

TUMPS = Family

Trinity United Methodist Preschool Phoenix, Arizona

by Susan Weedman



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What is TUMPS? It is an acronym for Trinity United Methodist Preschool, but if you ask the parents of current and former students, their answer is family, community, a place where children learn, not just about the ABCs — but about life. TUMPS is a 51-year-old preschool with an average tenure for teachers of 23 years. TUMPS has several traditions of family events and special activities for the children that go back 30 or more years and still continue today. These activities include the Thanksgiving Feast, Breakfast with Santa, and Family Picnic, to name a few.

TUMPS is family. Since the majority of the staff has worked together for 14 years or more, we truly care about each other. We celebrate birthdays, promotions, and support each other during other life events. As the Director, I do not just tell my staff what to do, or present them with new policies and procedures; I ask for their input and we share our thoughts and opinions and decide together what is best for the children, staff, and families. As a staff, we are flexible. We work with families and their often-changing schedules regarding when the children will be with us for class or extended hours. We also fill in for one another when a staff member is unable to be at work. Sometimes being flexible with schedules is challenging and stressful, but that is how it can be in a family.

In this age of technology and telecommuting, some parents don't always have the opportunity to speak with other adults. We employ an 'open door' policy, and our parents are able to share their concerns and joys about parenting with the staff at times that are convenient for them. My office is often the place where advice and a positive word are found for parents struggling with finances, marriage, and parenting. Parents share with us health concerns, upcoming surgery schedules, and many other prayer requests.

TUMPS is a community. We currently have eight students who are second-generation students. There are a number of families where all the siblings, cousins, and cousins' cousins have attended. Once a family becomes part of the TUMPS family, they are forever in our community. We reach out to our alumni families for fundraising support and invite them to attend our special events. Last month we had our Annual Family Dinner and Silent Auction and were honored to see some of the children who once attended TUMPS, now in elementary school, junior high, high school, and even college.

TUMPS is a place where children learn not only academics, but life lessons as well. Our goal is to take each child from

where she is academically, socially, and developmentally, and move her forward. We do our best to have as many one-on-one interactions with the students as possible. We feel that if children learn to love going to school and have fun while learning in preschool, they will be successful in 'big' school. We teach the children how to respect themselves, their classmates, and adults. We work with children to overcome fears and to discover talents.

With all the great things at TUMPS, we still faced decreasing enrollment mainly due to the recession and our economically changing neighborhood. We began dedicating more of our efforts to fundraising, advertising, and praying for more families to find us (and to be able to afford us). Our budget was extremely tight and we didn't dream of replacing old furniture or buying new manipulatives. We were doing our best to pay the bills and our meager salaries.

Then along came First Things First and the Quality First program. This program did three great things for TUMPS. First, through evaluation of our program, we are building on our strengths — like dedicated staff who interact meaningfully with children — to improve the quality of our early learning programs. Second, it helped improve our classroom environments by helping us afford develop-

mentally appropriate learning materials, like books, dolls and manipulatives. And, third, it funded scholarships for more children to access our program. By early September, we were full. Additional scholarships have helped us open another classroom, and we are currently five students away from being full again — praise God.

TUMPS's future is bright. Because of the amazing foundation that has been laid over the last 50 years, the deep sense of loyalty and community we build each year with our families and with the assistance of the Quality First program, we are confident that TUMPS will continue to grow and thrive. We are dedicated to continuing to improve the quality of preschool education and hopefully in the future I will be able to report third-generation students.



In November 2006, Arizona voters passed a citizen's initiative that funds high-quality early childhood development and health. With its passage, the initiative created a new state level board known as First Things First to highlight the importance of early childhood. Quality First is a signature program of First Things First. Quality First partners with regulated early childhood providers to make quality improvements that research shows help children, ages birth to 5 to thrive. Currently, more than 900 child care centers and homes, as well as preschool programs in communities across Arizona, participate in Quality First. These programs are committed to quality improvement, going beyond regulatory requirements to help the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in their care to be ready for success in school and beyond.

First Things First supports child care and preschool programs enrolled in Quality First with:

- coaching to build on what's great about a program and to identify opportunities to improve.
- funding for the purchase of educational materials, equipment, and other resources.
- financial support for teachers and caregivers to gain expertise in early childhood and to learn how to nurture the development of young children.
- specialized assistance from a team of experts in child health, mental health, and supporting children with special needs.

Quality First is about continuous improvement. The quality of each program participating in Quality First is assessed by highly-trained early childhood professionals using valid and reliable tools that focus on what research shows are the key components of quality early care, including adult-child interactions, learning environments, and staff qualifications. Based on these assessments, each program is given a Quality First Star Rating.

Quality First Star Rating helps guide the improvement process by providing both an objective measure of each program's quality and a goal to achieve. Through QualityFirstAZ.com, the program also offers parents information about the importance of quality early care and education and what to look for in child care and preschool settings that promote learning. It also empowers parents with information on what they can do to support their child's learning.

