

For the past two summers, Coastal Kids preschool has had a teacher aide who is a very familiar face to director Priscilla Congdon. Alexandra Gardiner, 20, was a student in Congdon's first preschool classes. "We were located in the old Bremen Grade School (now the Town Hall) recalls Congdon, "and Alex started in our three year old class. She was a sweet, energetic and affectionate little girl." When asked what she remembers about her experience at CKP, Alex smiles. "I remember the beach field trip and going to see the llamas." Alex also noted that many of her grade school and high school friendships began at CKP.

Roxann Gardiner, Alex's mother, also served as treasurer on CKP's first Board of Directors. All of Gardiner's children attended CKP. "All my children loved attending Coastal Kids, and I always appreciated the nurturing atmosphere and caring staff. Not only were they there to guide my children and help them grow, but they were a great resource to me as a parent. They were always willing to listen and offer their experience and advice to help my kids have the best experience they could. I have wonderful memories of the years my kids spent there."

Alex originally came to Congdon in June 2012 interested in working with special needs children and was considering a career in the field. One third of CKP's enrollment is reserved for children with special needs. Alex also has a younger brother with special needs who attended CKP. "I saw how much CKP helped my brother and I wanted to work there".

"Alex has always been extremely patient and kind with her brother," notes family friend and CKP staff member Patty Kramley. "I think being exposed to children of all abilities from an early age contributed to her understanding."

Congdon noted that from the start, Alex served as a role model to other new staff members. "New student assistants tend to be hesitant at first interacting with a child who has limited speech or uses a wheelchair, " notes Congdon, "but Alex was very comfortable interacting with all of the children right away and that encouraged the others to follow suit."

Alex, now a junior at the University of Maine in Portland, has decided to pursue a career as an Occupational Therapist. Her energetic personality was channeled into dance, where she has been a talented member of a Midcoast Dance Studio, and has also taught a preschool ballet class.

Congdon is looking forward to having Alex return for a third summer this year. "I love to keep track of how our former students progress over the years," said Congdon, smiling. "It is so rewarding for us when a student like Alex is able to return and give back to our program."

This fall will start Coastal Kids 20th year educating area preschoolers. Coastal Kids Preschool's mission statement is to provide a developmentally appropriate preschool education for all children regardless of income or ability. The school is now accepting enrollments for its eight week summer camp and fall session for children ages 2-8 years. Call Congdon at 563-5335 for more information or to schedule a tour.