

JOWONIO

FAMILY & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Dear Jowonio Families and Friends,

Our 2025-2026 school year is well underway, and it's a joy to see our children building happy relationships with their teachers and one another, and diving into the many rich experiences each classroom offers. We're deeply engaged in getting to know one another—celebrating the strengths each unique child and adult brings to our community, and learning how best to support one another through challenges. We're grateful for your partnership in this work, and hope you feel well-informed and positive about your child's—and your own—experience with us.

I treasure the community we create together at Jowonio. We believe every child deserves a place to belong—where they are seen, supported, and celebrated for exactly who they are. In our inclusive classrooms, children of all abilities, backgrounds, and experiences learn side by side. They play, create, and explore together—building not only early academic, language, motor, and social-emotional skills, but also empathy, confidence, and a sense of belonging. These are the skills that help them thrive as individuals and contribute to a more just and caring world.

The recent outpouring of support for our annual Food Drive is just one example of how our community extends that spirit beyond the classroom—caring for both children and adults alike. I often say that Jowonio is a microcosm of the world we wish to live in: one where every person's gifts are celebrated, challenges are met with creativity and care, and everyone has the opportunity to realize their potential. In a time when there is so much division and so many are struggling, this vision feels more important than ever.

Thank you for the trust you place in us by sharing your wonderful children each day, and for all the ways you help our community live out this vision.

Warmly,
Lori





Ellen Beard Barnes
January 5, 1945 - October 6, 2025

We are deeply saddened to share that Ellen Barnes passed away on October 6, 2025.

Ellen was the beloved former director of Jowonio, who led the school with extraordinary vision and heart for 45 years before moving into an advisory role in 2018 and retiring in 2020. Ellen was the heart of Jowonio, shaping it into an internationally recognized model of inclusive education.

Her belief in dignity and potential of every child, her fierce commitment to inclusion, and her deep care for families and staff helped shaped Jowonio into the place we know and love today. Her passion for creating beautiful, functional, and educational spaces went beyond the classroom and into the natural world, resulting in seven inclusive outdoor play spaces for Jowonio children to enjoy. Ellen made an impact - child by child - that is felt not only by the children she worked with but by the Central New York community as a whole.

Ellen's legacy lives on in the thousands of lives she touched - through her leadership, her compassion, and the vibrant, inclusive community as a whole. Ellen's legacy lives on in the thousands of lives she touched - through her leadership, her compassion, and the vibrant, inclusive community she helped create. As we mourn her loss, we also celebrate the profound impact she had on our school and the world beyond it.

**To learn more about
Ellen's life and legacy,
her obituary is available at
<http://bit.ly/3X9Kq7O>**



WHAT'S NEW!



Anita with Edwin on a sunny Star Room day

Study Groups

Starting in November, we will launch our next study group series, where staff can learn in small groups, revisiting monthly on three Wednesdays to deepen understanding and include time to practice and learn.

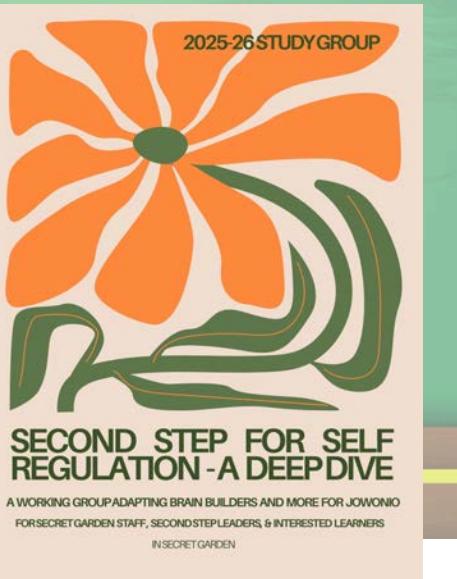
What do we do on Wednesday?

Wednesday afternoons are dedicated to collaboration and staff learning at Jowonio and is directly related to the high quality inclusive classrooms we are so proud of here. To start the year one of our veteran teachers, Anita Freezman of the Star Room, lead our staff in a learning session to help set a strong foundation for a great school year. She focused on relationship building, being deliberate about language we use with kids and the classroom environment. Staff left the session committed to being thoughtful of these aspects of their jobs and even signed a Teacher Language Pledge because we know that our words shape children's experiences.

A favorite quote from Anita:

"Presence is more powerful than perfection. If you're showing up with curiosity, with humility, and with love - you're doing the work. Let's keep learning together."

Jowonio Wednesdays give us the opportunity to keep learning together!



Cheers to Retirement!

This year two of Jowonio's long time employees have retired! We salute Brenda Cafarelli, special education teacher, and Pam Carges, occupational therapist, with a combined 71 years at Jowonio!

Years at Jowonio: 37 years

Classrooms: started in the Teddy Bear with toddlers, Butterfly, Star, ENRICH (home/community based), Bernice Wright and SU Day Care collaborations, Dragonfly, then back with toddlers in the Bunny Room

Hometown: born in Brooklyn; raised on Staten Island

What kept me at Jowonio for so many years is the philosophical beliefs for total inclusion, diversity, respect and the strength and teamwork to implement these requirements into practice. Every person can learn, given appropriate and varying methods and guidance.

Favorite song: Whitney Houston's "Greatest Love of All" has been a huge influence for me: "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside. Give them a sense of pride to make it easier. Let the children's laughter remind us of how we used to be."

There's more to life than Jowonio! I plan to continue to fulfill my passion for attending music and theater events. There is so much talent in our community, there shouldn't be too many reasons to always go very far to watch a great local concert or play. I hope to resume a bit of traveling that was put on hold, possibly returning to England and Spain, where some family reside, in addition to a few new places. Being able to join groups at the neighborhood library, community center and the gym, which only meet during the workdays, piques my interest. There may even be some places I can do some volunteering. I also hope I can remain connected with people that I have met along my way.

Brenda Cafarelli



Years at Jowonio: 35 years

What kept me at Jowonio for so many years: I'm not sure anyone plans to work at any one place for that long but when we strive to keep learning and advancing our practice and we get new kids every year or two (I love the preschool years!) things stay fresh, interesting and fun! More than one person has heard me say "can you believe we get to do this everyday?" I have stayed at Jowonio so long because it's great to work with people who share values of respecting, loving and wanting the best for kids and families. Those values extended to my own family as the Jowonio community helped raise my three kids!



Pam Carges

Hometown: I am from Cincinnati and earned my Occupational Therapy degree at Boston University where I met a guy who became my husband. We came to Syracuse for his grad school years and never left. I was new here and working for North Syracuse schools when one day someone said to me, "you should be working at that school in the city". A few years later I met MJ, a PT working at Jowonio, and she also said I belonged at Jowonio. Seems like they were both right! When I started the OT/PT room was the Kaleidoscope room - now it's the Secret Garden. Being an OT I have worked with many classroom teams and many many children.

There's more to life than Jowonio! I'm not sure what retirement will bring for me. I am getting a granddaughter in November! I am very excited about that! I am looking forward to not having a set schedule, to reading a novel or two, traveling (we just got back from Alaska!), no paperwork, and just doing whatever I want every day. I am ready for my next chapter! Thanks to Jowonio for being a big part of my journey so far I have many memories to take with me!

Jowonio staff LEAVE THEIR MARK



One of the things I love about social media is how it connects us with people and organizations all around the world, each with their own story and background. In August, the president of the Autism Council of Utah reached out to me when they were in need of a design for communication boards to be set up in parks across the state of Utah. They had previously commissioned a design for a board that they were not happy with and wanted something more visually pleasing while being functional for kids with a range of abilities. After viewing some custom work I have voluntarily done for other families as a Licensed PCS Maker, they reached out to me for help. Through education about core words, neuro-affirming practice and use of AAC we meshed our ideas to create a layout for a board. Shannon Keeley, Jowonio's Clinical Liaison for our Speech Language team, made suggestions for edits before finalization. This month the first board was installed! Originally the bids they received for premanufactured communication boards were \$3,200 a piece. With our free design and the support of a local Utah sign printer who generously reduced his printing and installation costs, each board costs less than \$500, allowing more playgrounds to install them and giving more children the opportunity to communicate. Just another way a small piece of Jowonio is making its mark across the country.

-Jennifer Petrie, Assistant Director

GOODBYE!

It is with a heavy heart that I share that I will be beginning a new journey. I have been part of the Jowonio community for 25 years, and in that time, the line between work and family has grown very thin—because Jowonio has truly become like family to me.

I love this school deeply. The incredible work that happens here each day—by staff, children, and families alike—is both inspiring and humbling. It has been an honor and a privilege to witness it and to be part of it.



Jowonio has not only taught me how to be a better social worker, but also how to be a better parent. It has given me a beautiful quality of life to raise my son and has gifted me with friendships and connections that I will cherish for a lifetime. I have truly treasured these years. To our amazing families—thank you for trusting us with your precious children. Your partnership, strength, and dedication make Jowonio the special place that it is. And to all the incredible children I've had the joy of knowing, you are the heart of this school. You remind us every day of the importance of inclusion, curiosity, and joy. Never stop being yourselves—you are the reason we do what we do.

As I move forward, I hope to leave behind a piece of my heart and passion. I encourage you all to keep living out the mission of this school—never forgetting how much you mean, not only to the children and families we serve, but also to one another.

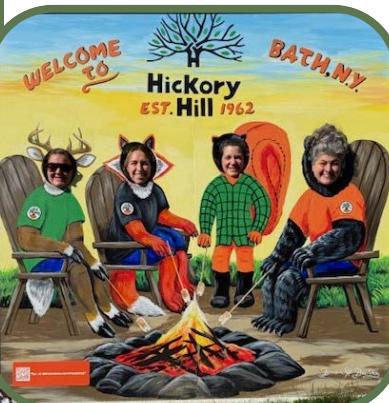
Jowonio is a very special place. While the day-to-day hustle can sometimes make us forget that, my hope is that you always remember the incredible impact you have.

Jowonio will always be Home to me.
With love and gratitude,

Emily Vercelloni
Family Support Team

**We wish
you
all the
Best**

Family Events & Support Resources



Family Retreat at the Hickory Hill Campground in Bath, NY



The summer and fall were full of fun and educational events for Jowonio parents and families!

Parenting Strategies w/ Maripat & Kate



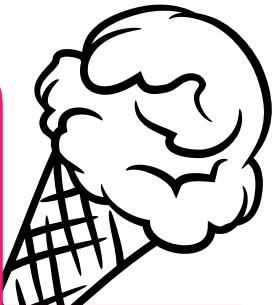
Dads' Night out at the Mets game



Feeding Workshop w/ Shannon & Lisa



Moms' Night Out @ Jowonio led by Waterfall teacher Colleen



Ice Cream Social brought together current & alumni families in August



ONCE A JOWONIO KID

ALWAYS A

JOWONIO KID

Jowonio has been a "second home" to me for most of my life. My mom, Gail Ensher, coordinated the Early Childhood Master's program at Syracuse University for 47 years and worked closely with Jowonio for a majority of her career, bringing me to Jowonio as a baby. **I was a Jowonio kid from 1985-1989.** I volunteered when I was 13, worked during summers while in college and returned in 2010 where I first worked in the Rainbow Room and then as an aide in Koala room before becoming an assistant in Waterfall. I had the honor of completing my mom's program to become certified in Early Childhood Special Education. I am now a Lead/Special Education teacher in the Rainforest room currently (previously in Koala). **I've now been here 16 years consecutively!**

I love being at Jowonio! I have met some of my closest friends here. I love coming to work every day and working with the amazing kids and families that I've been blessed to meet throughout the years. Our mission of inclusion has helped me grow both as a teacher and a person. I am grateful for our team approach in the classroom. My co-workers are dedicated and caring and work with heart, brainstorming and problem-solving to ensure that all children have access to all materials and learning activities. I love that my daughter can now experience everything that Jowonio has to offer that has shaped me as a person. I can't imagine being anywhere else! - Kim Rae



I've been connected to Jowonio forever — **first as a Jowonio kid in 2001 and now as part of the staff since 2021.** I began as an Aide in the Kangaroo Room and am now an Assistant Teacher in the Bunny Room. My favorite thing about Jowonio is the incredible sense of community. I'm beyond thankful for the opportunities this school has given me and for the chance to grow alongside such dedicated educators. I love how Jowonio teachers nurture students to learn and explore with every sense, always treating each child with kindness and respect as they find their way in the world. I couldn't be more grateful for all that Jowonio has taught me and the learning experiences I've had here. — Abby Marr



My name is Pauline and **I was a Jowonio kid in 2003** and became a staff member in the year **2025 as a Social Work intern.** My favorite thing about Jowonio is the school's capacity to create such a nurturing environment for children of all learning styles and the nurturing and supportive staff that accompany it. — Pauline Mann



Jowonio has been a meaningful part of my life for as long as I can remember. **I was a Jowonio kid from 1995 to 1997, volunteered on an event committee in my early 20s, and in August, I was thrilled to come full circle by joining the staff as the Director of Fund Development.** What I love most about Jowonio is that its values of inclusion and respect aren't just ideas we talk about — they're lived every day by the staff, the children, and the entire community. I've only been on staff for a few months, but I've already learned so much and have felt so welcomed by this school community. — Megan Wagner-Flynn

“It’s you and me who build community”

To start the year Jowonio kids studied themselves and each other as part of the first domain of the UPK curriculum and to create classroom community!



Ocean kids & teachers compared the skin they're in!

Butterfly kids played and read together!



Blossoming Bunny Friendships



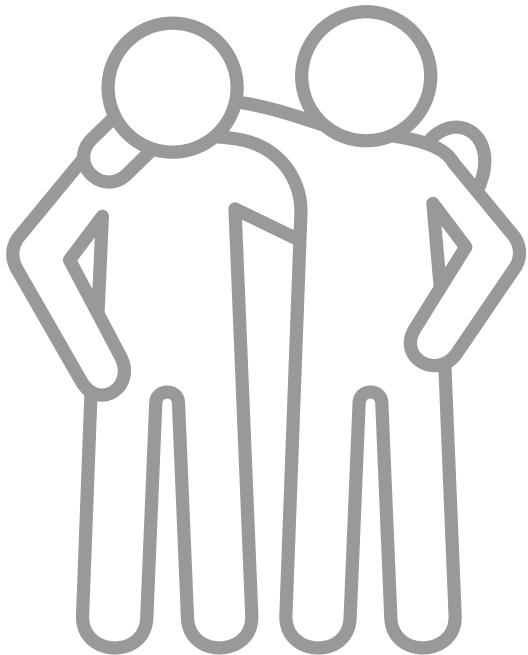
Star Room kids explored pebbles with their classmates photos on them!



Sunflower kids made photo portrait puzzles and snacked on tortilla faces!



Kangaroo Kids explored leaves together inside and out!



Fall Field Trips!

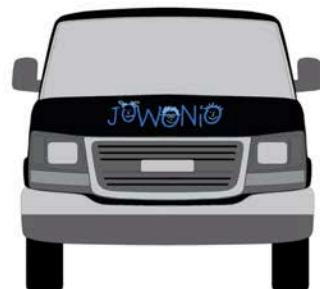
Waterfall kids visited the Pumpkin Hollow on a chilly October day!



Sunflower kids spent a sunny day at Beak & Skiff



Sea Turtle kids visited Canal Landing Park, a Jowonio favorite for their first field trip of the year!



UPCOMING EVENTS

{ As we approach the holiday season keep an eye out for flyers about our upcoming Jowonio drives and how you can participate! These drives benefit our Jowonio community. Families are encouraged to participate if possible by donating or by requesting assistance as needed. }



November Food and Monetary Donation Drive Nov 7th-19th

Toy and Gift Drive Dec 1st-17th



As always, if your family is in need of resources at any time, please contact the Family Support Team (Melissa or Emily) for assistance.

Jowonio

Board Corner

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Jim D'Aloisio

Nicole Schuster

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Jaime Riley

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Jen Petrie, Assistant Director

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President - Mike Rey

Vice President - Liz Dwyer

Treasurer - Michelle Hammerle

Secretary - Jakia Durham Kelly

contact the board: board.member@jowonio.org
to reach Mike Rey: board.president@jowonio.org

Fund Development & Communications



Hello Jowonio Community!

My name is Megan, and I'm excited to introduce myself as Jowonio's new Director of Fund Development and Communications. I joined the team in August, and as a former Jowonio student, it feels wonderful to be back!

Before this, I worked in public policy and nonprofit management, most recently helping set child care strategy for Onondaga County at the Early Childhood Alliance. Now, I get to focus on raising the funds and visibility that help our amazing teachers and staff do what they do best. That means everything from building community partnerships to hosting events and connecting with donors and friends. I'm fortunate to work alongside our amazing Fund Development Associates, Kristen Antonacci and Sophia Meskos.



If you'd like to connect, collaborate, or just say hi, please reach out. I can't wait to meet you!

Megan Wagner-Flynn



We have a new website!



The Jowonio website has a brand-new look! It's brighter, easier to use, and full of updated information, photos, and helpful resources for our families and community. We can't wait for you to take a peek!

Visit our website at www.jowonio.org and let us know what you think!



Join us in building a brighter future

The **Annual Appeal** will be arriving in your mailbox or inbox in the next few weeks. Please consider supporting Jowonio in your end of year giving!

Monthly or annual donations provide a sustainable way to support our mission and grow the educational experience.

Donations can be made in various ways:

- Online: Visit our website at www.jowonio.org and click on the "Give" page to make a secure online contribution or set up automatic donations.
- Check: checks can be made payable to "Jowonio School"

Employer Matching Programs: Many employers offer matching gift programs to support employees' philanthropic efforts. Matching donations double the impact of your contribution. To participate:

- Contact HR: Reach out to your Human Resources department about your company's matching gift program and fill out the necessary forms.



United Way
of Central New York



Birthday Fundraisers: Families and students have created beautiful birthday traditions where friends and family are asked to provide donations to Jowonio School in honor of a birthday. For every donation made in honor of your birthday or your child's birthday, we send a thank you note to those who donate, designed with love.