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CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

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➔ **KAJSA JAMES,**
*a Dana Point mother
with a compelling story of
strength and courage*

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BY DEBBIE LAVDAS

Explore the Waldorf way

The fast-growing educational approach is on the rise in Orange County.

Many preschool parents rely on word-of-mouth recommendations when choosing an education style for their children. I was lucky enough to learn of the Waldorf teachings from a good friend when my son was nearing kindergarten, and I found the priority to raise educated, compassionate, ethical children with a strong sense of community quite compelling.

Exactly what is Waldorf? It's a style of education that was developed by Rudolf Steiner in 1919 and is based on a profound understanding of human development that addresses the needs of the growing child. Waldorf teachers strive to transform education into an art form that educates the whole child – the heart and the hands, as well as the head.

Several Waldorf schools are in Orange County, including The Children's Cottage – a Waldorf-inspired preschool in Costa Mesa; (childrenscottageschool.com); the



private Costa Mesa-based Waldorf School of Orange County ([WSOC; waldorfschool.com](http://WSOC.org)); and Journey School (journeyschool.net), the only charter school south of Los Angeles that provides a tuition-free Waldorf education.

Matthew Mead, whose first-grader, Ronan, started at WSOC and is now at Journey, is a strong supporter of the Waldorf ways.

"As the boys were growing up and getting close to preschool age, my wife and I were discussing what form of schooling we would like them to experience," says Mead. "We both were from very traditional public school systems, and we both had similar experiences: The whole philosophy of a traditional public education is a process of memorization and 'regurgitation,' which neither of us wanted for our children."

Mead was also concerned about the stacks of homework that he saw the children of friends and family bringing home.

"We wanted our children to enjoy the experience of schooling and enjoy being children when they were home, not having the pressure of extra work to do after school hours," he adds. "A local mom was hosting a small Waldorf-style playgroup, so we studied the philosophies of Waldorf and found it appealing."

Mead says that what appealed to him and his wife most included the back-to-basic aspect of learning and relying on the child's imagination as a learning tool, a belief shared by many Waldorf supporters.

Tammra Tanner, a Waldorf educator

who shares insights on her blog, "Beauty, Harmony and Order," offers informal talks about parenting and the Waldorf education, and explains the importance of a Waldorf setting for toddlers.

"While the preference is for the very young child to be primarily in a family setting with their parents, today's culture is such that childcare has become the norm verses the exception," she says. "A gentle structure such as a Waldorf program is a lovely first step away from home for the young child in which to explore and experience the world around them."

The Waldorf settings are unique in many ways.

"You won't see a lot of flashy toys or jarring colors; what you will experience is a peacefulness and a purposefulness in all that is done," Tanner says. "Children play and use their imagination to gain a sense of security."

How will a Waldorf education impact

An ever-growing trend:

- There are approximately 1,000 Waldorf schools in 91 countries, including some 150 in the United States.
- In the Western U.S., there are now nearly 50 Waldorf-based public schools, most of them K-8 charter schools.

What is Waldorf?

- It is the fastest-growing educational movement in the world.
- It is based on a profound understanding of human development.
- It provides detailed, richly artistic curricula that responds to and enhances the child's developmental phases, from early childhood through high school.
- It cultivates social and emotional intelligence.
- It connects children to nature.
- It ignites passion for lifelong learning.

Source: whywaldorfworks.org

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Toddler



“American education has become more about short-term results and test scores than long-term success and deep understanding.

—Shaheer Faltas,

Executive Director of Journey School

your toddler after transitioning into grade school? Shaheer Faltas, executive director at Journey School (grades K-8), shares his perspective with OC Family magazine.

“We believe that children learn best when their teachers are greatly invested and pay attention to them as individuals,” says Faltas. “We understand that positive relationships are paramount. For this reason, we limit class size and allow teachers to travel with their students through the grades. The net result is that the students feel honored, safe and motivated.”

Another difference is how the arts are central to both the learning and the human experience; it's not viewed as expendable “electives” or “add-ons.”

Finally, if you share Mead's concerns about excessive homework, as well as today's general pressures of rote memorization – and a growing number of parents do – Faltas explains that the Waldorf style is a journey versus a race.

“American education has become more about short-term results and test scores

than long-term success and deep understanding,” he says. “This has never been the case at Journey School. Since our inception as the first parent-initiated charter school in Orange County, we've always taken a long, comprehensive view of education. In spite of societal pressure to go the opposite direction, we've stood by our founding principle.”

Robin Theiss, the high school humanities lead teacher at WSOC, agrees:

“Through creative play in early childhood, imaginative learning in the lower grades, and critical thinking in the high school level, Waldorf education prepares the student to meet the challenges of the new millennium, to engage in the global community and to create a new paradigm for collaborative leadership.

“At the Waldorf School of Orange County, we believe we are changing the world – one student at a time.”

It's never too early to begin immersing your child in Waldorf teachings, which can be part of your lifestyle from birth and throughout the school years – and beyond. **OCF**

Learn More:

Blog: “Beauty, Harmony and Order,” by Tammra Tanner (beautyharmonyandorder.wordpress.com)

Book: “Over the Rainbow Bridge” online: whywaldorfworks.org