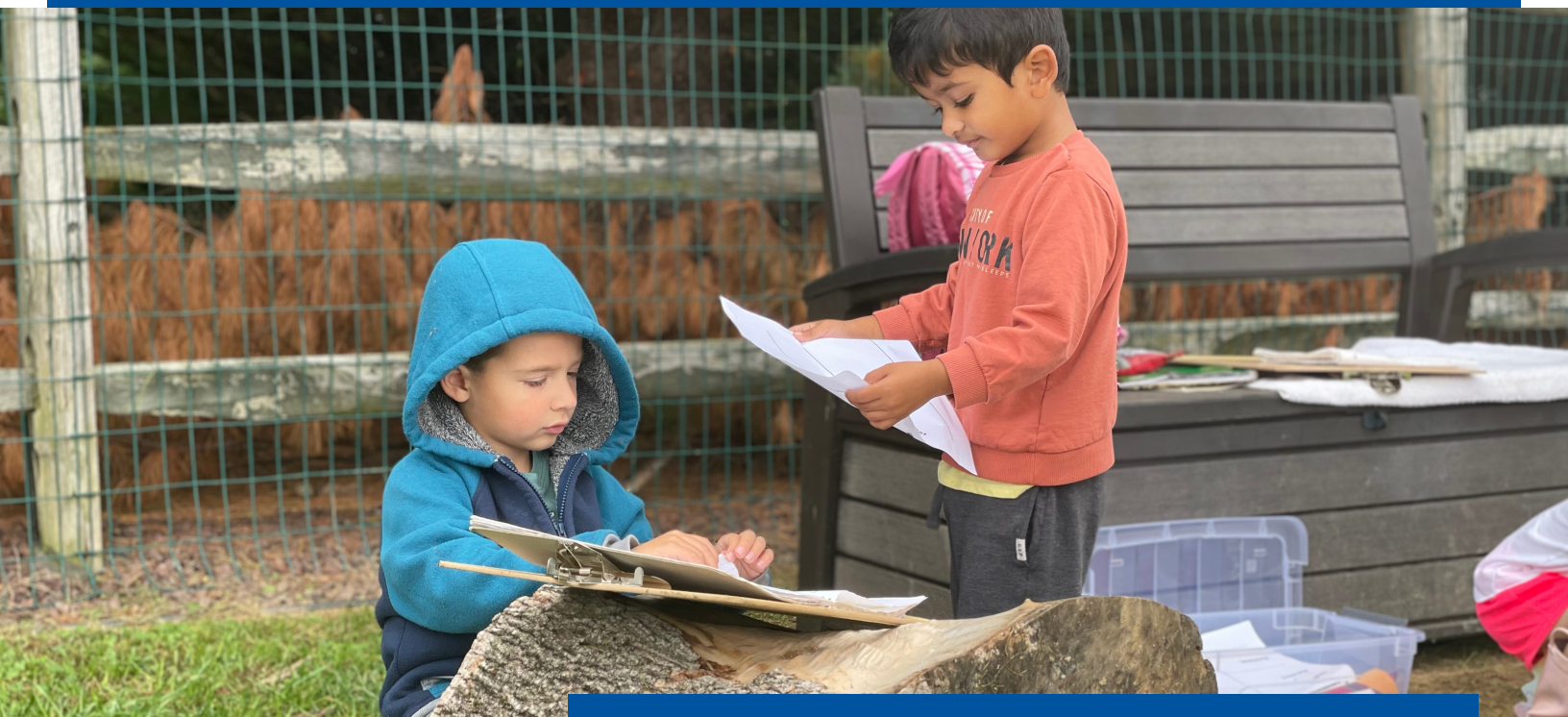


DECEMBER 2021

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

The Kids Zone Family Child Care & Preschool



DELAWARE INSTITUTE FOR
Excellence in
Early Childhood

Early Childhood Professional in her "Zone" with Outdoor Classroom

Written by Lin Nordmeyer

"Everyone is much happier outside. The student's behavior is so different than when we're inside for an entire day."

Clarise Brooks, program owner

On a misty, cloudy day, Clarise Brooks runs her classroom with a field backdrop and children sitting on tree stumps. Her classroom is outside, and she and her students couldn't be happier.

For close to 30 years, Clarise has run a family child care program, "The Kids Zone Child Care," located in Middletown, Del. And now, through the support of DIEEC and the "Let's Go Outside" grant, Clarise is spending her days in an outdoor classroom - in all kinds of weather.



The "mud kitchen" area at The Kids Zone, pictured above, was made possible through Let's Go Outside Grant funds.

"We learn more about nature and then we see it through exploration."

Clarise Brooks

"Everyone is much happier outside," said Clarise. "The student's behavior is so different than when we are inside for an entire day."

With about seven children, infant - prekindergarten, Clarise begins each day with circle time and then teaches using outdoor stations that include a thunder board, mud kitchen, and clipboards and crayons.

"The kids are much more engaged," adds Clarise. "We learn about nature and then we see it through exploration." She recalls a particular afternoon when they learned about slugs and crickets while holding them.



Students love spending their outdoor classroom time exploring the kitchen's various features.



Dirt, shovels, and a wheelbarrow are also included as part of the mud kitchen. These items, as pictured above, foster collaboration among children.

Besides the heightened learning environment, Clarise is especially excited about what the outdoor classroom is doing for her students from a social/emotional perspective.

According to Clarise, they are much more willing to take calculated risks. "For example, if you jump off a log, you may scrape your knee, but you're going to be ok.

"An outdoor classroom allows my kids to try different things and become more comfortable with the unknown. This setting promotes hands-on learning and a deeper understanding of how things work."



Sticks and stump slices act as loose part items within the mud kitchen.



The Kids Zone outdoor classroom was once the large backyard area of Clarise Brooks' home, pictured above.

The families are happy too. So much so that they all contributed to make sure every child had layered rain gear for those bad weather days.

No matter the forecast, Clarise is teaching in her outdoor classroom, and her outlook couldn't be sunnier.

