

Bronx's 'Little Red Schoolhouse' Helps Troubled Toddlers



Toddlers often have behavior problems, but so bad that they get kicked out of school? A small school in the Northeast Bronx is trying to help youngsters get back on track and into traditional schools after having early problems. Erin Clarke filed the following report.

Santos Wainwright can now hold a five-minute conversation at a Christmas party with his son Jayden in his arms, but about a year ago, that would not have been possible.

"I couldn't hold him like this without him going off," said Wainwright.

Wainwright also noticed other behaviors that concerned him.

"Jumping on the floor, running around, hitting his head. Just not playful, but hurtful," said Wainwright.

Upon doctors recommendations, Jayden was enrolled in The Lawrence F. Hickey Center, affectionately known as the "Little Red Schoolhouse."

The center is licensed by the state Office of Mental Health to work with three- to five-year-old children with severe emotional needs that can range from attention difficulties to...

"Being aggressive, which includes hitting, kicking, throwing, spitting, pinching," said Celesta Parisi, a senior teacher at the center.

Most parents come to the school after their kids have been kicked out of day care or other programs because of their behavior.

The school, which is funded by the state and free of charge for families, provides individualized special education in small classes of about nine.

Counseling and assessments of the children are also provided and parents say those services have made a world of difference, even after just a few months.

"He's willing to sit down with you and talk to you about what's wrong with him, what's bothering him," said Wainwright. "He's more calmer now."

And although kids can only attend the school until age five, students and parents aren't left on their own after graduation. A transition team helps assist parents as their child move on to kindergarten, first grade and beyond.

"They know what services are required and recommended, they will try to make sure that the school that the child goes to provide those services," said Program Director/Principal Yvonne Garvin.

The goal is for children, who may have had a rough start, to have an easier time in the future.

Equipped with coping skills to learn and work with others and hopefully transition into a traditional school setting where they can succeed.