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CPD Legacy Story: Long Live the Little Red Wagon

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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CPD LEGACY STORY: LONG LIVE THE LITTLE RED WAGON

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On any one day at the CPD you may have to dodge a little red wagon coming down the hallway carrying precious cargo—a young preschooler or two.

According to Dr. Bryce Fifield, CPD Director, the Little Red Wagon has been making laps around the CPD as far back as the late 1970’s, giving small children enrolled in the Center’s programs a thrilling ride. It could be seen any time of the year traveling through the halls of the CPD or loaded with kids all bundled up enjoying the winter weather outside. USU students from Special Education or Child Development classes spent many hours pulling children in the Little Red Wagon to places that would stimulate their social and language skills.

It became a symbol of what the CPD stood for—helping those with disabilities move to new places that will improve their skills.

The Little Red Wagon has more recently become a featured part of the Autism Support Services: Education, Research, and Training, or ASSERT preschool program since its beginning in 2003. ASSERT is a state-of-the-art preschool program that uses research-based techniques to address the individual needs of children with autism.

The Little Red Wagon became a preferred activity for many of the young students who attend ASSERT. “They often work very hard to earn their wagon rides,” states Dr. Thomas Higbee, Director of the ASSERT program. “It has the added benefit of providing them with an opportunity to use the skills they have learned at ASSERT in the ‘real world’ as they travel through the hallways of the CPD.”

Tyra Sellers, lead teacher for ASSERT, explains that “the students will complete structured work for a period of time to gain access to the wagon.” Then they get to go on a much treasured trip through the labyrinth pathways of the CPD.

Sellers continues, “While on the wagon ride, the instructors work on language and social skills. For example: we can work on having the student fill in the phrase ‘Ready, set, go!’ request to ‘Go’ or ‘Stop,’ make eye contact, request to go ‘fast’ or ‘slow,’ ‘left’ or ‘right.’ While on the ride we can stop and have the student label or point to common things (e.g., colors, water fountain, a man walking by), or work on greeting people. Sometimes we pair the children to work on peer-to-peer social skills.

“Once the Little Red Wagon even ended up in a research study where the purpose was to teach appropriate waiting for a preferred activity. The Little Red Wagon is also used for less glamorous purposes, like hauling in snacks, toys, and other materials from cars, especially in the winter.”

Those of us who work at the CPD often have a chance to help out as we greet the “wagon” children in the hallway and the ASSERT staff prompts them to respond. Seeing the Little Red Wagon coming down the hallway brings a smile to our faces and brightens our day as we
hear the enthusiastic chatter and songs that the staff use with the children.

May the Little Red Wagon travel many more miles through the halls of the CPD in the years to come!