

Behind-the-scenes Support Empowers GRC

The public face of Gifted Resource Council is readily recognized through the many teachers who deliver academically challenging classes on Saturdays with GRC's Fall and Winter Learning Labs and during the summers via GRC's Summer Academies. Yet the work of talented teachers is dependent on a myriad of support activities accomplished by a small, but dedicated cadre of staff – most of them very part-time – who provide detailed, behind-the-scenes support for GRC's programs. The longevity and loyalty of these employees provide consistency in the implementation of Gifted Resource Council's varied programmatic offerings that enhance the lives of more than 2,000 children each year.

Barb Roussin began her association with GRC when it was a fledgling organization in the 1980s. Barb served as both the part-time secretary and bookkeeper in those early days. Since then she has taught classes with GRC's Learning Labs, served as the Academic Challenge Cup coordinator, and assisted the Executive Director with both GRC's Summer Academies and Saturday Learning Labs. Barb's skill as a photographer of GRC students during the summers has been recognized and appreciated by countless parents through the years.

JoAnn Hetisimer has capably served as GRC's Office Manager since 1999. JoAnn is the voice that first greets callers on the phone who ask questions about application processes for GRC

programs or who seek guidance regarding testing for their child or who simply need an initial bit of guidance in navigating the waters of educational opportunities for gifted children. JoAnn responds to literally hundreds of e-mail inquiries each week with conscientious efficiency. She is the person

who has input thousands of students' names into GRC's database – and who frequently remembers each of those student and family names at a moment's notice.

Marla Dell utilizes both the right and left side of her brain in her few, but important hours of work each week with Gifted Resource Council. Marla has accomplished the varied bookkeeping tasks of GRC since 1992. In that role Marla generates monthly financial reports for the

Board of Directors, writes checks for teachers, prepares the federal 990 report and numerous other budget-related tasks. Marla also is an accomplished artist, who has been designing GRC's Summer Academies t-shirts for more than twenty years. Her work proudly adorns the shirts of hundreds of children each summer.

Dennis O'Brien has written development and marketing materials for GRC since 1999. Denny's "Parents Ask" column has appeared in GRC's newsletter, *mindwonders*, each spring and fall throughout the 2000s. These columns have offered guidance for parents and have often been



Sue Flesch and Barb Roussin, GRC's "Quilt Maker", present the t-shirt quilt at a Summer Academies student assembly. The t-shirts, designed by Marla Dell, represent GRC programs through the years.

Dialogue with the Director

What are the stories that can be told by a quilt? Truly there are many!

What are the stories that can be told by a t-shirt? Certainly, there are many more!

Quilts – and the creating of quilts – have never lost their meaning since the days of early America, when their value was no doubt measured in useful ways like providing warmth for sleep. And the creation of quilts via “quilt-ing bees” offered an opportunity for women to spend time together, while producing an item that would benefit the lives of their families.

T-shirts – especially those that bear the emblem or message of a particular event, school or organization – are a more recent means of telling a story. We are all familiar with (and indeed, probably have dozens of examples in our closets of) t-shirts received for running a race or attending a concert or playing on a sports team.

Yes, Gifted Resource Council has given t-shirts to children who attend GRC’s Summer Academies since its early days. GRC’s shirts are colorful reminders of topics studied in Jr. Science Searchers or Ancient Academy or Space Academy for more than thirty years.

Many GRC teachers – and students too – have extensive collections of t-shirts spanning multiple years of participation in summer programs. Indeed it is always a significant day during the summer when several GRC teachers wear the same historic t-shirt on the same day (without having “received a memo” to do so). Everyone appreciates the delight of that experience!

For almost twenty years Marla Dell has been the designer of GRC’s Summer Academies t-shirts. Marla has willingly shared her artistic talents by creating an original design each year that symbolically “tells the story” of a significant aspect of each of the summer programs. These designs are truly

appreciated by the children and adults who participate in GRC’s Summer Academies, as they enthusiastically identify which of the academies they are personally attending during their two, four or six weeks of summer learning and fun.

Several years ago, I began to think of how wonderful it would be to combine many of these historic t-shirts into a quilt. Who could help to accomplish such a monumental task? I quickly realized who to ask for assistance: none other than Barb Roussin, GRC’s intrepid Summer Academies’ support person! Barb readily agreed.

Thus, during the Summer of 2014, GRC’s Summer Academies quilt of t-shirts was completed.

The quilt was proudly presented during one of the daily summer assemblies – so that the students could share in the significance and wonder of such an accomplishment. It was then hung in a central gathering place at Crossroads, GRC’s summer site, so that it could be noticed and appreciated during the entire summer. More than once I was delighted to hear children – some just beginning their experiences with Gifted Resource Council – talk about which of the t-shirt designs was their favorite or which represented a particular academy that they had attended or which was an academy that they hoped to attend in the future. Children, sharing their stories of GRC...

Many thanks go to both Marla Dell and Barb Roussin for their amazing talents and the generous ways in which they have shared of their expertise with all of GRC’s Summer Academies’ participants.

Yes, t-shirts and quilts can tell a story – especially the GRC story...



Sue Flesch, GRC executive director

Susan C. Flesch

Children of Alums Thrive at GRC

A growing number of parents who benefited from Gifted Resource Council programs as children are now providing the same opportunities for their children. While many former GRC students who live in the St. Louis metropolitan area have enrolled their children in GRC programs, several have taken extraordinary measures to send their children across the country to stay with grandparents in order to attend GRC's Summer Academies. Here is what three GRC alums have to say about their own experiences and their hopes for their children.

Starting Young to Jumpstart Growth

"I participated in GRC throughout the 1990s in Math, Marvels & More, Ancient Academy and Space Academy," said Bill Phillips, now an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Illinois. "Abigail is currently three (not for too much longer), but she has a huge appetite for knowledge and an endless supply of energy and enthusiasm. GRC helps provide her with constructive stimuli and broadens her quickly expanding knowledge base. It is great to see creative learning opportunities offered to children as young as Abigail.

"So far Abigail has completed a class on farm animals and a class on nocturnal animals in GRC's Saturday Learning Labs. This provides her with subject material for her spontaneous at-home lectures and gives her more material for her ever expanding art gallery. The classes provide an excellent synthesis of creativity, information, physical activity and social skills.

"There is a wonderful symmetry when I put my daughter's GRC raccoon mask next to my GRC Roman armor. I look forward to many more art projects and lectures in years to come."

The Girls from Seattle

"I participated in GRC's Ancient Academy the summer before I started 7th grade," said Dana Jacob, an attorney who clerks for a Magistrate Judge in the Federal District Court in Seattle, WA. "The subject was Ancient Rome, I absolutely loved the subject and the class was so much fun. It was a



Aubrey Jacob (center front, dressed in a Greek tunic of her own creation) is surrounded by fellow Ancient Academy "citizens of Athens" with their heraldic banner.

very memorable experience."

"For the past several summers my girls have visited their grandparents in St. Louis. One of the best parts of this time in St. Louis is the opportunity to attend GRC. Aubrey, who is nine, has attended Space Camp, Academy Americana, and Ancient Academy. She has loved them all, but Ancient Academy really suits her passions.

"We knew early on that Aubrey was gifted. She spoke in grammatically correct full sentences from the time she was about two and read chapter books at four. Unfortunately, I have not been impressed by the opportunities for gifted education near us. Aubrey attends a great private school that is definitely able to challenge her due to the small class size and great teachers. But, she is definitely 'different' from many of the kids in her class. Gifted Resource Council gives her an opportunity to be with kids 'like her.' Her complicated and creative brain has free reign at GRC. She loves it!

"Just the other day one of her past teachers was reminiscing about Aubrey coming back to school after Academy Americana and exclaiming, 'I learned all about the Great Depression. It was so much fun!' Last summer, after Ancient Academy Greece, she was playing word games with a friend—think of a word that begins with the last letter of the previous word. Her friend said 'kangaroo.' Aubrey's word that starts with an O? 'Ostracism.' We all stared at her, and she proceeded to explain what it meant and how the ancient Greeks ostracized people. It was an amazing example of how her brain works and how 'different' she is from many kids.

"My Kindergartener, Phoebe, will attend Jr. Science Searchers this summer. My hopes for her are a bit different. She is also extremely bright and smart, but has lived in her sister's shadow. I am hoping that GRC will give her an opportunity to see herself as the very bright girl that she is. I hope for her to be inspired and empowered. I want her to learn that challenges and using her brain can be fun and that she is every bit as capable as her sister."

Acquiring A Passionate Interest and Leadership Skills

Major George Johnson began attending GRC's Space Academy in 1986, the summer he completed first grade. He loved it and continued every year through 1992. For the next three years he returned as a volunteer and began the transition "from experiencing activities to helping others achieve through the experience," his mother Fran Johnson said. In 1997 and 1998, Johnson served as an assistant teacher. "Space is my hobby. I like teaching at Space Academy because you get a lot more out of it—a lot more contact with really knowledgeable people, like the Space Academy Captains," he said at the time. In fact,

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Thanks to...

...the following individuals who made financial contributions to Gifted Resource Council from May 2014 through April 2015. We apologize for any names which may have been inadvertently omitted or misspelled.

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copied by teachers who share them with an even broader audience in the metropolitan area. “Parents Ask” columns are archived on GRC’s Web site, www.giftedresourcecouncil.org.

Debbie Gregg is another part-time employee who has shared her writing expertise with GRC since the early 1980s when her own sons first participated in GRC programs. Debbie’s masterful use of the English language has consistently enhanced the descriptions of GRC’s Learning Lab courses and Summer Academies’ brochures.

These five Gifted Resource Council staff members – whether they work four hours per week or only on Saturdays and during the summer – have provided invaluable support for all of GRC’s programs.

Cumulatively, these dedicated and loyal friends of GRC have been “behind-the-scenes” support for more than 80 years of experience! Executive Director Sue Flesch readily credits these loyal staff members, saying, “Their contributions of time, talent and expertise – along

with their willingness to do whatever is necessary to achieve a common goal – are a huge part of our success over the years. Their work is invaluable to GRC and the families that we serve.”



Two ‘cadets’ in GRC’s Space Academy experiment with their robotic creation.

BECOME A MEMBER OF GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL

Now *you* can participate in shaping America’s future by becoming a member of **Gifted Resource Council**, a not-for-profit agency serving bright and talented young people. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable us to improve existing programs, extend offerings and reach more children. Your membership will not only benefit gifted children, but also entitle you to receive the following:

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Parents Ask: What can we do? Our child is so bored she's beginning to complain about school and not do her homework.

By Dennis O'Brien

All too often bright children find themselves trapped in a curriculum they have already mastered or could easily master in a fraction of time other children need. This is not only boring—it's also damaging. Studies show that bright, bored students not only fail to advance when asked to do repetitive assignments involving skills or content they have already mastered, they disengage and may actually begin to fall behind academically. Perhaps even more destructive, they also fail to develop effective study habits and the grit and persistence to pursue an objective that does not come easily.

Fortunately for your child, teachers have developed strategies—generally called “curriculum compacting”—that engage talented students and allow them to pursue their interests while challenging their intelligence and strengthening their skills.

What “Curriculum Compacting” Means

Essentially, curriculum compacting means systematically modifying the curriculum in order to challenge a student whose skills enable her to easily master specific content. This process may involve using pre- or post-tests for a child with a particular unit to determine what could be skipped altogether, what should not be skipped, whether learning should be simply compacted and accelerated, or whether replacement may be appropriate. Often it involves creating an enriched curriculum that goes well beyond what classmates are doing—not simply covering the same material at an accelerated pace. There is abundant evidence that these strategies work—not just for language, social studies and history, but for math and science as well. What's more, it keeps the focus on developing higher level thinking skills and mastering curricular complexity.

What about being in a gifted program? That certainly helps, but often attending “pull out” enrichment classes several times a week is simply not enough to challenge very bright students. However, curriculum compacting can supplement these “pull out” classes and help provide the challenges a gifted student needs. “This is important because a student is gifted 24/7, not just for a few hours a week,” observed Kathy Nuetzel, a gifted specialist at Rockwood's Center for Creative Learning.

Strategies for Success

Teachers should not be expected to do it alone. Success requires a partnership with parents working supportively with their child's teacher(s). Here's how you can help.

- First, make sure that your child actually understands the material that “bores” her. Sometimes, boredom results when the child does NOT understand the material. Parents who overemphasize their child's abilities may unwittingly communicate to their child an expectation that she will be bored with routine school work—even though the child actually may not understand the material. In this case, say-

ing “I'm bored” masks a lack of understanding rather than mastery of the material, and some focused tutoring, not compacting, may be needed.

- Begin your conversation with the teacher by discussing your concerns. Get her input. She may be aware of the same issues and have insights that supplement your own. Only when you have listened thoroughly should you move on to solutions.

- Offer to help the teacher research replacement learning assignments, resources and potential enrichment activities that she might utilize with your child and other bright children. Although teachers experienced with compacting say that it actually saves them time in the long run, your child's teacher may be hesitant—not opposed to it, but concerned that it may take time she does not have.

- Encourage your child to see the benefits of working on more advanced enrichment assignments even if they require more time than racing through rote assignments of materials he has already mastered. Let your enthusiasm show. Praise the teacher so your child knows you value the special effort she is making to meet his personal educational needs.

- Include homework and study time in your child's daily schedule that is appropriate to her age, and make sure she sticks to the schedule.

- Create additional learning assignments that are compatible with the teacher's assignments if his are too simple or do not take enough time. Long-term projects are especially valuable because they allow your child to explore an issue in depth. Whenever feasible, select topics that align with your child's interests and allow him to pursue his passions.

- Show interest. Praise and encourage your child for her enrichment work. Stress how much you value the work, the independent study and the study habits she is developing. Explain that persistently making the effort—not raw talent—leads to success in both these assignments and in other endeavors in life. Being “smart” is only a small part of long-term success.

- Make it clear that being bored is no excuse for distracting others or acting out at school. If the teacher reports that this is a problem, put consequences in place and enforce them firmly and matter-of-factly.

- Involve your child in extracurricular learning experiences, such as those offered by Gifted Resource Council, that include working with other gifted students. Hands-on activities that involve teamwork are especially valuable because they teach students important social skills and create respect for the contributions of others.

- Help your child understand that his intelligence is a gift—and also a responsibility to use well for the benefit

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of others as well as himself. This will require challenging himself academically, expending diligent effort as well as getting along and cooperating with others.

Bottom line: Redirecting your child's boredom with school can be an opportunity to jump-start a more advanced learning process that will help her develop skills and gain valuable knowledge. It's the smart thing to do, yielding long-term benefits.

Dennis O'Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist, who has led five nonprofits. He has written educational materials used by the Washington University School of Medicine Dept. of Psychiatry, weekly columns on parenting for the Suburban Journal/Post-Dispatch and numerous columns for St. Louis Moms and Dads, CHARACTERplus, Family Connection (Mo. Dept. of Mental Health) and Gifted Association of Missouri. O'Brien's April 6 column, "Prevent teen suicide by addressing it," won the 2010 Missouri Institute of Mental Health award for outstanding reporting on suicide.



ECO Academy 'entrepreneurs' proudly display stepping stones that they created and sold as part of their "Stepping Up, Inc." business during the summer of 2014.

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Captain Jon Heerboth "became perhaps George's favorite teacher in his entire academic career," his mother said.

"Space Academy challenged George intellectually and kept him grounded in academia at a time when the public school system was not. He learned teaching and leadership skills which have been crucial in his job as a Major in the US Army," she added.

Johnson has taught at a university level and served as a Company Commander in the storied 82nd Airborne in Iraq. Currently he is a senior advisor on a Joint Military Training Base in Eastern Europe.

With such positive experiences himself, it is no wonder that Johnson's 5-year-old daughter Virginia came from Colorado last summer to attend her inaugural GRC class: Jr. Science Searchers. "As the mother of a son who gained so much from GRC, I couldn't wait until Virginia was old enough to attend," said her grandmother. How did it go? "She left each day with a skip and a hop and a smile on her face. She enjoyed it immensely."

And what are they hoping for in the future? "It's a fun program where she can learn from teachers who know how to meet the needs of gifted students like George and Virginia."

What Prospective Parents Should Know

"As a former GRC student and current GRC parent, I would encourage prospective parents to take the opportunity to broaden your children's learning experience through GRC's programs," said Bill Philips. "Both in Ancient Academy and in Space Academy I got the opportunity to explore subjects in a depth that was not offered in a standard school environment."

"GRC provides a great supplement for gifted kids who may not be in a gifted environment all the time," said Dana Jacob. "The classes are lots of fun. I also really like that there are humanities based classes. Lots of gifted education seems to focus more on STEM. STEM is important, but while Aubrey enjoys science, her passion is really mythology, history, literature, etc. GRC has opportunities for her and addresses the subjects in an interdisciplinary way that is really thought provoking and fun with hands-on activities."

"GRC's Summer Academies give bright students the opportunity to interact with like-minded students whose parents have some of the same intellectual values," said Johnson. "It stimulates their intellect as well as encourages their growth socially. It's a place where they can learn and grow in a manner which best suits their style and isn't necessarily bound by conventional school structure and rules. And it's all fun."



Virginia Johnson (center of photo) intently examines a flower during Jr. Science Searchers 2014.

mindwonders

informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

Gifted Resource Council
357 Marshall Ave., Suite 6
St. Louis, MO 63119
314-962-5920
www.giftedresourcecouncil.org

Susan C. Flesch
Executive Director
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Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area.
Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents
to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.