

Creating Inclusive Preschool Opportunities

Resources for children experiencing disabilities

Northwest Regional Education Service District's Board of Directors will recognize Amazing Minds Child Development Center for its efforts to create inclusive preschool opportunities for children experiencing disabilities.

In the K-12 education system, federal and state laws protect the rights of children with disabilities. However, research shows that families with children who have delays or disabilities and are under five years of age are too often rejected from the already limited early learning opportunities in their communities.

That's why Northwest Regional Education Service District has made it a priority to partner with local preschools and support child care providers on creating inclusive classrooms. The agency partners with more than 100 preschools in Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Washington counties. Sabi Velasco, the owner and founder of Amazing Minds,



From left - Saray Flores, Sabi Velasco and Yesenia Flores pose for a photo at the Amazing Minds Child Development Center in Aloha. Photo by Jennifer Youngblood.

is one of these partnership preschools. Velasco runs two child care centers in Washington County with her daughters Yesenia Flores and Saray Flores.

to provide special education services to children and help the child care providers navigate challenges and celebrate successes.

During her time there, they talk about how to ensure the physical layout of the classroom is inclusive for all kinds of children. That includes having posters about emotions on the walls, using softer lighting and creating calming corners where children can go to process their emotions in a healthy way. But the physical layout is just the beginning. "It's the teachers themselves who bring the school to life and help make it a loving and nurturing place to learn," says Youngblood.

She says that the teachers get down at eye-level with the children and play with them. They understand their individual needs and understand that every child has different sensory needs. For example, a child with autism might need to sit in a different sort of chair and play with a fidget during storytime.

Youngblood emphasizes that making these accommodations isn't something that is extra. These approaches help every child, regardless of whether they are experiencing a disability. Data shows that everyone benefits when preschools create inclusive environments where typically developing children can learn about accepting difference, empathy and compassion.

To read more about the work Amazing Minds Childhood Development Center is doing, read this partner spotlight story on nwresd.org.

PCC Willow Creek Partners With WorkSource

Free Legal Services and Job Support

Portland Community College has partnered with WorkSource Portland Metro to offer free legal services once a month at the Willow Creek Opportunity Center (241 SW Edgeway Drive) in Hillsboro. This partnership now allows individuals in Washington County to access valuable legal and employment-related services.

The CLEAR Clinic/PCC Legal Resource Center provides limited-scope legal services for various issues. These services include DACA support, criminal record expungements, eviction assistance, and help with name and gender-marker changes.

J.J. Caufield, a staff attorney at the clinic, explained that they also offer Senate Bill 819 Reviews for Eligibility, a process similar to a pardon, and they can connect individuals with deportation

defense services. Caufield and his team also provide eviction expungements. This is important as eviction records can appear on rental histories even if a renter did not actually lose their eviction case. The clinic collaborates with WorkSource to provide job training and resume assistance, extending support beyond legal matters.

"We can connect folks with resources for touching up their resume after their criminal record is cleared," Caufield said. "We can set people up with job training and occupational skills training. Even if a participant is unable to fully clear their record, for example, they can meet with WorkSource partners to plan their career and set their life back on track."

"Ordinarily, we are largely limited to assisting folks with legal issues," he added. "But at the new Willow Creek Clinic, our sponsors at WorkSource can assist people with work issues as well."

The Willow Creek Opportunity Center legal clinic operates on the second Monday of each month from 2-6 p.m. The remaining 2023 dates are Oct. 9, Nov. 13 and Dec. 11. Services will continue into 2024 as well. For more information, visit <https://www.pcc.edu/clear-clinic/>.



Martiza Seja performs fingerprinting for expungement services client

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