

The Mission:

## A talk with Clinical Director Barbara Cavallo

**I**f most of your energy goes into holding yourself together, it is hard to have the energy to learn," says Barbara Cavallo, C.S.W., explaining the basic assumption underlying **Open Heart-Open Mind**, PWC's innovative child development program. Barbara, who is PWC's Clinical Director, founded the program in 1992.

While studying for her masters in social work in the early 80's, Barbara did an internship at Big Sisters, as PWC was then known, and has remained with the agency. In the course of her agency assignment as a line social worker, she worked in public schools, and came to realize that in many on-site school programs, CBO social workers were not sufficiently integrated into the school community.

"Lots of programs came in one day per week and they didn't seem to fully meet the needs of the school. We felt there was a need for integration of our staff into the school, in order to build trusting



Diane Siles

into the school community, providing services to promote the success of all the children in a school."

**Open Heart-Open Mind** provides direct services — clinical work, preventive services and school enrichment programs — to children. "Children cope with a lot of social and economic pressures that impact on them emotionally, socially and cognitively," explains Barbara. "They may be living in temporary housing, they may have family members who have died of AIDS. In some of their homes, there are drug or alcohol problems. They may have been the brunt of — or witnessed — violence in the home or in their communities. They are faced with a lot at an early age. Then they come to the school, and have to learn. This poses problems for everyone concerned."

The answer to these problems is to get everyone involved. **Open Heart-Open Mind** encourages the active participation of the entire school community: parents, teachers, social

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relationships with children, parents and teachers. PWC has allowed me to be creative in developing **Open Heart-Open Mind**, our on-site school program, as a program in which social workers integrate



### P.S. 64 "The Village School" Song

64 is our school  
Working together is our rule  
Let me tell you how it starts  
First we open up our hearts  
What then follows, do you know?  
Mind energy to grow  
Together we will go far  
'Cause everybody is a star!

Continued from other side.

workers and administrators, as well as the children themselves. Barbara and her staff of certified social workers and graduate social work student interns try to be the catalysts that transform the school community into a more supportive learning environment. "What we do with every constituency group is work on developing relationships based on trust, respect and understanding. We get involved in the life of the entire school. We sit on key committees at the school. We reach out to parents by phone, home visits, whatever it takes. In any community, word gets out. When word gets out that you're OK, you are accepted."

In addition to their professional credentials as clinicians, **Open Heart-Open Mind** staff have a wide array of talents and experience in acting, dancing, song-writing and art. Under their guidance, children are encouraged to develop their creativity for schoolwide events that promote a sense of community, and give students a sense of their own place in their school community.

"We ask the children to come up with class names and make a class banner," Barbara explains. "We talk about the importance of a name, who named them, and why. They try to think of a name that describes the class as a whole." In this way, the "Friendly Spiders", the "Nation of Cooperation," and the

"Peacekeepers" develop group identity, class pride, and a sense of belonging.

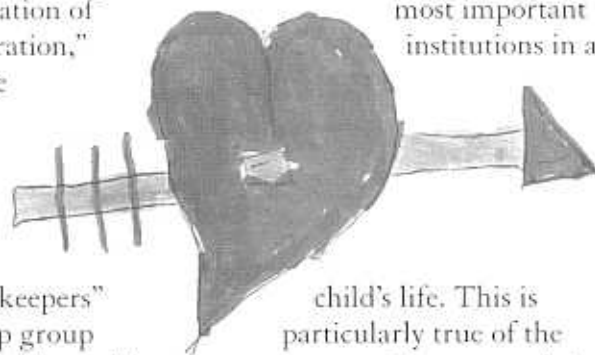
**Open Heart-Open Mind** social workers try to create a synergy between the counseling and the academic work. "Schools are accountable for reading scores," notes Barbara. "We are aware of this, and support them by using literature and writing in our counseling. We also discuss with teachers what they are doing in terms of a thematic unit, and build on that in our counseling." One example Barbara gives is collaborating with a teacher whose class studied the life of Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr. — **Open Heart-Open Mind** staff expanded the unit to include discussions and writing of the children's personal dreams and future goals.

Barbara emphasized the crucial importance of the school environment to children: "After the family, the school is one of the most important institutions in a

child's life. This is particularly true of the communities we work in — kids are in school for practically all their waking hours. The people they meet there are very influential." Thus, **Open Heart-Open Mind** staff understand that to have an impact on children's lives they must go beyond the standard 45-minute treatment session.

Which brings us back to one of **Open Heart-Open Mind's** first principles: everything that happens in school should be done with the child's development in mind. "Key to building a safe environment for the children to open up their hearts and minds, are the relationships of the people within that environment, coming together with the belief that all children can learn."



I Love You



### Peer Mediator Program in Island School

PWC staff is implementing a peer mediation program at the Island School. Social workers train children to mediate disputes and become school leaders, and have created school-wide events to encourage everyone to participate in building a peaceful community.