

## Being Green Has Big Payoff for the Littlest Sprouts

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OWNER ANNETTE'S PRESCHOOL

**W**e protect our children from the winter winds with warm coats, from the burning rays of the sun with hats and rash-guard suits, and from risk of accidents with safety car seats. But what children smell, taste and touch in everyday lives can also have negative impacts on their nervous system and physiological growth.

Pesticides are implicated in an array of harmful effects to wildlife, people and pets. Idling of cars causes pollution and harms young children's airways as well as our atmosphere. Broad ranging green initiatives have historically worked long and hard in Vermont to improve the health of our environment and the health of our state residents.

Annette's Preschool and The Clubhouse Camp in Hinesburg are proud to be recognized as an environmental advocate in early care and education by receiving the Eco-Healthy® Childcare certification from the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN). This certification recognizes high standards for environmentally healthy program practices in and outside of the classroom, use of materials that are sustainable and safe, and a commitment to educating children and families about choices to preserve and conserve natural resources. The criteria for certification include committing to no pesticide or insecticide use, reducing lead exposure, fewer plastics and minimal use of household chemicals. Annette's Preschool is one of only seven early care and education programs in Vermont to be recognized for their commitment to

reduce children's exposure to environmental health hazards. The Clubhouse Camp is the only Vermont afterschool Camp program to be Eco-Healthy® certified.

"Young children's bodies absorb more toxins per minute than do adults' because their heart rate is faster, their body mass is smaller, and children naturally engage in a lot of hand to mouth behavior" says Angela Record, Business Director and Eco-coordinator for Annette's. "Using natural, healthy materials reduces the risk overall, and is often easier to clean up, too!" Annette's has exceeded the minimum number of standards for this important certification, and continually strives to improve using their commitment to sustainability in their mission as a guiding philosophy.

But the ability to effect change in children's attitudes can go deeper than a checklist. As part of a commitment to creating an awareness around being environmentally conscious, the afterschool Clubhouse Camp has started a recycling club. Tricia Pawlik, the Director of the Clubhouse afterschool program notes, "Our kids collect recycling once per week from the preschool classrooms and properly dispose of it, but also think imaginatively about how they can be used for creative art projects in the Clubhouse Camp." It's an initiative wider than saving valuable resources. Last summer the Clubhouse Summer Campers made bracelets out of aluminum pull tabs, sold them and donated the proceeds to a local animal charity.

Healthy choices for classrooms need not be difficult. For example, the program staff at Annette's has refrained from using shaving cream for sensory activities because its fragrance and chemicals are not proven to be safe to young bodies and developing brains, and instead choose to use natural products like rainbow rice, acorns or dried beans. In addition, staff are encouraged to check on the safety of products and materials before planning curriculum. Angela Record adds, "Babies are now being born with over 600 chemicals detected in their cord blood. How is this natural? Children only have one chance at a healthy childhood, and as early educators, it's our job to ensure it is the best one they can get."



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