

# McNeill Children's Institute – A Heartfelt Homage to Healing and Growth

In the cozy, historic town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island, situated on the Post Road there's a wonderful pediatric occupational therapy institute that's become a beacon of modern, mindful, data driven nurturing and growth – the McNeill Children's Institute (MCI). The institute is More than an occupational therapy center; it's a warm, welcoming community hub founded by the compassionate Sarah McNeill, a true hometown hero who identified a need in the community and passionately set off in pursuit of answers and a response she could bring back to the community.



This was realized shortly after graduating from the Quinnipiac University, when Sarah, having identified the west coast as a bastion of progressive, developing education on the subject committed to this "soul rewarding" work and career path, packed her things in her car and drove cross country all the way out to California to embark on an educational journey that would span over 20 years taking her across the United States and allow her to touch the lives of those both domestically and abroad. Abroad, Sarah utilized her skills to aid San Jose Mexico supporting Red Autismo and Casa Rame, both of which are schools geared towards helping those with disabilities. Though ultimately, growing up in Rhode Island she wanted to come back and support the community she loves and calls home.

What is pediatric occupational therapy? You might ask. Well, pediatric occupational therapy focuses on "help[ing] those with unique learning styles i.e., those who may struggle with various

physical, mental and cognitive activities and tasks, grow, learn and interact more successfully in their daily lives: at school, at home, in sports, on the playground, and in the community-at-large." This has proven essential since Covid, as many of those, aged birth-22, not surprisingly after lockdowns, quarantines, and at home classes, were found to be suffering from difficulties related to behavioral issues, social skills, self regulation and sensory difficulties. Issues which often impacted, not only the children in question, but their families as well.

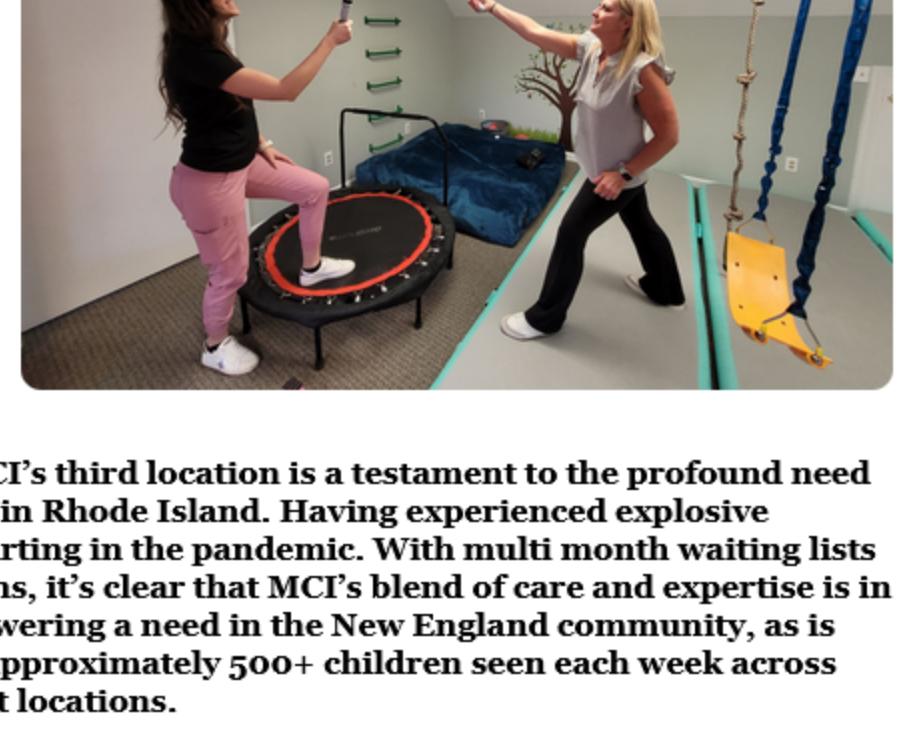
Far from seeing the world in black and white, Sarah has identified a need to exist and work in the "grey area" identified in pediatric occupational therapy - helping those kids that exist in a space where they have typical to high cognition function but have difficulties in areas such as behavior, sensory processing, and executive function, and often struggle with challenges related to autism and ADHD. To this end, the McNeill Institute provides tailor made Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) based on the needs of the individuals in question. This takes the form of identifying three action areas based on deficits identified in a head-to-toe evaluation, and leads to the creation of broad goals complete with smaller actionable objectives that encapsulate and address parental and academic needs as well as the expectations of the institute and society at large.

"We bring the whole family in, we work to make sure the OT 'homework' is practiced not only in the clinic, but also at home and at school. We look at this as a triangle of support." And the results of this triangle of support is nothing short of amazing.

## The Soul of MCI: A Staff That Cares Deeply

Sitting down with the North Kingstown branch of the McNeill Institute it's clear that in addition to Sarah, everyone on the staff cares deeply about their mission!

Try to sing Sarah's praises, and she'll humbly redirect the melody to the needs of the community and the same can be said of the wonderful staff working at the McNeill Institute! And while I'm not sure if this behavior is learned from being in close proximity to Sarah, if it is something purposely discovered in the interview process, or just happens organically as a byproduct of hiring good people and being a good judge of character, one thing is for certain. It's incredibly refreshing and uplifting to witness. With each staff member pouring themselves into the goal of creating a sanctuary that's safe and nurturing for the children of North Kingstown and the greater Rhode Island area at this and their other locations the byproduct ends up being a place to work and career path that is rewarding for the soul and that has been carefully crafted as a cradle of compassion in which every child's potential can be gently unfolded and explored.



## A Growing Need: MCI's Third Home



The opening of MCI's third location is a testament to the profound need they've addressed in Rhode Island. Having experienced explosive growth despite starting in the pandemic. With multi month waiting lists at all their locations, it's clear that MCI's blend of care and expertise is in high demand, answering a need in the New England community, as is evidenced by the approximately 500+ children seen each week across their three current locations.

## Embracing Families on Their Journey

This comprehensive evidence-based data driven approach utilizing a system of goals and objectives allows issues to be divided into more bite size pieces which can then be focused upon with greater focus and purpose. By doing so, Sarah and her team are able to address both symptoms and causes of behaviors in a more meaningful way. By doing so MCI creates a support unit not only for the children experiencing their occupational therapy but for the homes and schools they're coming from as well. And this is something Sarah and her team only have sights on expanding and is one of the driving forces behind their push to open

an occupational therapy preschool.

## A Legacy of Empowerment and Joy

Spending part of the afternoon with Sarah and her team at the McNeill Institute, it quickly becomes evident that they aren't just offering therapy; they're crafting joyous childhoods and empowering futures. From the purpose-built sensory rooms to the comprehensive services that span the spectrum of needs, to a highly trained and caring staff literally equipped to deal with all ages MCI is a place where children don't just grow; they flourish.

But MCI is more than a chapter in a book; it's a living story of community, strength, and hope. One which is off to an incredible start, not only here in North Kingstown, but at all three of their locations throughout Rhode Island and which you can help celebrate and pass on in the community. It's a place where success is celebrated, individuality is cherished, and every child is given the means to unlock their potential and achieve their goals.

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