

# jumping mouse

CHILDREN'S CENTER

Fall 2014

## What We Mean by Resilience

We often think of resilience as a natural ability to bounce back from hardship. Some of us, it seems, are born “tougher” than others. But Henry's story reveals that resilience also contains the opposite of “toughness”—a capacity to flex with changing circumstances and relationships, trusting that all will be well. As Clinical Director Dott Kelly explains, resilience is developed in our early relationships, and can be nurtured and learned.

### HENRY'S STORY

Henry first arrived at Jumping Mouse at the age of four. Neglected in the early years of his life, he was removed from his birth parents at age two and placed in foster care. Now he was in the process of being adopted by parents who wanted to understand how Henry was affected by his years of loss and neglect.

Unsurprisingly, Henry indicated through his behaviors that he didn't find adults very trustworthy. As a form of self-protection, he responded combatively to changes in routine or expectations. When his family spontaneously invited guests over, Henry became aggressive toward his mother. If the routine at preschool shifted in any unpredictable way, he would hit other kids.

One way of understanding Henry's behaviors is through the lens of resilience. The word *resilience* appears quite often when discussing what helps children thrive physically and emotionally. Here at Jumping Mouse we talk about resilience as a process, a dynamic that is primarily learned, and a wee bit inherited. It defines a child's level of flexibility and whether that child might learn to navigate around and through the missteps his life has taken thus far.

Henry began his work in earnest after he found his therapist to be trustworthy. In his early play therapy sessions, Henry chose toy clocks to represent his family. The parent clocks pushed the small clocks about with seemingly random interactions. Henry's play was rather unemotional as he wiped out these nonhuman representatives. The therapist reported a deep general sadness in the room and quietly held the rigid, nonhuman constructs while initiating honest interaction with Henry himself.

Over time, Henry's play slowly warmed up. Instead of the clocks, he reached for some humans off the toy shelf and began creating the bare makings of a house. Through her own reflections and narrations, Henry's therapist carried the emotions of these new, more alive, more risky relationships for him. She commented on keeping the people warm and safe



In the beginning of therapy, there is an impenetrable barrier between the “mama clock” (on left) and “baby clock” (in Henry's hand).

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and wondered out loud what these figures might eat or want to do. Henry was now entering the field of resilience. His first effort with the clocks had revealed the empty sadness of avoiding emotions. As he began hunting for the connection and safety of relationship in the therapy room, he was peeking out from his past to try again.

Meanwhile, Henry's therapist helped his adopting family support an interactive environment where Henry could slowly move toward the risk of relating again. At home, he began agreeably sitting with the family for a meal, all smiles as he looked at his new picture board, where his mom had placed tomorrow's events for him to see.

Resilience is a primary building block in relationship, which Henry had missed. Parents help to slowly build trust and confidence in their infants, by responding to the infant's needs and by welcoming the differences that the baby expresses. As the toddler explores his world under the guidance of a trustworthy adult, he is learning about taking risks and solving problems. These skills are inherent in resilience: the ability to communicate options and solve problems, to manage strong feelings and make emotional adjustments, and to have confidence in one's own strengths and abilities. All of these positive factors are part of the long-term process of relationship that Henry had never had.

Working with very young children at Jumping Mouse bears out the profound capacity for recovery in hurt children. As we look first at the child's own perceptions of past trauma, through choices that are made during play, we work together on the rigid protectors that were put in place by necessity. Henry's aggression and distrust of adults were part of his own self-protection. But a new and trusting relationship can reduce the adverse outcomes from the past and can renew a child's capacity to try again, to move forward into a world of trust. This is the heart of resilience: moving toward safety in the arms of relationship, and learning to adjust to the demands and emotions of other people, which before had seemed too dangerous.



Toward the end of therapy, Henry creates a rich and vibrant tray, full of living plants and creatures, much different from his earlier barren landscapes containing only inanimate clocks. The bridge represents the connections Henry is beginning to make with the world.

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*Jumping Mouse is inspired by a Native American legend of a small creature who dreams of a new way. He journeys into the world beyond the familiar, with compassion and awareness. He grows, discovers his strengths, and transforms into Eagle. Like the myth, our children's center is about offering the tools that will assist each child in meeting the challenges of daily life.*

## Connect for Kids

What if we became a model community in caring for kids and families in our region? That is the vision behind our **Connect for Kids** project, which aims to build a stronger support network for kids and their caregivers throughout East Jefferson County. Our Connect for Kids project focuses on three areas that are central to the health and well-being of children and families.

**Our schools.** We will continue partnering with our community's schools to help both students and teachers feel safe and supported. From January to June 2014, Jumping Mouse therapists facilitated bimonthly consulting groups for teachers addressing student childhood trauma in their classrooms at Grant Street Elementary School. Based on the positive feedback from this semester, we will expand our program of support and training to additional educators in Jefferson County in the 2014–15 school year.

**Community resources.** It's not only our Jumping Mouse kids who suffer from neglect, violence, and other traumas. Many adults in our lives also struggle with traumatic histories and with creating a secure and nurturing family environment. In addition to providing individualized child therapy and parent counseling to each family at Jumping Mouse, our therapists also coordinate community resources for families, such as connecting them with our local domestic violence shelter, assisting them with Medicaid enrollments, or securing transportation to appointments. This fall, we have hired a social worker to formalize and increase this family support.

**Community partnerships.** Although we have always coordinated with other organizations to strengthen the safety net for fragile families, we intend to deepen these relationships—with our medical clinics, schools, shelters, and others—in a shared vision for a healthy community. Our goal is to increase collaboration, support, and communication among those working on behalf of kids and families.

By connecting our efforts and working together, we can foster transformative changes at the community level as well as the individual level.

## Home Outside Project

Many of you came to our open house in June to see our newly expanded space. Next up: the exterior of our facility. Our **Home Outside** project includes replacing the last section of old roof on our new addition; painting the exterior of our entire building one color, to unify our old and new space; creating outdoor therapy space for kids; and developing an area where staff can also find a quiet place to recharge between therapy appointments. We want kids to feel safe and at home both inside and outside Jumping Mouse.

*Do you want to support this project? Write "Home Outside" on your donor envelope or check to allocate your donation.*



*We have reached a new milestone: we are now able to provide 80 children's therapy sessions each week!*

*With your help, we will be on our way to our goal of 100 weekly sessions next year. Please consider donating today.*

*"As soon as I wake up every day, I jump up and get on my clothes and get outside. It's better out there."*

*— Abby, age five*



By Deb Hammond, *Jumping Mouse Jan's Club member*

## Why I am a member of Jan's Club – Jumping Mouse's monthly giving program.

When I first heard about Jumping Mouse, I thought it was a preschool, and what a charming name it had! It took some time until I realized the vital role Jumping Mouse plays in our world.

I say *world* rather than *town*, intentionally. The families and children who are helped to heal at Jumping Mouse do make our local communities stronger and healthier. Yet who's to say, as they live their lives, where people will go and who else's lives they'll impact? The tools people gain during their work at Jumping Mouse can influence many individuals and families over the years.

And that's why I am happy to be one of the people who support Jumping Mouse, monthly, through Jan's Club. Please join me in any way that you can to help Jumping Mouse heal children and families and to make life better for all the people they, in turn, will touch.

Visit [www.jumpingmouse.org](http://www.jumpingmouse.org) for more information about Jan's Club, our monthly giving program.

Jumping Mouse Children's Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and all contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Donations are accepted directly to JMCC.

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