

# Reading, Writing, and EATING:

BY SHANNON  
LINDEN

*How Education and Nutrition  
go Hand in Little Hand*



BUILDING BLOCKS  
LEADERS, FROM LEFT:  
BRIE REMES, DIRECTOR OF  
OPERATIONS; LAURA VON  
KROSIGK, DIRECTOR OF  
ADMINISTRATION, AND CHEF  
CHERYL FOORT.  
PHOTO BY WENDY MCALPINE



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*“It’s been proven by scientists that we do the majority of our learning before the age of five”*

**A**ren’t preschool kids amazing? The way they explore their environments, soaking up information like little sponges, showering adults with their enthusiasm.

*“It’s been proven by scientists that we do the majority of our learning before the age of five,”* explains Brie Remes, Director of Operations at Building Blocks Educational Childcare, located in Kelowna. *“That’s when kids have the ability to consume so much information, laying the groundwork for future learning.”*

Ripe for intellectual and social development, early childhood is also rife with rebellious independence. Eager to share what they’ve learned, toddlers and preschoolers are just as apt to refuse to eat dinner.

Every parent has been there—their three-year-old throwing down her carrots and demanding mac & cheese (preferably from a box with the initials KD emblazoned across the front). While picky eating is a right of pediatric passage, experts suggest it is a temporary stage and if parents can persevere, offering a variety of nutritional foods, children will learn to make healthy choices.

Research shows kids will eat more fruits and vegetables if the food is presented in an interesting way, but show us a working mom who gets to the grocery store on a regular basis, let alone arranges her produce in a rainbow.

That’s why Remes conceptualized her school with more than reading and writing in mind. In terms of decisions parents make on behalf of their child’s welfare, *“Education and nutrition are huge,”* she says.

Capitalizing on that, Building Blocks offers a comprehensive learning environment—and an on-site chef who prepares plated meals and nutritious snacks—every day.

## HOW TO BUILD A PRESCHOOL

With a background in business management, Remes took a few teaching courses and then traveled to China where she taught preschool from 2000 to 2003.

*“I fell in love with that age group,”* she recalls, *“but I also learned the value of providing more than just play, including opportunities*



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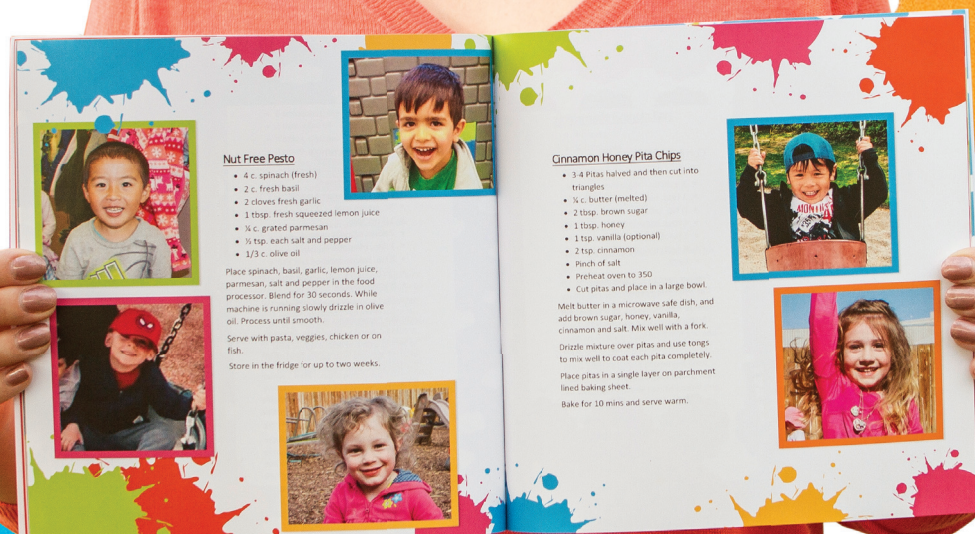


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When I tell people I'm a chef and that I work at Building Blocks, they don't understand—  
*kids* are the toughest critics!”



A WONDERFUL WAY TO WRAP UP THE YEAR, THE TEAM AT BUILDING BLOCKS PUBLISHES AN ANNUAL COOKBOOK FEATURING CHEF CHERYL'S KID-FRIENDLY, PARENT-APPROVED DISHES. PHOTO BY WENDY MCALPINE

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## AND CHEF MAKES THREE

to allow children to raise the bar and to prepare for kindergarten and their academic careers.”

Which is not to suggest tiny kids get crammed into intimidating rows of desks. Learning is presented through a balanced approach including play, parallel play, and structured learning.

Kids study science, especially the human body, an endlessly fascinating subject.

“My four-year-old son, Maris, said to me, ‘I can see a stirrup bone in your ear. That’s the smallest bone in your body, and by the way, your femur is the largest,’” Remes says.

Business partner and Director of Administration, Laura von Krosigk, says her daughter, Becca (also four), can name several famous artists, thanks to the artist of the month curriculum.

“Emily Carr is her favorite,” the proud mom says, adding that learning included a trip to the museum and a meeting with the curator of the art gallery. “She talks about Michelangelo. The kids got under the tables and painted upside down to learn about the Sistine Chapel.”

With a background in marketing and accounting, von Krosigk adds valuable skill to the administrative team but says it’s her parenting experience that matters most.

“I do have a background as a parent,” she says, laughing. “And sending kids to daycare and knowing your kid is well cared for and happy is everything.”

Full to capacity, a second location of Building Blocks is set to open in Kelowna this fall. Clearly parents are buying into the center’s balanced philosophy and breathing a sigh of relief at supertime, too.

When Chef Cheryl came on board, dazzling parents and merrily nourishing kids, Building Blocks became complete.

A foodie since she was just five-years old, Cheryl Foort was destined to make her living making meals. “My mom tells me I made peanut butter and jam sandwiches at my kitchen station and taught people how to prepare them,” she says, grinning. “I just love to feed people.”

After apprenticing at the Harrison Hot Springs, Foort worked in various restaurants including Earl’s, and then three years at Kelowna’s Coast Capri Hotel.

“Even the Food Network teaches me,” she says, “but I’ve learned the most here. When I tell people I’m a chef and that I work at Building Blocks, they don’t understand—kids are the toughest critics!”

Insisting it’s a misconception that kids won’t eat spice and flavor, she prides herself on flavorful food with different textures.

One of her favorite tricks is processing nine different vegetables and slipping them into dishes. Lunch includes meals like spaghetti and meatballs, salmon with broccoli and brown rice, butternut squash soup and grilled ham and cheese sandwiches, all of them plated.

“I believe kids deserve to eat well like they would in a restaurant,” she insists.

Of course harried parents can’t always coordinate Canadian Food Guide approved meals (let alone properly present them) and that’s why so many love what chef Cheryl brings to the table. With no lunches or snacks to pack, parents can rest assured their kids have eaten well for the better part of the day.

“We have parents who say, ‘Oh my kid will never eat that,’ when it comes to something like chili,” Von Krosigk says, “but you would be amazed. If chef Cheryl made it, the kids eat it—and ask for it at home!”

Never forgetting the philosophy of balance, Foort makes super healthy meals all week but everyone looks forward to fun Fridays. “We have treats, like tater tots.”

Perhaps no one appreciates the chef’s talents more than Director Remes: “I can’t cook,” she says. “Cheryl sends me home with leftovers.”

For this team of women, all three of whom balance children with careers, Building Blocks is more than their workplace—it’s the culmination of a dream to offer a unique program for Kelowna families and the foundation of a growing enterprise. While Remes says she lost many nights sleep back in 2007, when the Women’s Enterprise Center first backed her business plan, her vision has been rewarded with the current expansion.

For von Krosigk, it’s a career that combines her business and accounting skills with her parental care while Foort says the work saved her life. When daughter Torie was just nine months old she was diagnosed with a stage-four brain tumor and declared palliative.

Several surgeries and seven years later, Torie is a delightfully inquisitive and happy child who benefited from the Building Blocks program while her mom enjoyed a renewed sense of purpose.

--Three women building a solid foundation for future generations to do great things. 