



**United Neighborhood Centers  
of Northeastern Pennsylvania**

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## **Modern Childcare: Moving Beyond Kick Balls and Jump Ropes**

When most people think of childcare, concepts of baby-sitting, fun and games often come to mind. Yet, if you take a closer look at what's really happening in childcare centers, you'll find the face of before and after school care is rapidly changing, becoming an extension of the school day packed with educational activities and lesson plans.

At Green Ridge Childcare Center, part of the United Neighborhood Centers' (UNC) network of childcare, students, ages four through twelve, spend their afternoons receiving homework help and participating in educational learning centers based on arts, music, math and science. But it's not all work and no play.

One of the major driving factors at Green Ridge, and all of the UNC childcare centers, is its participation in the Keystone STARS program, a unique initiative from the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning that focuses on increasing childcare standards in the state. The program works on the foundation of four performance levels that build one upon the next. Recently, Green Ridge Childcare Center was evaluated and awarded STAR 3 status.

"Our goal is to make educational experiences of everyday, fun events through hands-on learning and project based curriculums," said Mary Clare Hopkins, Green Ridge Childcare Center Director. To achieve this goal, the staff at Green Ridge regularly completes training courses and seminars on the Pennsylvania Learning Standards; the same standards taught throughout school districts statewide to measure student performance and success during the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams. These standards, in addition to well-trained, qualified staff push the center to continuously move forward in childcare education.

As a STAR 3 childcare site, Green Ridge ensures its students will participate in educational activities throughout the day, taught by well-trained, professional staff in a stimulating and comfortable environment. Furthermore Green Ridge works to increase parental involvement through opportunities to participate in special projects and field trips. The center also recognizes the importance of parent teacher conferences and performs formal observations on students three times per year to give parents an additional look into their child's development both in and out of their regular school day.

And as the summer months quickly approach and many parents wonder what their children will do during their vacation to keep from falling behind in their regular school curriculum, childcare centers like Green Ridge become an appealing, affordable alternative to babysitting services or days simply spent at the local playground.

Currently, Green Ridge staff is looking forward to finding ways to move their successful project based curriculum to the great outdoors. Although they often don't know it, the students set the themes for lesson plans and projects based on their questions and idle wonderings. When a group of children wonders why worms live underground, teachers at Green Ridge create lessons that answer the question directly, yet disguise it in enjoyable activities and projects. This is just one example of how Green Ridge staff is able to shape their lesson plans around student interest, while still incorporating Pennsylvania Learning Standards.

By creating well-balanced projects and lessons on topics their students want to learn about, Green Ridge provides students with an enjoyable education throughout the year, fostering innate interests in children and peace of mind for parents. And thanks to the Keystone STARS program, we only expect the Green Ridge Childcare Center to continue reaching and to land among the STARS!

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### **About United Neighborhood Centers of NEPA**

*United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern Pennsylvania is a private, not-for-profit, grass-roots United Way agency that offers direct and general advocacy services for youth, singles, families and senior citizens in combination with programs that foster independence and self-sufficiency. The agency's mission is to work together with neighbors to provide services and create opportunities which empower individuals and build strong interdependent communities.*