

Little Folks of Fourth – History  
by  
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In the beginning, there was a child-sized table and chair in the hallway. This was the Director's "office". All information pertaining to the program was housed in one file folder in the church secretary's office. When the phone calls about the Mother's Day Out program began interfering with the daily running of the church, an independent line was run for the program. The phone was put in the children's bathroom that connected the nursery and the toddler rooms. Teachers had to step over baby gates to answer the phone. There was no place to sit (the little toilet had no lid) and the Director conducted business over the sounds of flushing toilets and teachers prompting children through the steps of toilet training. There was no storage space and little money for supplies or equipment. Teachers brought from home books and toys to use in the classrooms. The nursery teacher took the crib sheets home each day to wash them. This is the story of how the Fourth Presbyterian Mother's Day Out (MDO) became the present day Little Folks of Fourth Child Development Center.

In the spring of 1985, a Mother's Day Out Task Force consisting of Carol Kendall, Debbie Lucas (Sloan), Susan Chisolm, Ginger Stuart, and Dottie Metropol, Director of Christian Education (DCE) was formed. As a result of their findings, the Fourth Presbyterian Church's Mother's Day Out program began in September of 1985. It was a Thursday only three hour program consisting of three classes and twenty children. The teachers were Frances Stenhouse, Deborah Schneider, and Sally Pellew. The cost was a \$5 registration fee and \$3 per day per child for tuition. The teachers were paid \$5 an hour. From the beginning it was understood that the tuition paid by the parents would fund the staff salaries and materials. The program would not be a line item in the church budget. The director's salary is not paid by the church, but by the parents' tuition.

Initially, the MDO was to provide a child care service to the members of Fourth Church. Since we are a downtown church, our members live in many different communities and their children attend many different schools. This was an opportunity for the children of Fourth to form friendships and realize that the church is not a place that exists only on Sundays. It is God's house - a place of warmth that is full of love, kindness, and friendship. When the DCE left the church shortly after the program began, Sally Pellew was named the Director and bookkeeper in addition to being a teacher. For the first several years enrollment was up and down because most families wanted more than just one day a week. In 1993, the MDO expanded to three days a week and enrollment increased. This was also the first year that a Summer Session was offered. We realized that we were not here solely for members of the church, but also for their friends, families, business acquaintances, and newcomers to Greenville. The Mother's Day Out reported to the Christian Education Committee. There were a large number of families who were non-members who chose to visit Fourth Church as a result of the welcoming reception that they received at the MDO. Church members brought to our attention less fortunate families who greatly needed childcare to be able to attend school or work. For

several years the Mission and Witness Committee sponsored a child for two days a week while her sixty-two year old grandmother attended adult literacy classes. Families of all denominations brought their children to the MDO. We quickly realized that our purpose was considerably greater than being a MDO to the children of this church. We were an example of God's love to all of His children, without consideration of their race, religion, or family background. Serving these children had become a mission of the program and a case could easily be made that the MDO could also report to the Mission and Witness Committee.

From the beginning, the MDO was a place of learning through play. Each teacher used developmentally appropriate materials in classroom. There was a low teacher/child ratio so that each child could receive one-on-one time with an adult. This enabled the program to tailor the curriculum to build on the strengths of each child and also address their individual needs. In 1993, after touring our program, Dr. Doris Blazer of the Education Department at Furman University, suggested that our name be changed to Fourth Presbyterian Church Child Development Center. This way, our name would reflect that we were more than a day care or babysitting facility.

A Task Force for Child Care was formed in 1994 to assess the community's needs for childcare and our place in it. The committee recommended the formation of a governing board, a change of name for the program, and the development of a logo. The members of the first Advisory Board were John Mann (chair), Connie Hunt, Lesa Kastler, Laurie Quattlebaum, Laura Harrison, Allen McSween (pastor) and Sally Pellew (director). The director would report to the Advisory Board which in turn would report to the Christian Education Committee. As a result of the Task Force's research, in August 1995, the program also began operating five days a week, twelve months a year. In 1996, Bob Jones, a church member and former advertising executive, created the name Little Folks of Fourth Child Development Center and designed the Little Folks of Fourth (LFF) logo.

While the church planned an extensive building addition that was completed in April 1998, considerable thought was given to the needs of the church school and Little Folks. While the architects designed the preschool wing, Carol Kendall (DCE) and Sally Pellew (LFF Director) were told to make a wish list of what we wanted in the new preschool wing. The architects took our lists and designed the preschool wing and each room in it according to our specifications. Upon its completion, this new state of the art building met all the standards required to allow the program to operate more than the former three hour maximum per day.

In the fall of 1998, the LFF Advisory Board formed a Long Range Planning Committee to make suggestions for the best use of our new facilities. It explored the future directions that Little Folks could take to optimize our strengths and resources, along with meeting the needs of the church and our community. The committee was chaired by Nancy Strausbaugh and included Jan Welch, Lesa Kastler, Tony Jones, John Kisner (secretary), Emily Wilson, and Sally Pellew. In September of 1999, in response to the committee recommendations, Little Folks applied for and obtained registration status and, ultimately, licensing from the South Carolina Department of Social Services. In

addition, a mission statement was written, a goal to have one scholarship child for each room was adopted, a review process for pay levels for the director and teachers was developed, and a Late Stay program was instituted.

Completed in 1999, the design and construction of the playground was quite a challenge. It needed to fulfill three purposes: to be a playground, an attractive entry to the rear of the church, and a garden space to view from the new fellowship hall. The playground needed to serve children from age two through twelve, meet national safety standards, and accommodate as many types of play spaces as possible in a physically small space. Church member Tom Keith, a landscape architect, did a magnificent job using every inch of the space to fulfill all three needs. He created two playgrounds and found play equipment that maximized the use of the limited space. He researched plants that attracted butterflies and were safe for children. The result is a playground that the children love and that becomes a more beautiful garden each year.

Using donations to the program, a Scholarship Fund was created to provide scholarships for children whose families could not afford the full price of the program. Further interest, not only from the members of Fourth Presbyterian Church but also from the Greenville community, fueled continuous expansion of Little Folk of Fourth Child Development Center; maximum capacity was reached in February 2002. At that time, one hundred forty students were attending one to five days a week. Five preschool classrooms were being used and twenty teachers and a director were employed. In addition, a parents' group called "Big Folks" was formed. In 2003, Little Folks received grants from the S.C. First Steps program and became an Advocate Better Child Care (ABC) Enhanced facility. The ABC rating has enabled us to receive additional grants and accept ABC vouchers. These vouchers partially subsidize tuition payments for foster children and low income families that meet the eligibility requirements.

Now, Little Folks serves 125 children, has 23 teachers, and a Director. We operate six hours a day, five days a week all year long. Our facility and playground is state of the art. We have a library of over 2,000 books, developmentally appropriate materials in each classroom and access to a washer and dryer. The Director's Office has an adult-sized desk, telephone, computer, and copy machine. We all have plenty of storage space. When teachers complain about small things, I think back to those first several years - what a far cry from the humble beginnings of the child-sized table in the hallway.