



As Seen In The



**Including 'All Kinds of Children'
McLean resident wins Human Rights award for children's education business.**

By Mike DiCicco, The Connection

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When she was planning her Classic Tales 'n Tunes children's program, McLean resident Jody Katz said, "It was important to me that we were able to serve all different kinds of children." Six years later, that approach won her Fairfax County's Human Rights award for a county business, which the Human Rights Commission presented to her in a May 6 ceremony. The commission called Tales 'n Tunes "a uniquely inclusive educational program for children and accompanying adults."

"A basic right is access to curriculum," said Katz. To that end, the program, which now employs two subcontractors in order to serve five community centers, two preschools and a daycare center in Northern Virginia, caters to a variety of learning styles and incorporates American Sign Language and Spanish. Also, children in the class, who range in age from 18 months to 5 years, are taught to include each other and treat each other fairly. "The children let all the other children see and hear everything," said Katz.

ANY ONE CLASS might include children who are gifted, autistic, speech- or developmentally delayed, hearing-impaired or physically disabled. To include them all, Katz said she wanted to give equal weight to each of the three basic modes of learning – visual, auditory and kinesthetic, so each class includes singing, dancing, finger plays like "Where is Thumbkin," self-directed play and an "interactive story time." Every session revolves around a theme, such as the current "Fiesta" motif that is to coincide with Cinco de Mayo. She said the central theme helps the children access the material.

During story time, "the children don't just sit there while we do all the talking," said Katz. Instead, they might be asked to answer questions, sign words or imitate different animals. "It really helps them to feel like they're contributing and gets them involved," she said. For self-directed play time, children are given items like hula hoops, tunnels and slides to do with as they will. The adults might also participate in play time.

Age discrimination is also discouraged, so parents and caretakers are part of the program too. "They love learning the sign language," said Katz. "They sing the songs, play the music, they dance with us." She tries to have only the children answer questions during story time, "but sometimes the adults participate too," she laughed.

In keeping with the program's name, Katz also tries to center activities around books and songs she considers to be classics, from "Goodnight Moon" to Chopin, to Elvis Presley and Ella Fitzgerald. She also uses more recent work by local children's musicians such as Dino Rock or Sweet Honey in the Rock. "I start with a book and it will remind me of songs I know, or I'll hunt for songs," she said. "I'll preview like 2,000 songs for a lesson." She laughed. "I stay up a lot of late nights."

KATZ did not have a professional background in education when she created Classic Tales 'n Tunes. Upon becoming a mother she had stayed home with her children, but she often volunteered for musical and theater activities at their schools. She also directed some shows at Adventure Theater in Glen Echo, Md. But she said her best training was informal. "I raised two kids. I know a lot about music and I learned a lot from them."

"It's good to have the structured learning," said Isabel Tumblin after a Tales 'n Tunes session at the Carver Center in Arlington, noting that even teaching the children to follow simple instructions like when to sit and stand was helpful. "If they don't learn from the teachers, they learn from the other kids," she said.

"It's fun. It gives us something to look forward to," said Christine Ryan Jyoti. "I'm a stay-home mom, and we need something to do." She said the sessions were "much better than what I could accomplish in 45 minutes at home."

Elizabeth Hall said the program also helps children get comfortable with their peers and that the children love the music. "It's helped him a lot," she said of her 2-year-old son Calvin. "The best part was when he started speaking Spanish to our Spanish-speaking nanny."



Photo by Mike DiCicco/The Connection
Instructor Susan Hayes, along with the adults in the class, show the children how to sign along with a Spanish song during a session of Classic Tales 'n Tunes at the Carver Center in Arlington.