

## Parents Are Hard To Raise S03 Episode 113 Transcript

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**Announcer** [00:00:37] Diane and the crew are back on the road this week in front of a light and excited audience on the Parker campus in Highland Park New Jersey, in the US.

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[00:00:55] So what do you say folks. Let me hear you shout so loud I'll hear you in London!

**Diane Berardi** [00:01:06] Welcome to Parents Are Hard To Raise. Helping families grow older together without losing their minds. I'm elder care expert Diane Berardi.

[00:01:15] We're back at the Parker organization and I wanted to share a program that they have which I love. I love an intergenerational program. And this can help anyone, it can help your elderly parents. It can help you if you have children in school. They have a child development center in house and it's a fantastic program. And here to talk about it Robin Kessler the director of the Child Development Center and Candice Pietrzak. I hope I got that right. I'm known to mess up names and I apologize.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:01:54] It's Okay. Thank you.

**Diane Berardi** [00:01:56] Robin's name was so easy.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:02:00] It's a new name for me too I struggle with it, so...

[00:02:02] Candice is an Eden trainer for Parker.

[00:02:07] So if you can I guess. Tell us how the child development center got started at Parker.

**Robin Kessler** [00:02:14] Sure. So we have longstanding roots in the community in Highland Park. We were the Y here in the community for some 35 years. When the Y closed its doors, not because of the Child Development Center but some other funding issues, it was a natural move for us to move here. So it was actually at the beginning in 2007 we met. Found out that a lot of our needs were the same, Kids and seniors. And we spent a lot of time meeting together and talking with each other and creating an intergenerational curriculum. We've been here since the onset, 12 years.

**Diane Berardi** [00:03:00] Wow. That's fantastic. And what is, for our listeners who aren't familiar, the Eden program?

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:03:09] So the Eden Alternative is a philosophy to build a person centered world for the people that live within nursing homes or institutions. So it's breaking down the medical structure while still giving the care that's needed but not losing who the people are. So then when you move into a community you still are one you're not one of

so many. And so for the Eden Alternative it is the tool we chose. We've been on the journey for a long time being person center is never ending. Because we're talking about people. And some of their philosophy is to bring society back in. So often when people move into a nursing home they're taking them away from the community they were part of. And now they're just around employees and halls and rooms. But really it's to build relationships and bring community back in. So whether that's through volunteers, could be pets, companions that way, but then also children and the generations.

[00:04:09] So we've been very fortunate to be in a very great location that we're really close to the colleges and as we build the new our newest when we were building the assisted living we actually knew we wanted a child development center on site. So we actually built a space. We didn't know what was going to be in it, but we built the space with the idea of finding that partner that had the same values that we did. And the willingness to expose the children and the elders to each other and bring that connection back again.

**Diane Berardi** [00:04:42] You know, you don't think about it but we divide the generations from when we just start out in school. And I grew up with my grandparents and I loved it. But sometimes people, they're afraid of the elderly. They don't they don't understand. They don't realize, hey this is a person, you know they've lived a life. And so this is wonderful. What does it do for the elderly?

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:05:12] So for an older person what it really does it provides opportunity to connect but also identity and purpose. So again it's hard when you... so I've been in the industry a long time, almost 20 years I've worked in long term care. And when the child development center opened I was in recreation, so I was the Recreation Director so Robin and I worked closely together with planning. But what we realized is that these are people that are living here that have many roles in their life. Often parent, grandparent, friend. And when you move into a nursing home that tends to be taken away. So when you're exposed to children, a different generations, different ages, you can be a care provider again. You probably care partner, you could be a mentor. And so what we saw was joy, happiness, even when babies come to visit and they cry we may be cringing and the older adults are smiling and laughing because life is once again around them. We see memories. Stories are being shared that maybe they didn't have easy access to. Those experiences are bringing back shared memories to experience. And I think it's just connection.

[00:06:29] It's very interesting you had mentioned that, and we saw the same thing, Robin and I too, is that when the kids were first exposed the first group of children that came what they saw first were the devices.

**Diane Berardi** [00:06:44] Yes the cane, the walker.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:06:46] The cane, the walker. Maybe the spots on people's skin. The wrinkles. They saw those first and they they looked different. So they were a little timid. They did like the Walkers because they roll around and they were mechanical so they were taking those away times. And we're like No no no! [laughing] Don't take that away! Don't take that away from Grandpa!

[00:07:02] Yeah. There were the two twins they were a handful.

[00:07:12] But as we created opportunities for the two generations to come together, safe spaces, short amount of times, I mean for the elders it was instant. They were reaching out trying to grab them, and hold them, and hug them, and tell them how cute they were and how much they loved them and they just met these kids, right. For the children. They they grew into it.

**Robin Kessler** [00:07:36] The benefits are so real for the kids. I mean, I think that was the biggest eye opener for me. I think for all of us. We thought we were going to come here and the benefits were going to be exclusively for the elders. But children, especially in this society we live, we tend to shelter them. But aging is a part of life. And what I hear from the parents they are not afraid of the aging process anymore. They've lived here they were literally from the time they're born. They started 10 weeks and through kindergarten, so they're here for four or five years. And when they... parents tell me they'll go to visit their grandparents. They're so comfortable with this. At this point they climb into the wheelchairs to embrace the residents. So I think the values that we've taught the kids here is just an extra bonus that none of us had anticipated at the beginning.

**Diane Berardi** [00:08:36] Yeah. You would think, yeah, the benefit is for the elderly but you don't realize. It is for the children as well.

[00:08:43] It is for the children as well to respect the aging process. And the friendships and the relationships that are made.

**Diane Berardi** [00:08:49] I bet they have second and third grandparents.

**Robin Kessler** [00:08:53] Absolutely they do. And it stays. You know even sometimes the residents track the kids and when the children go on to grade school. They'll ask me, they'll stop me, how's he doing? How's first grade? And they really remember them. It's really, it's a bonus that I think that was we didn't anticipate when we started this.

**Diane Berardi** [00:09:15] Yeah. You know bonds form. And I'm sure they're carried further then, yeah.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:09:21] It really is about relationship building. And the program that we have offers that opportunity. It's wonderful when all the groups from outside want to come in and do the singing, but it doesn't allow for the connection. The actual contact and...

**Robin Kessler** [00:09:36] We live together.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:09:37] Yeah, we do. And the kids are always on the move and sometimes they come and surprise us and they do spontaneous parades and the elders love it and the employees love it too, 'cause it's reason to get away from the desk. Go see all the kids in their costumes for Halloween. You know our memories right as well yeah of our experiences. But the relationships. And I think it helps us to at times you can work in this field and it becomes routine. But it lets you remember that they're people. So when you see someone in Stone Gate in the assisted living or in the nursing home and they react to a child like you do, you're like, Oh that's right. It's a person and this is their experience. How can I support it?

[00:10:21] And then the kids actually are the best teachers because they're so patient.

**Diane Berardi** [00:10:25] I was going to say, yes...

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:10:26] They are so patient with the elders, especially as they form that bond. They don't... Well we always want to help and step in. like, Let me help you. Let me help you. The kids actually just let the elder at their peace, do it.

**Robin Kessler** [00:10:39] And they don't judge.

**Diane Berardi** [00:10:40] I was gonna say they're not judgmental.

**Robin Kessler** [00:10:43] They don't judge. No. They don't. And they remember them. They talk about them. It's really just remarkable. I mean I think it's it. It never ceases to amaze us, that has been through this process. And it's a very unique situation what we do here. Because we cohabitate.

**Diane Berardi** [00:10:58] Right yeah. And what maybe activities do they do together?

**Robin Kessler** [00:11:06] We do a lot of interest that we do scheduled activities and impromptu activities.

[00:11:11] So the schedule... [laughing]

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:11:14] You can only schedule certain ages and up, so there's schedules... So like infants and I again I don't have any children so I've learned through my time, that infants and up to two year olds, you don't actually schedule anything with them. They just kind of show up and... Especially the toddlers. [laughing] They are just running around, and again and they're excited and they're in the moment. So it's again, we schedule the opportunity for them to come together. What happens is a whole other.... we have no idea. Ya just kind of make sure no one gets lost.

**Diane Berardi** [00:11:45] [laughing] Go with the flow. Right. And you have to. Right.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:11:47] But then we've also... Like you know they'll do celebrations, social, entertainment. they have...

**Robin Kessler** [00:11:53] Intergenerational birthday parties.

**Diane Berardi** [00:11:55] That's great! Okay.

**Robin Kessler** [00:11:55] And there's actually a program that we started a few years ago called, Book Buddies, where the children, the residents read to the children, and then the children read to the residents as they emerge reading. So. And it's really.

[00:12:13] And it's not like a teacher reading a book to a class. They sit one on one and you'll often see the children put their heads on their shoulders when they're reading. So they end it's the same person. So they read to the same person. So their relationships stay and they get. And the residents get to watch children as they learn how to read and to give back. So...

**Diane Berardi** [00:12:34] Yeah they see different...

**Robin Kessler** [00:12:37] Stages right. They watch the development and sometimes they have some very good teaching tools. The residents, you know, because they've been reading for a lot of years so they can help. Sounding out the words, comprehension, things like that.

**Diane Berardi** [00:12:52] Right. And you know they, our elders, they've lived life. So they probably have all different stories and different...

**Robin Kessler** [00:13:03] They tell great stories.

[00:13:04] You know just I mean we think about Veterans Day when we celebrate Veterans Day. We have real war veterans here. And they can relate. They can tell the kids things that we can't tell them from reading a book to them or explaining. They tell them about their experiences and the value is enormous.

**Diane Berardi** [00:13:23] I bet the kids are mesmerized.

[00:13:25] Mesmerized. Yes. They love it. I'd say it's the biggest treat is to go visit the grandmas and grandpas.

**Diane Berardi** [00:13:31] Oh yeah it has to be. And they're hearing stories from the heart.

**Robin Kessler** [00:13:35] That's right.

**Diane Berardi** [00:13:35] And kids are... they genuinely show...

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:13:41] Yes they're authentic to each other.

[00:13:44] They're very happy to see each other. I mean I remember one elder who was a teacher so we were very fortunate we have lots of professions so we had a teacher and she had a nickname and I remember seeing when the kids were coming to visit they were really kind of walking down the hall as they turned the corner she was sitting in a room and they yelled her name and they all ran to her and she just opened her arms and they hugged her, because she was so happy to see them from the last time. And it was like, Oh... Again it's just those moments.

**Robin Kessler** [00:14:11] Yes.

**Candice Pietrzak** [00:14:12] That's why we do it, too. Right? It again helps us remember you know meeting and scheduling and learning about what kids need and what the elders need and kind of teaching each others like, Okay this is why we do it.

**Diane Berardi** [00:14:25] And those moments will last forever for the elder and the kids.

[00:14:29] We're going to continue talking with the Parker organization. But first if you're a woman or there's a woman in your life there's something you absolutely need to know.

[00:14:39] I want to tell you about my friend Katie. Katie is a nurse and she was attacked on her way home from work. She was totally taken by surprise. And although Katie is only 5 feet tall and 106 pounds she was easily able to drop her 6 foot 4, 250-pound attacker to his knees and get away unharmed.

Katie wasn't just lucky that day. She was prepared.

In her pocketbook, a harmless looking lipstick, which really contained a powerful man stopping aerosol propellant.

It's not like it was in our grandmother's day. Today just going to and from work or to the mall can have tragic consequences. The FBI says a violent crime is committed every 15 seconds in the United States. And a forcible rape happens every five minutes. And chances are when something happens, no one will be around to help.

It looks just like a lipstick. So no one will suspect a thing. Which is important since experts say, getting the jump on your attacker is all about the element of surprise.

Inside this innocent looking lipstick is the same powerful stuff used by police and the military to disarm even the most powerful, armed aggressor. In fact, National Park rangers used the very same formula that's inside this little lipstick to stop two-thousand pound vicious grizzly bears dead in their tracks. It's like carrying a personal bodyguard with you in your purse or your pocket.

Darkness brings danger. Murderers and rapists use darkness to their advantage. We all know what it's like to be walking at night and hear footsteps coming at us from behind. Who's there? If it's somebody bad, will you be protected? Your life may depend on it.

My friend Katie's close call needs to be a wake up call for all of us. Myself included. Pick up a Lipstick Bodyguard and keep it with you always.

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**Announcer** [00:17:14] It's as simple as that.

[00:17:15] You're right Dolly. There are so many really cool new ways to listen to our show. It's hard to keep track. You can join the 180 million listeners on Spotify. You can listen in your car at the gym or pretty much anywhere on your smartphone with Apple podcasts and Google podcasts. You can get us on Apple TV, Direct TV, Roku. And like Dolly said, you can even ask Alexa to play the show for you. It's great, because you don't have to be tied to a radio anymore. You can listen when you want, where you want, for as long as you want. And if you're listening to the show one of these new ways please do me a big favor. Share this new technology. Help someone else learn about the show and show them a new way to listen.

[00:17:57] So I'm so excited to have two very special guests here. Phil Dacko he is a Parker at Stone Gate assisted living resident. And we have Robyn Schumer who has her

daughter who attends the child development program. And your son also graduated from the program. So I'm so excited to have both of you here to share your experience.

[00:18:23] So Phil, what has your involvement in with the children?

**Phil Dacko** [00:18:27] I have the opportunity at times to read stories to them. A small group, usually a half a dozen or so. And I find it fascinating how attentive these little ones are versus this older gentleman sitting there. They pay attention. And then I tried to involve them in the stories. I will raise questions and they have the answers right there.

[00:18:58] These four or five year-old ones. Yeah. So it's very up building for me, I enjoy that. With the energy these little kids have.

**Diane Berardi** [00:19:10] And I understand you read to Robin's daughter.

[00:19:13] Yes. yes. Amelia.

[00:19:16] There was an experience. She was, Amelia was sitting next to this young boy. And while we were, while I was reading, I noticed that her head started leaning over and she placed her hand on his shoulder. And he being a boy at that age, He kept pushing it up.

[00:19:42] And I felt like telling him, wait another ten, fifteen years... [laughing].

**Diane Berardi** [00:19:47] You're not going to be pushing her away. [laughing]

**Phil Dacko** [00:19:49] Yes. Right.

**Diane Berardi** [00:19:50] Oh that's cute.

[00:19:51] Yeah. And all of them were just invaluable. I find energy coming forth from them and it makes me feel very good.

[00:20:05] Half hour reading and I'm revitalized, kind of.

**Diane Berardi** [00:20:09] Oh I'm sure. Yeah. And Robin, what do you see with your children coming here and mixing it up with the elders?

**Robyn Shumer** [00:20:20] So my son who is now eleven and a half, what I noticed right away is that he related to older people very differently than I did. Where I was afraid of my grandparents. And they were lovely people. But just seeing older people didn't make me very comfortable. And I noticed right away with my son that he was very engaged and connected with older people and unafraid. And my daughter is completely the same. And she's very, very energetic to begin with but she just absolutely loves when she sees the grandmas and grandpas. And she always tells me about it.

**Diane Berardi** [00:20:57] I'm sure she does. She tells you probably what she's done with them.

**Robyn Shumer** [00:21:02] Yeah it's really lovely.

[00:21:03] So I the number one thing I see is the kids developing a sense of ease. Around being around people that don't look like them.

**Diane Berardi** [00:21:11] Right. And it's so important. I just love getting the generations together. I just think it is so important.

**Phil Dacko** [00:21:20] Yeah. I've found that, as she was saying, Amelia's mother was saying, how at ease these youngsters are with older people and so on. And just to another point, my room is right by a sidewalk. So, in the morning while I'm getting up and everything I hear all of these little voices, "Come on, Mommy. Come on Daddy." Or vice versa. And they. And it's an energizing factor. Couple of times I looked out the window and I saw a girl trailing behind her mother, walking along the railings on the bocce court, and you would've thought it would be a little boy that would be walking along the railing. She started trailing behind, and it had just rained a little while ago. And it was just something made me keep watching her. And she stopped and she looked around. And she saw a puddle. All of a sudden as she did a 180, and she went over there. Again, you would have thought it would have been a little boy, and she was stomping away in it until her mother invited her to come on and get to school. [laughing]

[00:22:44] Stuff like that is very encouraging for I think older people, most older people.

**Diane Berardi** [00:22:52] Oh yeah. I mean they're free spirits. They have energy and they're so alive. And I would imagine that they just brighten up your day, and brighten up the place.

**Phil Dacko** [00:23:06] Just hearing the little pitter patter on the sidewalk, I find up building.

**Robyn Shumer** [00:23:12] Do you want to come home with us tonight? [laughing]

**Phil Dacko** [00:23:17] Why? You need a babysitter? I'll tell you. I'll do it for nothing if the kids are cute.

**Diane Berardi** [00:23:24] It's great because sometimes, like Robin you said you were you didn't probably know your grandparents or you probably were a little fearful. I remember when my niece first saw my grandfather, and he had a... He was sitting and he had a cane. And they were saying, Katie... Come meet great grandpa. And she was afraid. You know she was afraid. And she was backing up. You know she didn't want to meet him. And so starting out so young and meeting, new grandparents probably, is just a wonderful thing, because then the kids aren't scared. You know because there's so many adults who are scared. People will say to me, Well how do you how could you do that how can you work with the elderly all day or you know why would you do that? People don't realize they're individuals with hearts and they want a hug, too. And I bet you get a lot of hugs from these kids.

**Phil Dacko** [00:24:38] I've kind of held back on that, to a degree. In the society we live in and so forth. But yeah, if I had my will, my way, I would grabbed all six of these kids and just give them a great hug together.

**Diane Berardi** [00:24:56] Yeah I guess it was different a little different when I was growing up. I mean, we could do that.

**Phil Dacko** [00:25:04] Yes. So I've been a little reluctant at times... Like Amelia. I would love to give her a hug.

**Robyn Shumer** [00:25:14] You may hug Amelia.

**Diane Berardi** [00:25:16] I bet Amelia probably wants to run up and give you a hug.

**Phil Dacko** [00:25:20] Yeah. You know actually that's good you brought that up because after I was finished reading to several of them they would walk over to me and stand in line and I was as I said reluctant to actually to do something and they would start reaching out and I says, Ah... the heck with it. And gave them a hug.

**Diane Berardi** [00:25:41] Because that's in them. That's what a child does. And unfortunately we lose that as we get older, probably because society has changed a little. But...

**Phil Dacko** [00:26:01] Yeah. Big. Big change since when I was a kid.

[00:26:05] Oh yeah, I'm sure. It's probably even different from when you were growing up.

**Phil Dacko** [00:26:10] Yeah. Yup.

**Diane Berardi** [00:26:11] Well everybody was together and I think it's wonderful.

[00:26:17] And thank you so much for being here.

[00:26:20] And we have Danielle Woodruffe the communications manager here to talk about the. "With it" movement.

**Danielle Woodruffe** [00:26:28] Yeah. So we recently launched "With it." It's a movement Parker has put it out there, and it really is, we wish we could bring everything everyone through the Child Development Center right.

[00:26:42] We want to share with all generations that you know you don't have to be afraid of someone who is a different generation. So what we're trying to do, because we find that there is a huge disparity between the generations. We found that Gen Xers and millennials are more likely to consider someone old by the time they hit 70, than people who are older than that.

[00:27:02] So the with it movement celebrates age and at every stage of life. And we are sharing stories on our website. We are with it dot org. We have social we're on social media Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. And we're sharing stories about people who are loving aging at every stage. Whether you're 40 whether you're 70. Whether you're 80 and you're climbing mountains or doing yoga 90. Or you're not too mobile but you still celebrate and love yourself at that age. And so that's what with it is all about. And the reason why we launched it, Diane, is because you know there's just a lack of appreciation for the aging process. Nowadays everyone's trying to look younger. You see the crazies on social media. You know his aging hit me? Dress your kid up for the hundredth day of school. So very disrespectful it really is a form of ageism. People don't realize that.

**Diane Berardi** [00:27:49] No they don't.

**Danielle Woodruffe** [00:27:51] Right. So some of the stories that we're sharing and we're hoping it catches on with different organizations who want to join us in this movement and want to tell the stories they're seeing with their grandparents or they know someone who's with it or they're with it. So we encourage people to again go to we are with it dot org and share those stories of aging. And it really is about making Aging part of life and it's about what you're seeing in the Child Development Center. That's what it's all about.

**Diane Berardi** [00:28:19] Thank you so much. Thank you. Parker organization Thank you Phil.. Thank you Danielle. Thank you Robin for being here. Thank you so much for what you're doing. You're doing a great job.

[00:28:31] I hope you got something out of this episode. I know I did.

Parents Are Hard To Raise® family... I love getting your e-mails and questions so please keep sending them. You can reach me at Diane Parents Are Hard To Raise.org or just click the green button on our home page.

[00:28:45] Parents Are Hard To Raise is a CounterThink Media production. The music used in this broadcast was managed by Cosmo Music, New York, New York.

[00:28:53] Our New York producer is Joshua Green. Our broadcast engineer is Well Gambino. And from our London studios, the melodic voice of our announcer, Miss Dolly D.

[00:29:02] We love our parents, but parents sure are hard to raise. Thank you so much for listening.

[00:29:08] Till next time... May you forget everything you don't want to remember and remember everything you don't want to forget. See you again next week.