



# HISTORY OF LITTLE SPROUTS

How Little Sprouts  
grew from the heart  
of CEO and Founder,  
Susan Leger-Ferraro

## Making a difference one child at a time.

Little Sprouts' CEO, Susan Leger-Ferraro, has worked in early education her entire career and is nationally recognized as a leader, innovator, and activist in the field. She has also received many awards as a leader in her community, including the 2007 Athena International Award, 2006 Massachusetts School Committee Association Partner of the Year, named Intriguing Individual of the North Shore by *North Shore Living* in 2005, and she received a special Tribute to Woman from the YWCA in 2004.

Susan's fascination with early education began at a young age. In 1982, at the age of 17, Susan realized her dream, opening Susan's Playpen in a rented duplex in Methuen, MA. The family day care organization was licensed for 6 children at a time. Susan still remembers all of the children from that first year, and most of them have returned to work for Little Sprouts at some point since.

In October of 1984, Susan purchased a house and re-opened as Little Sprouts Learning Center, serving 15 children. In 1986, Little Sprouts expanded further to 37 children (infants through kindergarten). Little Sprouts always had full enrollment, and began to expand rapidly. In 1994, Susan opened Little Sprouts Child Enrichment Centers at Valley Office Park in Methuen, serving 114 children. In 1995, another new center opened at Cross Point Towers in Lowell, MA, with a license for 144 children. Cross Point selected Little Sprouts in a very competitive bid process, based on the organization's personalized approach, exceptional curriculum, and innovative environments. Also in 1995, Little Sprouts was invited to bid on a space at Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, MA. Susan won the bid and Little Sprouts at Northern Essex Community College opened in June 1995, licensed for 74 children. The summer of 1996 was the

inaugural year for Big Sprouts Summer Adventure program, which takes advantage of the rolling hills of the Northern Essex Community College campus and the nature trails of adjacent Kenoza Lake to offer a rich experience to over 50 children aged 5-12.

In 1998, Little Sprouts opened two more centers, one in Andover to serve 144 children in the Andover and Lawrence communities, and one at Lowell General Hospital offering first and second shift education and care to 94 children. Later that year, Little Sprouts opened a full-time School Age program at Valley Office Park in Methuen offering After School and Before School programming as well as vacation days and snow days. Summer of 2001 was opening year for Blooming Sprouts Summer Program, a new opportunity for younger school-age children. During this year, Big Sprouts received a grant from the ABC

consortium of grantees, including IBM families that offered Corporate Partnership allowing priority placement, free registration, and tuition discounts. Also, General Mills provided a sponsorship for continuing education for their teachers, and Lucent Technologies continued to be a great supporter of Little Sprouts Child Enrichment Centers, providing five grants totaling over \$200,000 to provide training for educators, new playground equipment, a bus for school age and field trips, and developmentally appropriate equipment for infants and toddlers. In addition, the organization achieved certification by the State Office of Minority and Women Organization Assistance (SOMWBA).

As Little Sprouts grew, the development of communication skills and employee leadership became very important. Little Sprouts was awarded a series of Massachusetts Workforce Training Grants, enabling Susan and other senior administrators to become certified as facilitators in the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the *High/Scope* method, and many other leadership training programs. These training methods became part of the Little Sprouts culture, creating an approach that makes them such a unique early education provider.

As Little Sprouts realized dramatic benefits from this training approach, it became clear that these methods could help the broader Merrimack Valley community. Susan and Little Sprouts CFO Melissa Leger laid the groundwork to launch the Leadership and Literacy Foundation, a non-profit organization that



operates separately from Little Sprouts, offering formal training in areas such as leadership, ESL, and literacy to local schools, corporations, and organizations.

In 2000, Little Sprouts was awarded a grant from the Department of Training and Development for an Out of School Youth (OSY) program. Additional programs were created thereafter including Project Strive, Project Connect, and Project Pathways, offering support and direction to youth and young adults.

In 2003, Little Sprouts received national recognition as a Preschool Center of Educational Excellence, receiving the U.S. Department's \$1.5M Early Reading First grant to provide advanced literacy training to young children in the Merrimack Valley. Little Sprouts is the only for-profit in the nation to receive this award.

In 2005, Little Sprouts opened a new center for 140 children in Lawrence, MA

as part of the Riverwalk Revitalization Project in the Lawrence Mills.

In 2006, Little Sprouts was awarded a second Early Reading First grant for \$3.5M. Little Sprouts was the only for-profit preschool in Massachusetts to receive this honor. In September of 2006, Little Sprouts opened a 6th center in Westford, MA, in collaboration with the Nashoba Valley Technical School Early Education Department. In December 2006, Little Sprouts expanded further to their newest site at Roxbury Community College.

Little Sprouts has ambitious plans to continue innovating and growing in the future. It is the Stewardship Team's hope to expand Little Sprouts steadily, offering the organization's unique, holistic, nurturing approach to as many children and families in at-risk communities as possible. We intend to enrich many more lives as we continue to sprout!