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**April-May 2015**

*VSA Vermont uses the magic of the arts to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities.*

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## Celebrating Volunteers and Young Children

For VSA Vermont, April doesn't just bring showers, it marks a month of meaningful celebrations.

April is National Volunteer Month. This past year, so many VSA VT volunteers dedicated their time and talents in service to building inclusive communities where art beats for all. We are highlighting quotes from many of our volunteers on [Facebook](#) and all our volunteers have been invited to a special April 22<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer event in our Winooski office. [Helen Keller](#) once said that "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." We are exceedingly grateful to our volunteers for all that they have given, helping us to do so much more than we would have believed possible. It's magic.



We are also recognizing [NAEYC's Week of the Young Child](#) with an article about our statewide model

program, [Start With The Arts](#) (SWTA). SWTA lays the foundation for children's success in school and later life. What could be more

important! Here at VSA VT we are recommitting ourselves to ensuring that each and every child in SWTA experiences an inclusive arts-based literacy program that promotes their early learning.

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# Start With The Arts (SWTA)

## *A statewide model program for early literacy education*

For the past 12 years, Jennelle Gallagher has provided childcare at her home in Colchester. This fall, six children from infancy to three years were there throughout a ten-hour day, with a couple of older children joining them when school let out.

Toward the end of 2014, Jennelle was offered the opportunity to participate in a VSA Vermont's [Start With the Arts](#) (SWTA) Program. [Judy Chalmer](#), VSA's Executive Director, says that SWTA "helps busy home-based childcare providers include all children and make each book an adventure by inviting children to explore the stories in books with movement, drama, music and great art activities." It was a chance for Jennelle to experiment with new ideas.



The new ideas came in the form of weekly hour-long visits by Peter Burns, the SWTA instructor assigned to work with Jennelle. Peter is a professional storyteller who carries his love of story into activities that encourage children to read. He has been an instructor with SWTA for nearly a decade. In working with children, he can also draw on the couple of hundred nursery rhymes he has memorized and sometimes written himself.



On one representative day, Peter began the drama with a chance for the children to take turns unwrapping Margaret Wise Brown's classic book "Goodnight Moon," which Peter re-wrapped each time in a multicolored scarf. Then Peter read from the book, pointing in particular to a drawing of mittens that had been hung out to dry. Everyone looked for colors in the book that corresponded to colors on their clothes.

Peter added a song about the moon that everyone acted out: "I see the moon, the moon sees me." Then the song became about each child in turn: "I see Becca, Becca sees me..." In an echo of the book, Peter had each child trace their hands on drawing paper to make their own mittens. They colored the mittens, hung them up, and counted them. Then Peter made trails of mittens on the floor for each child to follow in turn to find where he'd hidden the book.



By the time the hour was over, the book had been the basis for reading, distinguishing colors, game playing, song, counting, and art. At every point along the way, each child was singled out for individual attention. At the end, they sang a goodbye song ("Now it's time to say goodbye, wave goodbye, hug goodbye"). Peter left, saying he'd be back the next week, and the children went down for their nap.

SWTA instructors visit weekly for 16 sessions at each childcare site, modeling inclusive arts-based literacy best practices so that children learn and childcare providers experience the process at their own site with their children. Childcare providers also receive monthly training outside of care hours. During a three-month follow-up period, childcare providers develop their own activities to integrate literacy and arts, with monthly support visits from Start With The Arts instructors. [link to "[www.vsavt.org/arts-education/preschool-arts-based-literacy](http://www.vsavt.org/arts-education/preschool-arts-based-literacy)"]



Although the overall structure is always the same, individual SWTA instructors choose their own books and come up with their own ways of relating the arts to these. The same week Peter was in Colchester, for example, [Lisa Aschbacher](#) was working in Wilder, Vermont, at Melissa Trzesiara's home-based childcare. Lisa has been a SWTA instructor since 2008 and is VSA's Regional Coordinator for the southern part of Vermont. Her choice of book was Jasper Tomkins's "Nimby," about a young cloud who follows his own playful instincts instead of deferring to what the older clouds expect of him. After they'd heard the story, the children made cloud creations of their own from paper plates, glue, colored tissue, and cottony fiberfill. Then they shared stories about their creations.

A few weeks later, [Peggy Rainville](#) was in Burlington, with Jenal Dumas at her home-based childcare site. Jenal cares for two infants and three active young preschool boys, in addition to homeschooling her 7 year old daughter. Along with being a SWTA instructor, Peggy is Director of Children's Programming at VSA Vermont and has been coordinator of the statewide SWTA program for the past ten years. Peggy read "Super Duck," by Jez Alborough. Duck, wearing a cape, becomes Super Duck, and saves Frog who was flying in the air hanging on to a kite. Frog is saved, and the animal friends agree that Duck is really a super hero. Peggy then provided the children with capes improvised from T-shirts. They used markers to decorate the T-shirts and became super heroes themselves, saving their own frog and other stuffed animals. By the end of the hour, they were so engaged with the story that they insisted on adding "Goodbye, Super Heroes" to their usual goodbye song.

It's hard to overestimate the value of a process like this. Peggy Rainville notes, "Early childhood is in the spotlight right now about how important it is. Children's brains develop 80% by age three, 90% by age five. It is important for people to understand the importance of quality early experiences and the positive impact that they can make on early learning. And that walks hand in hand with what SWTA does. Start with the Arts encourages the love of reading and creative self-expression in inclusive, flexible and supportive ways.



SWTA has been working this way with home-based childcare providers for the past decade. In the past five years alone, 1,000 Vermont children, ages 0-5, have participated in the program. This year, 10 SWTA instructors are working in 36 home-based sites and six center-based sites, reaching approximately 200 children.

Statewide each instructor adds their own individual flavor and style to the program by choosing their own books and arts-based activities, creating a rich mix from each genre: music, creative movement, dramatic play and visual arts. SWTA is an inclusive program. Every session is intended to include all children of all abilities. Home-based childcare providers typically have children within a wide range of ages in their care. It is not unusual to have babies alongside 5 year olds. Each SWTA instructor welcomes and accepts each child and provider, presenting open-ended arts-based activities and modeling age appropriate expectations.



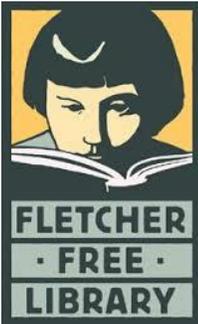
In a study of Start With The Arts carried out by VSAVT's [Heidi Pfau](#), MSW, during 2012, providers said that “The biggest thing that was helpful is the intentional planning, some purpose behind an activity linked to a story. Not just coloring because you can’t think of anything else to do. Something that has more meaning.” Exploring that idea has staying power. According to Pfau’s study, “As a result of participating in SWTA, providers are linking literacy and arts-based activities for months and years after completing the program.”

Back in Colchester, Jennelle is well on her way. “It’s amazing to see what you can pull out of any activity education-wise. I think it’s great.” When asked whether she would expect to do more of that after this process is over, she responded, “I think so, yes. At least that’s the plan!” It’s a plan we hope will carry on for months and years.

## **BOOM VT 2015**

### *Save the date*

In 2015, BOOM VT, our annual drum festival and disability identity project, has expanded into a year-long program. We hope to offer drum making and/or drumming instruction workshops at libraries (targeted to preschoolers and families with children with disabilities), adult homes and adult day programs (for older adults with dementia and Alzheimer’s), meetings of disability organizations/groups, and more.



Save the date. The culminating FREE BOOM VT Drum Festival will be held on October 4, 2015 from 1 to 4 PM at the [Fletcher Free Library](#), 235 College Street, Burlington. The free festival will include drum making and drumming instruction workshops for children and families, drumming performances, and a final jam session including all participants.

If you want to view a [3-minute video](#) about our 2014 BOOM VT drum festival, just go to: <https://vimeo.com/118270672>. [Dr. Stephen Pite](#) of the Vermont College of Fine Arts made a wonderful promotional video about BOOM VT for us. We want you to see it. Stephen has developed nationally and internationally recognized programs of innovation in design and filmmaking in the US, China, and Mexico. We couldn’t be happier that he volunteered his time to help us capture the magic of BOOM VT. Please share the video with friends and family. A [large print, verbal description](#) of the video is available on our website.



# BEST Institute Summer Conference

## *Working with students with behavioral challenges*



From June 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> in Killington, VT, the [Baird School](#) and VSA Vermont will be co-presenting at the [BEST Institute's Summer Conference](#)—*School Climate Matters! Positive Approaches for building Safe, Care, and Supportive Environments*. The workshop, entitled *Arts to Smarts: Integrative Arts Engagement*, will focus on our collaborative work using [arts-integration](#) and [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) to improve student engagement and social interactions in the classroom. Lisa Condino, a VSA Vermont teaching-artist, and David McIntyre, a classroom teacher from the [Baird School](#), will describe their collaborative process, discoveries about effective practices, assessment methods used and results. Following the presentation, workshop participants will take part in a hands-on arts activity, demonstrating adaptations designed for student success. Workshop participants will receive handouts on best practices for artist-classroom teacher collaboration and sample assessment tools. Workshop participants will also learn about options for adapting arts materials and teaching methods to engage students of varied abilities, disabilities, and backgrounds.

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## Celebrating the Life of Amy Wise

[Amy Wise](#) of Williston, Vermont, died on November 11, 2014. Amy touched the lives of more than 1,200 children, their families, her colleagues, and SWTA childcare providers. She was a remarkable advocate for young children and served as a VSA VT teaching-artist for 2 years. Those of us who knew Amy and her excellent work decided to celebrate her life by purchasing four copies of the book *Stopping by the Woods* by Robert Frost with beautiful illustrations by Susan Jeffers. In Amy's memory, we donated copies to The Lund Center, The Williston Public Library, and Poker Hill School.



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## News You Can Use:

**2015 VSA VT Annual Appeal:** The goal of our annual appeal is to raise \$15,000 in unrestricted funding. Your help will bring the gift of creativity and confidence to people whose voices have yet to be heard. We've raised \$12,675 so far. We still need to raise \$2,325 more. Won't you help us to meet our goal? The "donate now" button below makes it easy to send in your contribution electronically through [PayPal](#).



**ADA 25th Anniversary: ADA Live!** (WADA<http://adalive.org/schedule>) is a free monthly show broadcast nationally on the internet. You can ask questions and learn about your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Leaders in the field share their knowledge, experience, and successful strategies that increase the participation of persons with disabilities in our communities. You can listen to or read the transcripts of nineteen, 30-minute episodes dealing with everything from service animals to post-secondary education and students with disabilities.

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great opportunities coming.**

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