



MEET BEVERLY SMITH, ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL

Beverly Smith was primed for change. After a lifetime of increasingly responsible positions in suburban schools—most recently as head of Acorn Montessori School in Lebanon, NJ—she was ready to explore life in a more urban, culturally available location. She had started putting out feelers for new positions.

Bev knew about WSMS because of its reputation in the greater Montessori community, and she had also been hearing about the school from Marie Dugan, former president of the American Montessori Society and a close personal friend to her and also to Mimi Basso. And, as Vice President (now President) of the New Jersey Montessori Association Corporation, Bev knew Lisanne Pinciotti, Director of WSMS-TEP (Lisanne is also a member of NJMAC).

When Lisanne called Bev, out of the blue, and said she and Mimi had an idea they wanted to discuss, Bev was happy to meet with them.

Mimi had two objectives: she needed someone to absorb some of her hands-on responsibilities, and she wanted to augment the WSMS-TEP options with an Administration-credentialed course.

Bev was the perfect candidate. Before her time at Acorn Montessori, she held a variety of administrative and teaching positions at Washington Montessori School in New Preston, CT. At the same time, she taught and consulted for the Center for Montessori Teacher Education, with a particular focus on school management.

Bev wondered how it would be to go from being a Head of School to an Assistant Head

of School, but she quickly realized that this was a true opportunity, that she and Mimi had complimentary skills and talents, and that the TEP programming was another chance to have an impact on how schools are managed.

Fast forward a few months ...

Beginning a new job in a new environment is always challenging: what will my new colleagues be like, is there a coffee machine... but Beverly Smith says the transition was remarkably easy. "Everyone was so welcoming. They made me feel comfortable from the beginning."

She has been surprised by the demands on Mimi's schedule: exmissions meetings with parents, classrooms observations, faculty meetings, and—at this time of year—visits to ongoing schools. She describes Mimi as "taking things in stride" and "open to suggestions," and is happy to relieve her of some of those trips to other schools (a chance for Bev to learn about them) and multiple daily classroom observations ("The level of teacher expertise is incredible. And having three or four teachers in every classroom means the children get unparalleled support.").

Bev actually did not start out as a Montessori teacher. At Rumsey Hall in Washington, CT, the sixth grade students who had transferred in from a local Montessori impressed her. "The Montessori kids were amazing. They always found something positive about the other children. They asked critical questions and even asked for extra homework to explore different ways of looking at a topic." She moved to Washington Montessori School and began work toward a Montessori credential.

At Washington Montessori, Bev was always looking for another challenge. At West Side Montessori, she is delighted with the challenges facing her. Her ongoing work with American Montessori Society (AMS) on the Emerging Leaders Fellowship Program (ELF) feeds directly into the development of the TEP administrative curriculum.

And she relishes the chance to become involved in the community. At Acorn she was hired to turn around a school that had faced a few difficult years. She describes one of her strengths as the ability to "see how the community will interpret what's happening, and focus on the positive." Her success at Acorn in building community translates into the desire at WSMS to reinforce the strong core she recognizes here.

When asked if anything surprised her, Bev said she is "blown away" by our historical diversity and financial support, and by the professional development opportunities available to our faculty and administration. She admits with a smile that finding a quiet space is a challenge, but is impressed by the ingenious multi-use green facilities.

Transition to urban life can be a bit intimidating, and Bev did it with care. At first she commuted from her home in central New Jersey. Then she found a great apartment in West New York—an easy commute by bus across the Hudson, with glorious city views when she walks her dog in the park across the street from her building. At the moment she is housing her 27-year-old son (soon to move to London) and her daughter, who graduated last May from Haverford College. She loves access to the cultural life of the city...and the opportunity to "order in" her lunch!