



IRL Newsletter

January 2021 ISSUE

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Our Mission:

To empower individuals of all abilities to take charge of their own learning and lives, making it possible for them to be competent, caring and contributing members of society; and to provide learning opportunities for families, professionals, and communities to support those efforts.

In the Spotlight! Interview with Tamara Pinelo - Early Childhood Education



Tammie Pinelo has been the Director of the Early Childhood Education Program since 2011. Since Early Ed. is the only program that currently has children on site, we wanted to learn more about her program and how they are handling this pandemic while keeping our little ones safe.

What's an Early Ed Program? An Early Education Program is similar to what people call “daycare,” though I always joke that we don't take care of days, we take care of children. We're a childcare program.

We serve infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from birth to age 5 or 6 depending on whether they're going to 1st grade or kindergarten. We provide special education for preschool, infants, or toddlers as well as typical developing children. And we normally operate between 7 A.M. to 6 P.M., though, because of COVID, we're operating between 8 A.M. to 5 P.M.

One essential need is for parents to go to work and to have their children in a safe and dedicated space is crucial. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that kids can't do right now, that we can provide in our program. Because of this missing space, we have enrolled a lot of new families. Here, they can play and interact with other children in a safe group because the classes don't mix. The groups will remain the same until the end of COVID.

We've heard that you had to close the program due to COVID-19 back in April. What were your initial thoughts? My immediate thought was that I really need to close the program, and I worried about our children, teachers, and staff. We provide essential service to families and I wanted to remain open. But I quickly realized that we need to learn more about what is going on and develop a plan to safely reopen. After several weeks of planning and making sure we were following all precautions and safety protocols, we were able to reopen to the community on May 11th, and we've been open since.

What precautions did you have to take in order to reopen? The Los Angeles County Public of Health and California Community Health Licensing has guidelines to follow, which we are doing. We perform daily health and temperature checks for staff, children, and parents. Parents sign in via their cell phone, our classes sizes have been reduced from 20 to 12 children and our staff are sanitizing the classroom, toys, playground, and restrooms all day.

How do your teachers teach their students about proper cleaning techniques? We teach them to handwash, discuss germs, and the use of a mask.

What is the most difficult task for your teachers during COVID 19? Staying on top of the changing protocols of the Department of Public Health.

We know all the amazing work all teachers across the country are currently doing to help them thrive through these unprecedented times. How are you teachers and aides doing? What kind of support do they have? I have an amazing group of teachers. They are some of the best early ed educators I've worked with and they keep a positive attitude. If they need something, I try to provide it...whether it is to just listen or to have a day off.

What are some of your goals for Early Ed program? My biggest goal is to financially survive the pandemic because the cost of COVID is high and we had to reduce our class size, but kept all of our teachers working. My goal is to survive and be a resource for parents and children who need us.

A Year In Review

- Developed partnerships with Grocery Outlet San Gabriel, Grocery Outlet South Pasadena, Northgate Markets, and Trader Joe's who donated \$9,005.81 in food and gift certificates for our IRL families in 2020.
- Vocational Lab, funded by The Green Foundation, completed to offer Microsoft training and offer typing classes for Transition and Adult Service and Department of Rehabilitation clients.
- On March 16th, all program sites closed due to Novel Coronavirus.
- On March 30th, all programs moved from in-person to online learning remote and mental health telehealth services.
- Weekly delivery of breakfast and lunch to 165 students and homework deliveries to 240 students.
- On May 11th, Early Education reopened to children of essential workers.
- Drive-by and virtual graduations for Almansor Academy, Early Education, and Westmoreland Academy.
- Received Paycheck Protection Program funding to ensure all staff remain employed to provide services to all of our students, clients, and families.
- Online auction raised \$6,738.57 for playground at Westmoreland Academy.
- Provided Thanksgiving meal to 203 IRL families.
- Partnerships with Pacific Oaks College, Los Angeles County Office of Education, and Riverside County of Education
- Raised \$57,459.36 in Grants in 2020!

Celebrating the Westmoreland Academy - Nancy J. Lavelle, Ph.D. Founder, January, 2021

It's hard to believe that January, 2021, marks the 8th Anniversary of the establishment of the Westmoreland Academy, our specialty school for learners on the Autism Spectrum. When I founded the Almansor Academy (then called Almansor Education Center) in 1974, we started with four students, two on the Autism Spectrum. At the time, little was known about how to educate or treat these children who experienced sensory and language challenges. However, then, as it is today, we were struck by the commitment of parents and families who strived to provide the best, most nurturing environment for their children that they could find.

Today, we know that one in 54 children have been identified on the autism spectrum. The prevalence is staggering. We are proud that the Westmoreland Academy is loved by its students and highly regarded by both families and professionals. And the Westmoreland Academy is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the prestigious organization that also accredits UCLA and USC!

With today's stay-at-home policy in place, the Westmoreland Wolves (the name the students chose for themselves) are learning from home. I have been touched and inspired by the dedication and creativity of Nick Pinto, M.A., PPS, the Education Director, his leadership team, and the Westmoreland professional and support staff who work overtime to ensure that the Wolves receive their full range of learning opportunities online during this challenging pandemic. From weekly themes of Slavery to Inauguration, Food Chains, and Spirit Week, to Speech, Occupational Therapy, Adaptive P.E., and Counseling Services, to the formation of new after-school clubs (Explorers, Art, Theater, Cooking, Poetry, Experimentz, Music Appreciation, Chat, and ASL), the Wolves continue to develop new skills and pursue new interests while learning online.

Since you can't tour the Westmoreland Academy in person, be sure to visit Westmoreland on the web at www.redesignlearning.org.

Ways You Can Help...

To help support our work at Westmoreland Academy and all of our programs supporting children and adults on-campus and at home, please consider donating to IRL or a specific program.

[Donate Here!](#)

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