. When we were struggling to find a special instructor through Early Intervention, Katy put me in touch with a terrific instructor, Amy, who has been showing up at our home before 8 am ever since. We were introduced to other Rivendell parents and immediately relaxed into this new, needed community. Katy counseled me on how to transition out of Early Intervention into preschool services and—at least thus far—it's more thoughtful and sensitive than the bureaucratic headache I'd come to expect.

On one of the first days of school this fall, Classroom One was playing on the roof and Hooper—who is not yet walking—began crawling around and hiding in some boxes. Rather than zip past him, a bunch of the other children

slowed down, got in, and crawled around with him. There was no self-consciousness on anyone's part. As Hooper's parent, I'm so grateful. And I love to think about what all these children are lucky enough to learn at age two and three, how to navigate all sorts of differences without fear. If the real learning of preschool is social learning—patience, empathy, respect, teamwork, kindness—then there's no better spot.

News from Growing Connections

BRIGITTE YOHE

We had another lovely summer in Annie's Garden, named in honor of our very generous benefactor Antoinette Cicchetti, and the site of our thriving Growing Connections Program. The children who attended summer school enjoyed many sunny days learning about various leaves that are edible or non-edible. We had an abundance of kale, mixed lettuce, basil, parsley and chives to nibble on, all of it planted by seed by our preschoolers! Friends were busy attending to the garden by watering and adding to our leaf compost, as well as the vermicompost made by our hardworking Rivendell School composting worms. All year long, we reinforce the elements that seeds need to grow, soil, water and sun for warmth. The children witness first-hand what happens to seeds and tender young plants when one of these elements is left out. At the same time, they learn that when we are thoughtful and kind to our plants, we can make them grow bigger and stronger. Our children have been working hard all year long, collecting leaves and adding them to our compost bin that we introduced last fall. Lots of muscle work was required to turn the tumbler, but we did it! We had plenty of leaf compost to add to our fruit and vegetable plants! The tomatoes and peppers have been growing amazingly and the children have been able to snack on them in the greenhouse and during lunchtime.

As our curriculum in sustainability is expanding here at Rivendell, I'm so excited to announce that we are going to experiment with collecting food waste as additional compost this year. Here at the school, we try to keep food waste to a minimum. Teachers encourage their students to eat what they bring for lunch and to revisit their lunch boxes throughout their day. However, the children also learn that there are parts of food that we typically don't eat, such as banana peels, apple cores and eggshells. Over the years, we have collected and fed some of those food items to our composting worms, but there is a lot more than our worms can possibly eat. This fall, we added another compost bin to the garden that we will devote to food scraps. We will compare the leaf compost to the food waste compost; the children will experiment to see if it will look and feel the same and will wonder and observe to see if leaf or food waste compost could be more effective for our plants to grow.

As our summer days are winding down, the plants in the garden are starting to wither. That doesn't mean that our work here at Annie's Garden lessens. The children busily collect seeds from our ripe tomatoes and peppers, as well as from radish seedpods and the inside of our basil's flowering heads. These hands-on activities help the children witness first-hand the life cycle of our fruits and vegetables. At the same time, we are already starting to plan for a new beautiful garden in 2020!





Windows to Each Child

ELISA LUNDY
Assistant Director

So far this year, we are providing special education itinerant teaching services (SEIT) to thirty-eight students. These students are seen at Rivendell Preschool and in other schools in our extended neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and, for some students, at home as well. We make every effort to be a resource for our host schools and we continue partnerships with many schools even when we do not have SEITs there for the year. It is our priority to provide consistent quality of service and so we believe strongly in supervision, especially in the form of visits to the students' schools. In order to support our SEITs and develop collegial relationships that encourage our professional growth, regular staff meetings and professional development are essential components of supervision for Rivendell SEITs. Staff meetings give SEITs an opportunity to share ideas with one another and seek the wisdom and experience of others. We typically focus on a theme, based on current issues that students are experiencing, that will foster creative and quality interventions and relationships. Recently we received guidelines on writing annual reports that are submitted as required to the NYC Department of Education. We met to decide how we would comply with the guidelines, while also maintaining the thoughtfulness of our reports. It is important that reports bring a child to life so that a reader can clearly see the child we see, how they learn and what they need to access their school curriculum and have successful educational experiences. We examine the conditions and supports that provide the best outcomes and what it takes for the child to be as independent as possible. The voices of parents, related service providers and classroom teachers are included as well. Each person involved has a window into the child and only by opening all the windows can we try to see the child fully and share that vision with others. Rivendell SEITs love to talk about their work and have always had a great commitment to improving their craft and learning from one another and their students.



Our evaluation team works under the same principles. We have completed evaluations for fourteen children since the beginning of the school year. (Three hundred eighty-four assessments were completed by our team for ninety-six children last year.) Our evaluators are very thoughtful in their work and interested in finding out everything they can about the child in the time they have. The observations of parents and classroom teachers are invited and included in our process, too. Parents watch the evaluations as they happen and have the opportunity to ask questions afterward. They meet with me to discuss results and to learn about indications of needed services, again, opening as many windows as we can to have the best insight for each child. While the evaluation process may be a short-term relationship for some, we consider the families we meet through that process part of our Rivendell School family and we offer continuing support as needed.



25 Years of Rivendell: The Alumni Community

ANGELA CAROLA
Rivendell Board of Trustees

As parents of Rivendell alumni, we will always be vital to the success and growth of Rivendell School. While our children were here, we experienced what it means to be part of the community and see the strong sense of understanding about others that our children gained through the Rivendell mission. We embraced and advanced our school culture and contributed significantly to the Rivendell we enjoy today. As such, we will always be important members of the Rivendell community.

There are a number of ways we can stay connected to fellow alumni parents and the mission of the school:

- Attend alumni events. There will be more alumni events for you and your children in 2020 as Rivendell celebrates its 25th Anniversary. There may even be opportunities for you to host a Parent of Alumni reunion event. If you are interested in more information, please email: alumni@rivendellnyc.org
- Keep in touch—stop by for a visit or send an update about your alumnus/alumna or family.
- Make sure we have your current information so you receive news and information about alumni activities. If your contact information has changed since your last year at Rivendell please email alumni@rivendellnyc.org
- Make the Rivendell Annual Appeal part of your annual gifting plan. The Annual Appeal is the cornerstone of all fundraising at Rivendell School and gives our school financial strength and flexibility which enables us to support Rivendell's commitment and mission to promote excellent inclusive early childhood education through our Preschool, Evaluations, and Special Education Programs.

Rivendell Alumni parents often share anecdotes about the small interactions they see their grade school or even teenage children have with others, and how those interactions would look different if not for the perspective they gained at Rivendell. We can all agree supporting the spirit and mission of the school will help Rivendell thrive. Your continued involvement is paramount to making sure that happens.

MILESTONES

We're pleased to announce that Angela Carola and Julian Rappmann have joined Rivendell's Board of Trustees and that Gabi Martin has agreed to become our first Advisory Board member. All three have been members of the Rivendell Preschool community for many years and share a focus on fundraising and finance to support Rivendell's well-being and future. We welcome them and appreciate their efforts!





Affirming the Value of Our Shared Work

MEDINA KHALIL

Executive Educational Director, Brooklyn Free Space

A new year begins, full of possibility and promise, and, if we are honest, a little trepidation. As teachers and administrators, we find ourselves awaiting the revelation of how the classroom will feel with the new bodies, some of whom are children, some adults. Each year, we reinvent the classroom. How will this new mixture shape the dynamics of the room or the school?

When I was in the classroom, before the year began, I would scour the child information forms that parents filled out over the summer. I found myself reading between the lines to understand how these descriptions of temperaments and preferences would play out in the classroom. If a child was known to the school, either because she was previously in another classroom or a child of an alum, we would have pre-knowledge of these traits. All this information provided both a boon, in the form of valuable information about a child's family life, and a possible pitfall, in that the information could shape our perceptions of the child and color how we view a child. "Elliot is often in 'time out' at home; he can't sit still, and we are at our wits end." Knowing that a child is challenged to still his body is one point of information, but tells us little about where, why and when.

Our responsibility as educators is to use the points of information to help support, not label a child, to uncover as much as we can about the situations and experiences that shape a child's reality. The view we have of children is essential here. How do we see them: as capable, curious and engaged or naughty, mischievous and difficult? If we understand that children react as a result of the situations and feelings they may experience, then we are also making an assumption that they are rational. They do not simply act, with no

rhyme or reason. It is our job to take a holistic view to see the whole child; and, with that view, let it inform how we can shift dynamics in our spaces, modify our own practice and routines to meet that child. In supporting the child, we also recognize the value in nurturing resilience, so that tasks which are difficult are not avoided. Differentiating practice does not mean that children should not develop tools to interact with peers, teachers and engage in tasks that are not self-directed. We would not be serving our students if we did not challenge them.

In all of this work, we are partners with our Rivendell SEITs and service providers from other agencies. A service provider enters the room as another protagonist, helping shape and support the culture within the room. This engagement is a balancing act for all within the space. The children have yet another adult with whom to interact, negotiate and get to know. For the adults, there is a balance between pedagogy, practice and the intentional or unspoken culture of the space. Communication is key in all of this. When the teachers all work together to craft language that is consistent and supportive, the expectations are clear for a child's behavior. This sometimes means we have to have uncomfortable conversations with each other. We may have different points of view. In having these conversations, we are affirming that we value our shared work in the service of a child. By working through these ideas and positions we have an opportunity to grow in our practice and stretch our thinking. It is what we ask of our children: to be brave and look at our own behavior, to try new things, to trust us and to share in the joy of discovery. We are, after all, just bigger little people.

At the CORE of Social Learning

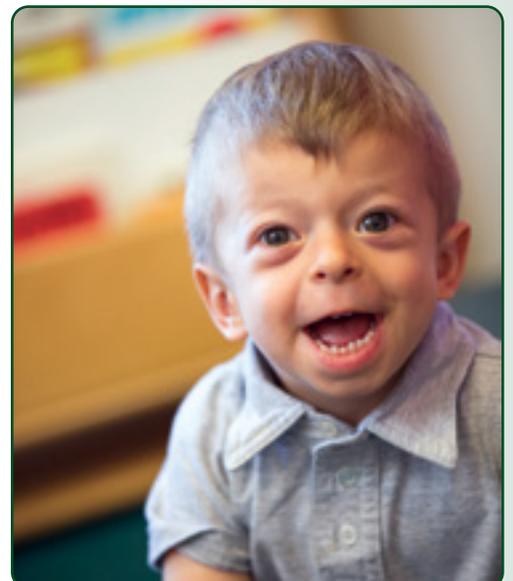
THE CORE TEAM

Rivendell School's CORE Project is an education and social thinking model that helps children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to develop the readiness skills they need to learn with others. Our educational model is based on the belief that relationships are the core of learning. The building of the teacher-child relationship is the primary focus that guides each direct teaching experience. Through this relationship, we teach children the meaning behind the skills they acquire and the generalized understanding they need to apply the skills they've learned in a variety of settings. When experiences are meaningful and shared, social understanding takes place.

CORE practitioners help students to form a positive understanding of teachers and their roles. The three psychosocial constructs that organize our work form our Fundamental Competencies of Social Relationships. They are: to understand the difference between self and other; to understand the roles of teacher, child and self; to follow a teacher's directive. We believe that the meaning behind following directions can only be understood when a child has a sense of self and other. To learn in a classroom a child needs to understand that she or he is an individual and that there are other, separate individuals nearby. The understanding of self actually arises from experiences with others.

Children become aware of their world primarily due to the relationships they form with others. In a classroom, the "others" are individuals with various functional similarities and differences. Typically developing children can imitate other people's behaviors such as facial gestures, body postures and tone of voice. While CORE students see what other children and teachers are doing they struggle to understand the ongoing relationships between teachers, peers and classroom materials. They rarely imitate the behavior of others in the classroom because the behavior of others does not have intrinsic meaning to them. CORE teaches about those ongoing relationships in a way that is individualized, systematic and based on each child's unique strengths. In partnership with parents and Rivendell Preschool teachers, we teach meanings across contexts, not discrete skills. Using dyadic interaction and video-based intervention we are learning together how to look deeper into how children who struggle to think socially can make sense of their busy, and often confusing, school experiences.

We are indebted to the children who have taught us what we know about how they think and to their parents and teachers, who have informed our practice since CORE began in 2007. We are especially grateful to the Morris and Alma Schapiro Fund whose generous support makes this work possible.



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My Return to Rivendell

WILLA MOORE
Assistant Teacher

I recently told a student in Classroom Three that I had attended Rivendell School when I was a little girl and was met with a look of utter shock and glee: “You?!” she cried, “You went here? To Rivendell?” Her excitement was both because of the awe-inspiring reminder that even grown-ups were once little, but it was also recognition that she and I shared this special experience of being a friend at Rivendell. She scurried around our classroom, telling friends the news she had learned and reassuring them that she was indeed right, and when their eyes inevitably shifted to me for confirmation, I’d nod, letting them in on my little secret. Because it is, in fact, true!

Just like the parents of all the friends who stared at me wide eyed over this big news, my parents made the decision to send me to Rivendell School, at that time called The Children’s House, located on 7th street, and later decided to send my younger brother there as well. They felt that their daughter would be treated as someone who could learn so much, yet simultaneously someone who could be learned from. They valued that their daughter would be taught not just the rules that exist at school, but also the reasons for these rules.

Just like the children I have the privilege of spending my days with, my time at Rivendell was marked by a period of intense learning and growth. I learned to be a friend to people I am still deeply close with today, I learned to be a part of a group, to share and negotiate and compromise, but most importantly I learned about myself, about what I wanted and how to ask for it, slowly starting to become my very own person.

I never quite realized what an impact my time at Rivendell had on me until I journeyed back to Rivendell in the Summer of 2018, after the opportunity arose to work in Summer School. The jitters that come with beginning a new job lasted only until I stepped foot inside the door. Even in an unfamiliar building, I felt this sense of warmth that I can only equate to coming back home after a long time away. I am not sure what about it was so instantly comforting and familiar - perhaps it was the physical aspects of the school, like the rugs I encountered in Classroom Four that I instantly remembered having rolled out in my own classroom to “do a work,” or when I realized the candlestick holder we use for birthdays is the exact same one I had seen in a photo of Shelly and me blowing out the candle at one of my Rivendell birthdays. Or perhaps it was something less literal, like the feeling I got from the teachers around me that no challenge was too challenging, no idiosyncrasies too idiosyncratic.

And now here I am back again, no longer a student but an Assistant Teacher, yet I am struck by the idea that my return to this home is marked by yet another period of intense learning and growth. Furthermore (and this is almost too cyclical for me to wrap my head around), now the people who supported my growth when I was little are doing it all over again. Katy, Shelly, Jane and Lissy (to name just a few) were a part of my Rivendell experience then and are now my teachers again.

There is something magical about being back here. I am proud to be here because in the same way that my Rivendell education has shaped me into who I am today, every day I see it shaping the children in Classroom Three. As we roll out rugs to “do a work” together, I feel privileged to watch these children learn and grow, but also feel lucky that I get to simultaneously learn from them.





Reflections from the Board

SALLIE STUTZ AND DARNELL NEWSUM
Rivendell School Board of Trustees

How did you find your way to the Rivendell Board of Trustees?

Sallie: The founder of the school Rosalie Woodside who was my neighbor, asked me to join the board in 1997. We were both raising families in Cobble Hill and I agreed that it would be ok to do one more thing as a busy working parent! Most of my career had been working for a for-profit entity – I was an executive at the Brooklyn Museum. The allure for me, the reason I said “yes” was the personal connection to Rosalie and her wanting to build a special school – I was intrigued about how that would happen.

Darnell: I became acquainted with Rivendell in its very early years (when they were based at the YWCA on Atlantic Avenue) because I had a child with special needs. My child received early intervention services through Rivendell and I became well acquainted with the mission of the school and its support for families going through the trials of locating needed educational services and therapies. I think Rosalie asked me to join the board in 1999 to bring a parent perspective to the board. Like Sallie, I was working full-time in the media business, trying to balance work and family and figured I could do one more thing!

Both Darnell and Sallie agreed that Rosalie’s passion and humanity about children, and particularly young learners, was a compelling reason to become part of the Rivendell community.

What are your favorite things about serving on the board?

Sallie: I enjoyed introducing Growing Connections to the school. I had taken a course in horticulture at the New York Botanical Garden and felt sharing the joy of planting could benefit the children. And, gardening happens to be a tenet of

the Montessori methodology. I also enjoy those times when I can meet the children when they arrive at school – greeting them along with Katy has been a special joy.

Darnell: One of my favorite things is attending the annual auction and seeing the pride of parents as they bid on their children’s artwork! It is fun to hear parents talk about this special school and how their children are thriving in this nurturing and supportive place.

How do you think the Board of Trustees can contribute to the sustainability of the school?

Sallie: We must continue to encourage fundraising, and work with the entire board to identify organizations, friends, colleagues who believe in inclusion and the value of early childhood education. We would love to connect with those who realize that children are shaped so profoundly by their early childhood experiences and value how children learn from one another.

Darnell: I agree that fundraising is critical, but I also believe we need to find ambassadors among alumni, future families, and educators who can speak to the need for children to become kind to one another, to be kind to their communities. We need to determine how to better help children learn, particularly children who may be challenged to learn in classrooms. We want to support best practices that foster the educational and emotional growth of our children.

As board members we want to encourage dialogue about the school and we are happy to meet over coffee, cocktails or even walks around the block to share ways to keep Rivendell the vibrant place it is.

Friends of Rivendell School July 2018 - June 2019

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Dear Friends of Rivendell

Continued from page 1

more one to one guidance, enhancements for our library, garden, gym, rooftop play yard and art program as well as professional development opportunities for our staff are all made possible through your kind contributions. Your gifts protect our underfunded special education programs and help us preserve things like affordable, high quality health benefits for our valued staff, too. The Reader is an excellent way to see what your contributions help us accomplish and with so many stories to tell, this issue is bigger, with more space devoted to the people and work that characterizes the spirit of Rivendell School.

The stories share themes of history, progress, self-awareness and service. They invite you into Rivendell School to observe up close and for yourselves the impact our programs have on so many. *The Reader* brings Rivendell to life!

With very best wishes,

Katy Hill
Katy Hill

VISIT OUR WEB SITE

Get up-to-date information, see th school calendar, or contact us any time at

www.rivendellnyc.org

WELCOME TO Rivendell School

A FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

Rivendell School
277 Third Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11215



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