

## Chelsea's Story

By Dott Kelly, Clinical Director

Working with children over the years has raised many questions, and these don't seem to change very much: "Wouldn't it work faster to use cognitive behavioral therapy?" "What is this 'play therapy'? How is it different from what I'm doing at home?" "I want you to find out if my child has been hurt. Can you talk to him [or her]?"

These are valid questions and concerns. Many of us are familiar with talk therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy and are anxious to have the problems we see at home or at school "fixed." But the Jumping Mouse approach is different, founded on the knowledge that children are capable of healing fully through their own language — play.

Young children do not express themselves in the same way as adults. A four-year-old may not be able to communicate in words how it felt to not know where his mama went, or his fear that there is no one to take care of him. Even so, our children feel deeply, and their traumas directly affect their physical, social, and emotional development. Childhood experiences continually form and affect complex neural pathways, and a child's brain needs time and the safety of a trusted relationship in order to restructure, renew, and create healthier pathways.

Such time, and the relationship between the therapist and the child, is therefore at the heart of Jumping Mouse play therapy. If a therapist "talks to" a child, then the child tends to put the therapist into the "just another adult" brain file. Instead, the therapist must enter the child's world, using the child's own language of play, and develop a relationship on the child's own terms.

"Chelsea" was six, living with her grandmother, when she started at Jumping Mouse. She had spent three years with her homeless mother, much of the time living out of the car and in the homes of people who seemed random and foreign to Chelsea. Her mom referred to these people as "friends," but Chelsea never saw these friends before or after their short stay. Thus, her first perceptions of relationships and attachments had little logic to them and lacked predictability and assurance.

Chelsea's first work in therapy was barren. She placed a large skeleton in my chair, as if to say, "There's not much to this relationship but skin and bones." A sadness permeated the room. Her play was messy and chaotic, as if she didn't quite know how to create something that revealed some order — nor did she want to. She didn't care because she couldn't afford to care.

When Chelsea began trusting me, she also became more agitated, and she wanted to stay *out* of the therapy room. It was as though she was caught between feeling the need for the assistance I offered and wondering if I was just another stopping place that would suddenly disappear. Chelsea had



One of Chelsea's first images in therapy. "There's not much to this relationship but skin and bones."

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learned that “if I like you, you go away,” and these old patterns became constantly present in our work. When she chose a puzzle to work on outside the therapy room, the puzzle became the focus of our relationship.

“Can’t you finish this?” she demanded, in an effort to push me away.

“Let’s take it into our room and see what we can do,” I said, matching her concern with reassurance.

Eventually, however, Chelsea did make the leap into trust. She begged me to leave everything in the therapy room just as she had left it, so she could come back and find her “own” room again. It became difficult to end sessions. “Please, please, just leave the princess here [in the castle],” she would beg, or “I’ll just take this [puppy miniature] home with me, because she’ll get lost by next time.”

Although what she asked for was impossible, I understood Chelsea’s real need: to be remembered and held in mind, to not be lost to the next unpredictable moment. In response, we created a small ritual, capturing photos of her work, which helped this young child form new beliefs about people and reliability. This was Chelsea’s first attempt to construct new ways of responding to her anxieties, instead of falling back on her old pattern of withdrawal and distrust. A new neural pathway had begun.

Chelsea began to test this new dynamic, questioning the therapist’s predictability and memory. “What would you do if I got lost?” she’d ask. “Do you think about me sometimes?”

What she was seeking was my consistent reassurance. As this rewired neural pathway is reused again and again, the



Near the end of therapy, Chelsea draws a picture of a family camping together on the beach. She has begun to trust the possibility of being part of a family.

brain becomes stronger, and the child is able to access this new “map” even in the world outside the therapy room. Chelsea had discovered that she was important to someone, that she could trust an adult to remember her, and over time she was able to generalize this, learning to trust her grandmother, her teacher, and then her peers.

Although there is no set formula for working with children, we at Jumping Mouse believe the most crucial ingredient is the trusting relationship. With trust in place, children have an urgency to grab an adult’s hand for assurance, as they test and discover their place in 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.*

We can do so much more  
because of YOU!

in 2015



95

CHILDREN PER WEEK ARE  
RECEIVING THERAPY SERVICES

180

parents and caregivers received on-call,  
weekly, or monthly support and  
education



of parents and caregivers  
reporting agreed:

"Jumping Mouse helped  
me understand my child."

41

Head Start teachers  
received training on the  
effects of trauma on young  
children



Intern and extern therapists donated  
2,478 hours of therapy services, enabling  
Jumping Mouse to see up to  
28 more children per week.



66% of our  
kids have  
ACE\* score  
of 3 or more



75% of kids are  
from Port  
Townsend



81% of our  
kids are in  
low-income  
households

\*ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score measures 10 different types of traumas a child has experienced, including abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and loss of a parent. Find out more at [acestoohigh.com](http://acestoohigh.com)

Goal: \$131,000



We are at 62% of our goal for  
contributions received before  
December 31. Help us fill up  
the heart, so children in need  
can turn to Jumping Mouse.  
Please donate today!

## Did You Know?

Jumping Mouse's **master's-level internship program** fills a regional need for training in children's therapy *and* enables us to serve 20% more children from throughout East Jefferson County. This vital program is funded in part by a one-tenth of 1% county sales tax grant and by United Good Neighbors of Jefferson County, which supports clinical supervision and other resources for our dedicated intern therapists. To date, Jumping Mouse has trained 40 therapists in our child-centered model, in partnership with universities throughout the Puget Sound region and beyond. Your purchases in Jefferson County and donations to UGN give more local kids a healthier, happier future. Thank you!

*"What I could not have imagined before coming to Jumping Mouse was that through persistence toward a goal and a community's greater understanding of how children are supported, this kind of therapy could be made available to any child in need."*

*—Jumping Mouse intern*

## Turkey Trot – November 21

Jumping Mouse is proud to partner with the Peninsula Trails Coalition to host the fourth annual Turkey Trot! Run or walk this fun 5K event, held on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Register at [www.jumpingmouse.org](http://www.jumpingmouse.org).

**What:** Turkey Trot 5K Fun Run/Walk and Kids' Dash

**Where:** Start and finish at the Port Townsend boatyard trailhead of the Larry Scott Trail; certified 5K course.

**When:** Race registration begins at 8:30 a.m.  
Kids' dash at 9 a.m.  
5K Run/Walk at 9:30 a.m.

**Cost:** Kids' dash (12 and under) — \$10  
5K pre-registration — \$30  
Race-day registration — \$35

Proceeds to support Jumping Mouse Children's Center and Peninsula Trails Coalition.

**Coffee, cocoa, and treats at the finish!**



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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