

Smart Love® Newsletter

Twenty Years of Caring!

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of our organization's founding. During the 2021–2022 program year we are recognizing this milestone and reflecting on where we have been and how we have grown, with an eye on building for the future.

Inspired by the insightful and innovative work and writings of Drs. Martha Heineman Pieper and William J. Pieper, a small group of people who had worked with the Piepers came together to discuss creating a way to help parents understand and benefit from their Smart Love approach and the research and philosophy from their unified theory of child development, psychopathology, and psychotherapy called "Inner Humanism."

Led by our founder and executive director Carolyn Stolper Friedman, these initial conversations gave rise to the creation of Smart Love Parenting Center/dba Smart Love Family Services as an independent nonprofit entity that was incorporated in July 2002.

From a modest start offering parenting seminars for groups of parents in schools, our work grew quickly. That growth continues to this day—our total service figures have grown every year since our founding. All told, Smart Love has touched more than 36,000 children and families since those first days. Today, our staff of 40 professionals and support personnel are a diverse and highly skilled team delivering a range of mental health, early childhood education, tutoring and assessment services, and parenting support programs.

We remain particularly focused on the mental health and development of children, teens and young adults, and this focus inspires much of our work.



Our counseling program was launched in 2007 to provide direct 1:1 counseling and parent coaching, designed to nurture and support positive family relationships and happy and healthy futures. From our initial core of just five therapists in a small office in Oak Park, our diverse counseling providers now number 32. We continue to hire and train new therapists to meet the continually growing demand for Smart Love's mental health services for children and families.

Through our work with parents and their young children, we realized that we could further help families by creating a learning environment where young children could be enriched and supported by a school built around the Smart Love approach. With the generous support of Josef Blass and his family, we opened The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool in 2010. The school's namesake, Mrs. Heineman, was a nationally known advocate for children who served as the first female president of the Chicago Child Care Society and president of the Child Welfare League of America. From its start, the Preschool has engaged hundreds of young children and their families in our

unique program, giving them a supportive, fun, and engaging setting in which to learn, create, and explore.

In 2016, we purchased and built out our new home in Logan Square, the Natalie & Ben Heineman Smart Love Center, with generous gifts from Cristine Russell and Ben Heineman, Jr. and many others. Creating a permanent home-base for Smart Love and the Preschool has enabled us to serve more families and build a more secure financial and operational future. Moreover, the Center and grounds include two gardens, abundant play space, and flexible space for multiple uses.

Another programmatic development occurred in 2018 with the launch of our therapeutic tutoring program to benefit children struggling in school. Our program features Smart Love-trained and clinically supervised tutors providing students from elementary to high school with 1:1 academic tutoring within a therapeutic context. Enabling children to discuss their feelings, frustrations, and hopes combined with hands-on instruction is proving to be a powerfully effective

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PROGRAM UPDATE

Pandemic Demand for Smart Love Preschool

When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, the unknowns seemed endless, with no ability to predict what to expect in the coming weeks or months. More than a year later there is room to be optimistic but we are still confronted with many uncertainties about the virus, requiring us to continually find ways to manage our lives. This has been especially true for families with young children who are struggling with so much under this new normal.

From the beginning of the 2020 school year to the beginning of the 2021 school year, Smart Love Preschool has seen an



uptick in interest in our program. Because of the changes COVID-19 has caused, like transitioning from working in the office to working from home, parents have been in need of an early childhood education program that not only provides a rich learning experience for their child, but also understands the many losses for children and their parents brought on by the pandemic.

Because of Smart Love Preschool's approach, we are uniquely able to support families with young children during these uncertain times. Our focus on social and emotional development allows children the space to express all of their feelings—whether it's discussing losses like how they miss their grandparents or happy feelings like spending time with their mom or dad—the children come to know that all of their emotions are welcomed and validated.

As Smart Love's Preschool Director, Kelly Perez, explains, "We value being able to take the time needed to give individualized attention to children when they need it. We also understand the importance of providing consistency in the children's day while at



school so they don't have to experience the roller coaster of the pandemic." With our years of experience, we know that when children are able to confidently get help to process their feelings, they are happier. As a result, the behaviors that parents observed of their children due to the strain of the pandemic—like being withdrawn, acting out, or losing interest in activities—are lessened. This in turn alleviates the stress on parents and creates a happier and a better functioning household.

The Rainbow Garden



With the new school year underway, our preschoolers are familiarizing themselves with our fall garden. We have blueberries, eggplants, carrots, and peppers growing nicely and the children are looking forward to harvesting them throughout the season.

Our garden program is a unique aspect of our curriculum and one that won an Illinois Schoolyard grant earlier this year. As part of our efforts to share more about Smart Love Preschool and its garden curriculum, we have developed a new feature on our website called "The Rainbow Garden." Filled with nature and garden activities, the Rainbow Garden offers parents and children ages two through six many fun projects to do together at home. Parents can help their toddler build a worm bed to create compost for an herb garden, explore local birds as they build a bird feeder, or



learn about colors as they hunt for colors in the grocery store! You can find The Rainbow Garden on our preschool website at smartlovepreschool.org or go here: smartlovefamily.org/rainbow-garden

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Counseling Program Continues to Grow

The Counseling program is busier than ever, both in client numbers and in our staff, capabilities, and services. While most clinical services are still being provided virtually due to the continuing COVID-19 requirements, that does not mean that we are not moving ahead in a number of ways.

EXPANDING THE TEAM

We are delighted to announce the promotion of Laura Bentley, LCPC to Clinical Coordinator, a new and vital position overseeing our new client intake, client case management, and care coordination functions.

Sustaining our long-standing commitment to providing an excellent learning and experiential environment for new clinical professionals, we are also excited to welcome this year's new post-graduate counseling fellows Anna Carty, MSW and Yvonne Combs, MSW. We are also pleased to welcome two new counseling graduate students, Monica Van Duyne and Skylar Wittenberg, who are earning hours towards their master's degrees in counseling.



Laura Bentley



Anna Carty



Yvonne Combs



Monica Van Duyne



Skylar Wittenberg

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Due to growing demand, Smart Love is transitioning this fall to a new, integrated service platform that combines new client onboarding, case management, and care coordination. We expect that this new platform will better meet our needs by expanding our capabilities and more effectively supporting our provision of care for years to come.

Smart Love is also grateful to have received a grant from the Community Mental Health Board (CMHB) of Oak Park Township for needed technology to help us better support our team as we grow to meet increasing demand. The CMHB has long been one of our most important and valued partners and we greatly appreciate this investment in necessary tools for sustaining our services.

Helping Students Struggling with School Work

The steady growth in our Therapeutic Tutoring service has led us to promote lead tutor Alison Pildner to the full-time position of Coordinator. In her new role she will conduct targeted outreach, recruit and train additional tutors as demand grows, and coordinate all aspects of the program, in addition to continuing to provide tutoring.

Therapeutic Tutoring is surpassing our initial hopes and expectations. Demand from

families has continued to grow from its very first days. The feedback from families shows students making meaningful gains. Students are benefitting by being able to talk about their difficulties and express their feelings, while getting hands-on subject tutoring. We are very encouraged by Therapeutic Tutoring's initial success and are confident it will be a great resource for even more families well into the future.



Alison Pildner



Katie Majko

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resource that is growing rapidly as more families seek support for their children's learning concerns.

Since 2020, with the impact of COVID-19 and a broader awareness of social and economic inequities, we have added a support for parents through our new *In the Pursuit of Happiness* webinar series. We have also rebranded and expanded our long-standing program for families of color. The *It Takes A Village* program

now includes *Finding Strength Together* for black parents, *Mi Familia* for Spanish-speaking parents, and a multicultural youth group.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Twenty years on, we are seeing a continually growing demand for services and with it a positive promise for the future. Our increasingly diverse and capable staff is vibrant and highly attuned to the needs of the people and communities we serve. We continue

to explore additions to our service capacities so we can serve even more families in need. However, we live in a world facing vast pressures and factors that continue to place great stress on families and on organizations like ours.

This fact will surely inform our future direction. While there will always be more we can do, we are inspired by all we have been able to accomplish in the past 20 years and hopeful and excited by all that we can do in the next.



SMART LOVE[®] FAMILY SERVICES

Natalie & Ben Heineman Smart Love Center
2222 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago, IL 60647 | 773.665.8052, ext. 130

In the Pursuit of Happiness Webinar Series Enters Second Year

After a successful first year of webinars with over 200 registrations, we are continuing our *In the Pursuit of Happiness* Webinar Series for another year! Offered quarterly and free-of-charge, the webinars feature Smart Love clinicians, key staff, and guest experts providing valuable insights into how children's minds work and effective parenting responses to topical concerns.



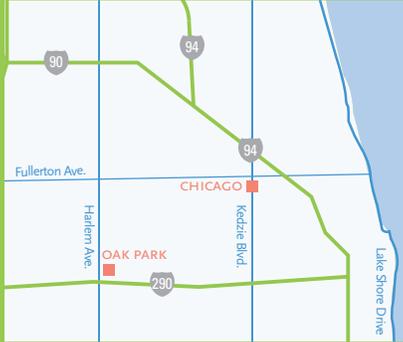
COLLEGE DECISIONS

March 10, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. CST

GIMME PURPLE ELMO!!! And Other Temper Tantrums

June 9, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. CST

For webinar details and registration, please visit smartlovetfamily.org/smart-love-webinars. Missed a webinar? No problem; you can watch the video from our webinar library here: smartlovetfamily.org/parenting-support-videos



OUR LOCATIONS

Chicago • Oak Park



TO LEARN MORE VISIT
www.smartlovetfamily.org
www.smartlovetpreschool.org

Smart Love Programs

COUNSELING SERVICES

- Therapy for Children, Adolescents, and Adults
- Play Therapy for Young Children
- Support Groups for Children and Adults
- Neuro-Psychological and Psychological Testing
- Couples and Family Counseling

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The Natalie G. Heineman
Smart Love Preschool

- Preschool and Kindergarten for Children 3-6 years
- Playschool for Children 2-3 years
- Summer Camp

LEARNING SERVICES

- Psycho-Educational and Learning Assessments
- Therapeutic Tutoring
- Customized Parent Consultation

PARENTING & COMMUNITY

- Parent Coaching and Counseling
- Webinars
- Publications and Resources
- Parent and Youth Groups

It Takes A Village presents: BREAKING NEWS: Helping Children and Teens Cope with Traumatic News and When Trauma Occurs in Their Communities

November 13, 2021 | 1:15 p.m. CST

GENDER IDENTITY: My child has just announced they are transgender or non-binary. I want to do what is best, but I'm struggling. What is the right way to respond?

January 13, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. CST

Save the Date

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE

SMART LOVE'S ANNUAL BENEFIT GALA

MARCH 11, 2022

The Smart Love approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love: The Comprehensive Guide to Understanding, Regulating and Enjoying your Child* (2011). Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. ©2021