



# 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE  
Montessori School



COMPASS  
Montessori Junior High



# LETTER FROM MICHELE

Dear Children's House Families and Friends,

The 2021-2022 school year continued to test our resilience, tenacity, and strength of community at The Children's House. As we continued to navigate school in the pandemic, we forged boldly ahead for our 20th year on the Long Lake Campus and our first year at the new Park Street Campus.

I remember moving to this dream campus in June 2002, pregnant with my daughter, Sylvie. Soon after the school year began, she surprised us by arriving three weeks early and Steve Maas jumped in and assumed my role as primary guide without hesitation. When I returned 9 weeks later to my classroom, there were days Sylvie would come to school with me and nap with Colleen in the administration offices, or be taken away by a doting parent of one of my Primary students. It is just what this community does – steps in and cares for each other both in good times and challenging times.

Since then, this incredible place has seen two decades of firsts – steps, words spoken and read, art created, stories written, research projects completed, seeds sown, orbits walked, celebrations of joy and sadness, and everything in between.

This year, we outgrew the walls of our building and found a new place for our adolescent students in downtown Traverse City. Now, our learners at Compass Montessori Junior High can expand their experiences through partnership and connection with businesses and organizations in their backyard.

Where we are today as a community is all due to the incredible support of our families, staff, and friends who have embraced our mission of supporting every learner to become the best version of themselves. I am grateful for those who came before us to support this reality, and to all of you now who continue to believe.

With sincere appreciation,

*Michele Shane*

Michele Shane,  
Head of School



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# MAKING DREAMS A REALITY: BY COLLEEN CHRISTENSEN



Fall 2002: Imagine the excitement of not only a new school year, but a new school! The North Long Lake Campus became home for The Children's House after an 18-year journey that began at the school's inception in 1984 to a point when demand for the program inspired and justified the construction of our dream school. We eagerly embraced the opportunity to build a facility that supported our Montessori principles.

Interviews with several architectural firms landed us with an architect, Greg Aerts, who listened carefully and responded with a design that took our breath away.

Some cautioned us that the construction and design we chose would not withstand the wear and tear of children over the years. The naysayers obviously didn't understand the value of the Montessori prepared environment and the care of the environment that is integral to our curriculum and practices. Twenty years have not diminished the features that shone brightly that first fall - natural light, outdoor classrooms, communal gathering space, emphasis on beauty and order, space that facilitates freedom of movement and independence in a safe surrounding. The architect listened and our contractor was on board to make it happen.

This building was a big leap for our non-profit program. Dedicated families provided the courage for this endeavor, but financing the building required more help. I'd like to insert a little history here for perspective. Prior to 1997, The Children's House was fortunate to have benevolent landlords who charged manageable monthly payments. We rented a farm house in Suttons Bay and four classrooms from The Congregational Church on Old Mission Peninsula (yes we had two locations for many years). In 1997, we unexpectedly lost our lease at the Church and had less than a year to relocate a program of about 100 children. We had little money saved and no history of borrowing large sums of money, but in less than a year, we built a 10,000 square foot building on West Royal Drive.

Royal Drive turned out to be a stepping stone in our evolution by showing evidence that the school could sustain enrollment and manage owning a facility. Four years later, a wait list that could not be accommodated at Royal Drive prompted the move to the Long Lake Campus.

So, how did we do this? Our connection to Connie Deneweth, who was president of Republic Bank at the time, proved to be the key ingredient. Connie had faith in us and in our business plan. She initiated relationships with the people that would help finance the project. She facilitated financing through the County Economic Development Corporation and a small group of investors known as the Friends of Montessori. The EDC loan was crucial to our business plan. Low interest payments made all the difference. The Friends Group covered the down payment.

A fortuitous listing of the Long Lake property (Saundra's Gardens) by Reed Zitting and Saundra Hintz provided the plentiful, rural space we needed. Hallmark Construction stepped in as general contractors and has remained a supportive friend to this day. Children's House board members Kim Hagerty and Greg Holmes, building committee chair Eileen Mikulski, school families, and staff rallied to make the move that more than doubled our indoor space and quadrupled our outdoor space. A rainbow surrounded the school at our Grand Opening, certainly a sign of many good things to come. The Dream School was now a reality.





## CELEBRATING 20 YEARS ON NORTH LONG LAKE ROAD

“When Hildegard Solzbacher, director of my AMI teacher training program, asked each of us to describe the Montessori school of our dreams, I said I imagined a place where children would be free to explore learning surrounded by adults who guided them with patience and love. More specifically I imagined a peaceful building, big lawns, lots of trees, flower gardens and even a winding driveway. Beginning with the farmhouse in Suttons Bay over 40 years ago, I have had the rare privilege of seeing a dream become a reality. It was only when Colleen Christensen, followed by other dreamers and doers, joined hands around an evolving vision that The Children’s House we now call “home” became a reality. With families who met endlessly around maps and plans, architects who agreed to design windows and wainscoting that grew taller with each age group, builders who treated the project as their own, donors who gave selflessly, teachers and staff who supported the challenge of the big move and landscapers who devised a way to save all of the trees, The Children’s House took on a life of its own. I will never forget the words of a three year old as she skipped through the lobby to the car line after her first day in the new primary classroom. She said breathlessly, “Daddy, it’s magic in there!” It is.”

- **Gretchen Uhlinger, Founder**



*"I vividly remember the first time we walked the acreage that would become our Long Lake campus. There was a barn where we eventually built our gym and a house near the road. The space was a garden center with several greenhouses and many trees. After the purchase, many of the trees were temporarily relocated to what we called the nursery while construction took place. The trees were watered by hand for the entire next year until they could be distributed around our beautiful new building. We sold all but one of the greenhouses, that one we decided to use for growing our own plants with our learners' help. Now, I feel fortunate to come to such a lovely space every day and think the beauty of your space is felt by even the youngest members of our community."*

**- Steve Maas**

*"I can't believe it's been 20 years for the Children's House campus. What a journey! It's difficult to imagine our school operating in the previous locations. Our community would simply not be what it is today. This space was designed to be the physical manifestation of what we stand for and for the essence of the Montessori philosophy: children of all ages learning and growing together in shared spaces that engage the outside world."*

**- McKeel Hagerty**

*"Inviting, inspiring, lovely, conducive to learning and community, all jump to mind as I consider the building and grounds we are fortunate to call school. No matter where you are, it's a comfortable home. The school feels like a little village, yet each connected room is snug and comfortable. Interesting architecture brings in natural lighting and is perfect for follow up lessons such as shape and angle identification. The door from our classroom into the courtyard makes that space a wonderful extension of our classroom, enhancing opportunities for our learners!"*

**- Nadine Elmgren**

*"The architect truly understood our desire to incorporate Montessori ideas into the building itself. One thing that impressed me was the variety of materials and textures used indoors that provide sensory differences: "bumpy" cool metal, natural warm wood, smooth concrete, lots of windows for natural light, etc. This was very intentional. Every indoor classroom had a door to the outdoor classroom. The coatroom areas, benches, and restroom fixtures were designed for student use, apportioned to their size. I was impressed with the way Colleen Christensen was able to communicate her dream to the designers who brought it to life."*

**- Eileen Mikulski**





## INTRODUCING OUR PARK STREET CAMPUS AND COMPASS MONTESSORI JUNIOR HIGH



On January 14, 2022 we added a new milestone on our school's timeline: that was the day our Junior High moved to their new home at 101 North Park Street in downtown Traverse City. Streaming with natural light, our Park Street Campus provides our adolescent learners with four times the space as the former junior high wing at our Long Lake Campus, including larger classroom and gathering spaces, a library, kitchen, and a computer lab. The location also provides students with immediate access to the "real worlds" of downtown Traverse City, West Bay, and the Boardman River.

This enormous step forward was made possible by the generosity of those who shared our excitement for the future of our Junior High. Leading this philanthropic effort were Carrie and Scott Goodreau, whose \$500,000 gift transformed this project from a dream into a reality. They were joined by an incredibly generous group of donors who made gifts, pledges, and in-kind donations toward the purchase and furnishing of the space. Because of these gifts, which totaled more than \$1,000,000, we were able to close on the property on August 4, 2022 with an affordable mortgage. We have so much gratitude for the people who chose to support this new campus and are excited by the possibilities and opportunities that this new space has created for our learning community.

We rebranded our Junior High to more accurately represent the school experience of our adolescent learners. Jennifer Lake, TCH parent, along with her business

partner Audra Tompkins of Brand Tonic, worked through a six-month branding process that involved the students from the start. "We enjoyed working with the students to develop this new branding, allowing them to incorporate their ideas to create a logo that is a more mature version of The Children's House logo," said Lake. "In the process, the students learned about brand messaging, color theory, icon development and marketing."

### **Donor Spotlight: Carrie and Scott Goodreau**



The opportunity to support the continuity in our children's development – as life-long learners, as friends, and contributing community members – is a responsibility we proudly share with the wonderful community at The Children's House. It is an honor to broaden the mission of The Children's House with the expansion of Compass Junior High. We believe in the cumulative work we all do together in our efforts to raise good humans and grow a better world.



# YOUR IMPACT: KAREN CIRCLE

Every year since 2005, The Children's House community of mothers and grandmothers have come together to remember Dr. Karen Gilhooly and carry on her passion for supporting a healthy and active lifestyle for our children. In November 2021, Karen Circle members gathered on Zoom and awarded \$31,000 to the following projects:

- Peace Library for Nido/YCC
- Encyclopedia Set for Elementary Library
- Junior High Library and Kitchen
- Soccer Goals and PE Equipment
- New furniture for Primary Great Hall
- Junior High Robotics
- YCC South Classroom Upgrades
- Language Cards for Holidays and Celebrations
- Pebble Harp for Zen Garden
- Employee Relations
- Professional Development



## BIGGER, BETTER, STRONGER

Patty Anton's motto will forever inspire our elementary students to do their best work and to be their best selves. Thanks to Frank Petty, John Ammond, Chad Schrader, Carl Ferguson, and Jeff Fedorinchik for creating and installing this artwork.

Patty Anton was our first upper elementary guide and after she retired she volunteered at 3 Mariposas Montessori in the Dominican Republic. Frank Petty gifted an identical artwork to 3 Mariposas in Patty's memory and to forever connect our school communities.





# BRAIDEN VOSS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

In August 2021, our school community enveloped the Voss family with love and honored the life and magical soul of Children's House alumnus, Braiden Voss. Chris Klau, TCH alumni parent, wrote a tribute using the words love, joy, appreciation, respect, humility, gratitude, connection, authenticity, and genuineness to thoughtfully and accurately describe Braiden. Because of Braiden's passion for education and cycling, his parents, Marie and Joel, decided to create a scholarship for Children's House alumni as they fledge into adulthood. They also organize cycling events – Ride for Braiden – to continue to come together in his memory. [everloved.com/life-of/braiden-voss/](https://everloved.com/life-of/braiden-voss/)

The first recipient of this \$1,000 scholarship was Kora, Braiden's sister who graduated from The Children's House in 2018 and high school in 2022. When asked to share an aspect of her time at The Children's House that had a lasting impact on who she is today, she responded: "Everyone is different and we all have our own stories. We should get to know the people around us and learn their stories." Kora is currently taking a gap year and working at a salon before attending the Douglas J Aveda



cosmetology school. Her scholarship essay focused on the word **appreciation** as it relates to her brother.

## Here is an excerpt:

*The person that I think of when I think of appreciation is Braiden. Not only was Braiden my brother, but he was also my best friend. Braiden was the most appreciative person I knew. Every time we dined out, he would profusely thank the wait staff, at least 100 times. It also was not just me that noticed this, it was all the people around him. After he passed and I went back to school, his teachers mentioned to me how he was either the first or only student who thanked them everyday after class. This made me realize how just a simple thank you can change someone's day for the better. No matter how far away or how busy he was, he always made sure I knew that he was there for me. He showed me how to get the most out of life.*

As of September 30, 2022, gifts in memory of Braiden Voss have totaled **\$18,715**.





## YOUR IMPACT: THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Our Bright Futures celebration took place on April 22, 2022 after a two-year hiatus. Children's House parent, Jennifer Lake, emceed the special event with remarks by Cortney Danbrook, Vice President of the Board of Directors, and Michele Shane, Head of School. The gorgeous backdrop of the Cathedral Barn, music by The Pocket, and dinner by The Cooks' House made the evening an epic foodie and music event for nearly 200 guests.

Our Bright Futures Fund supports our school – the people and the physical space. Since it launched in 2020, the fund has raised \$476,588, which has been used when and where it is needed most. Over the last two years, our school has:

- Purchased a 12-passenger van and a riding lawn mower
- Installed a new door lock system
- Restriped, repaired, and resealed the driveway
- Installed a new roof membrane
- Refinished many pieces of existing furniture and replaced some that could not be refinished
- Replaced two classroom refrigerators, three dishwashers, a washer and dryer, and several vacuum cleaners
- Replaced custom cabinetry in a classroom
- Painted walls and ceilings in classrooms and great halls
- Replaced vinyl flooring and rugs
- Refinished the gym floor
- Created two dedicated Primary nap spaces
- Renovated the former Junior High wing into a new community room, YCC Friends Club space, staff kitchen and work room, and quiet space for adults
- Replaced many lighting fixtures and updated switches

In addition, our Bright Futures Fund supports our cash reserves for future improvements - so that we are always able to plan for and respond to the needs of the future. What's the next project in the capital improvement queue? A new climber for the Primary playground!



**BRIGHT FUTURES FUND**  
*Inspire lifelong learning.*

# STRATEGIC FINANCIAL DIRECTION

While weathering the COVID-19 pandemic, The Children’s House embarked on a once-in-a-generation expansion: the opening of our Park Street Campus. In January 2022, 7th and 8th year learners and guides moved furniture, classroom materials, and their collective spirit to a new home at 101 N. Park Street in downtown Traverse City. Because of the generosity of several donors, The Children’s House was able to acquire a remarkable space that now houses a library, computer lab, art room, kitchen, science lab, and a large multi-purpose classroom. The junior high program has grown significantly since its inception in 2014 with its inaugural class of 4 students. The new 6,000 square foot space will accommodate much anticipated growth over the next several years, allowing for up to 36 junior high students.

As the Board of Directors sets its sights on a new strategic plan, we continue to reflect on the progress we have made in the area of staff compensation and benefits since our last strategic plan was updated in 2019. Recognizing the importance of this strategic initiative, the school has continued to offer increased retirement and health benefits to all qualified staff, as well as annual wage increases for both hourly and salaried employees. In fiscal year 2021-2022, the Board embarked on a compensation study to ensure that our staff are receiving competitive wage and benefit packages consistent with market benchmarks. Michigan Child Care Stabilization Grant funds allowed for the issuance of multiple bonuses for all staff, both full-time and part-time, at critical points throughout the year.

The Board has been keenly focused on the development and growth of our cash reserve fund. At the end of the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the school had 36% of its annual operating budget in cash reserves. These funds will ultimately be used for maintenance and upkeep of both our Long Lake and Park Street campuses.

The Board continues to support an optimal level of tuition assistance in order to balance socioeconomic diversity with prudent financial management. Tuition assistance as a percentage of gross tuition has remained around 20% for the last several years. Looking forward, the growth of our endowment to fund tuition assistance will become a major focus.

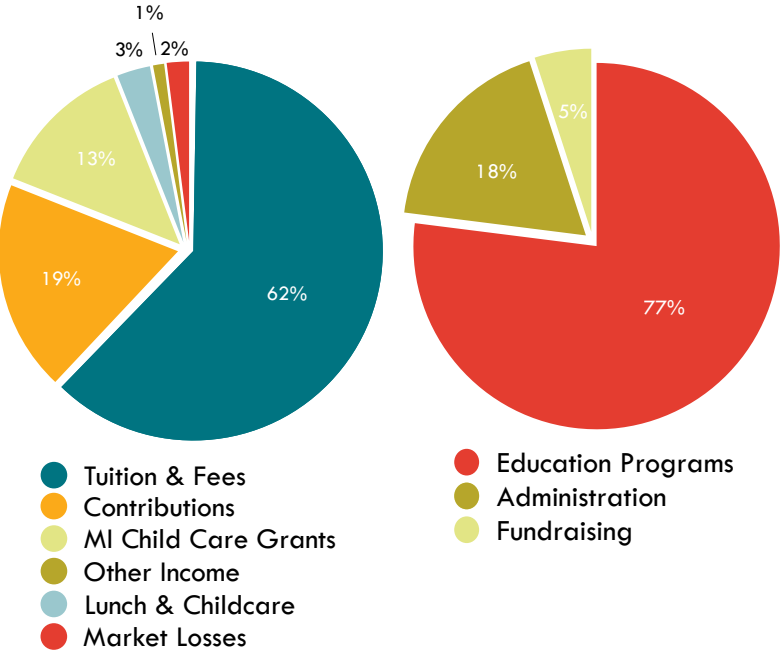
Overall, the future does indeed look bright for our lifelong learners. The Board looks forward to the continued generosity of our current school community and its alumni families, as well as the vision and leadership of our dedicated staff, to achieve its future financial goals.

## Summary of fiscal year 2021-22 financials:

<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>\$4,872,562</b>
● Tuition & Fees	\$3,136,444
● Contributions	\$1,025,349
● MI Child Care Grants	\$650,025
● Lunch & Childcare	\$138,623
● Other Income	\$17,859
● Market Losses	-\$95,738

<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>\$3,986,038</b>
● Education Programs	\$3,041,421
● Administration	\$734,191
● Fundraising	\$210,426

Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$2,005,972
Net Assets - End of Year	\$2,892,496
<b>Increase in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$886,524</b>



# 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT

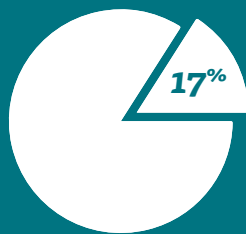


**145** 3 MONTHS  
— TO —  
**STUDENTS** 6 YEARS



**113** 1ST GRADE  
— TO —  
**STUDENTS** 8TH GRADE

**\$340,634**  
TUITION  
ASSISTANCE  
FOR **44**  
**STUDENTS**



Student Body

## OUR DONORS

With sincere thanks, we recognize those who give generously in support of The Children's House and Compass Junior High.

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Anonymous (Patty Anton Random  
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### **Braiden Voss Memorial Scholarship**

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Jessica Olson and Nick Perez  
Angela and Frank Petty  
Denis Pierce  
Carolyn Purcell  
Edith Ransburg  
Schrader & Associates, LLC  
Kim Gallagher and Chad Schrader  
Nathan and Jennifer Smith  
Jessica and Ryan Sullivan

Jodie and Kevin Tasch  
Sarah Bancroft-Treadway  
and Corey Treadway  
Gary and Judy Treadway  
Walnut & Charles Properties  
David Warnke  
Doug and Shirley Warnke  
Norie Warnke  
West Shore Bank  
Megan Younker







## THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE

**Montessori Children's House, Grand Traverse**

5363 N Long Lake Road  
Traverse City, MI 49685

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