

Education & Families

Discovery is an amazing thing. We encourage our members and the community to expand their horizons, grow together, and try new things with experiences that let all ages, stages, and abilities learn from each other and the world around us. Meet new friends in parent-child classes or enroll your little one in one of the best early childhood education programs in southeast Wisconsin. Let your kids hop on the JCC bus after school knowing that they will have the space to release their boundless energy and expand their learning through swim lessons, sports, and explorations in the arts and sciences.

jccmilwaukee.org/programs/education-families



A Whitefish Bay Native Takes on a New Role

As soon as school supplies start appearing in the aisles, parents and educators alike find their thoughts turning to fall. For Ronna Ruffin, the sight of new notebooks and folders brings a wonderful new opportunity. This fall will be Ronna's first school year as the Director of Youth Programs at the JCC. In this role she will be overseeing Kids Center Before & After School Care and many other programs for families with school-age children like Saturday Night Live (SNL) evening programs, Big Chill winter break camp, and Big Thaw spring break camp.

She has already jumped in and spent the second half of the summer working with the leadership team of the specialty day camps on the JCC campus in Whitefish Bay. Having this transition time in the summer has allowed Ronna to work alongside Aaron Stern, the outgoing Youth Program Director, who will be returning to school to pursue a Master's in Social Work at UWM.

"Ronna is well-prepared to deepen our commitment to, and deepen our impact in the lives of, the families we are blessed to serve," says Sarah Siegel, JCC Engagement Director. "Her enthusiasm for working with school-age kids paired with her professional experience and personal connections to our community made her the ideal candidate."

Taking on this role has a sense of coming full circle for Ruffin. Born and raised in Whitefish Bay with her 4 siblings, which include a twin sister, Ronna Sadowsky grew up at the JCC after it moved from the east side. She then spent 17 years living in San Diego where she earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology from San Diego State University and met her husband, Rickey Ruffin. In California, Ronna spent 15 years training dolphins and sea lions, much of this time working for the US Navy. She also spent some time teaching science programs to elementary school children.

In 2015, her family, which now included young sons Garin and Levi, moved back to the North Shore Milwaukee area. Ronna took this opportunity to reconnect with the JCC and began working as a 3-year-old teacher at Gan Ami Early

Childhood Education. She also taught after school STEM classes at the JCC to share her love of science with elementary age kids. Ronna's time in Gan Ami gave her a chance to share her love of the natural world with the preschoolers in her care and to create a sense of wonder in her classroom.

"Being back in the community I have run into many people I've grown up with, who know my family - or who happen to be family! Jewish geography seems to be the name of the game lately," says Ruffin.

Ronna's goals for this fall in Kids Center are to create a smooth transition from summer day camp to school starting for the many children who engage with youth programs year-round. She looks forward to welcoming new and returning families to Kids Center and other youth programs and to make this a memorable experience for all.

"As a mom of two boys ages 9 and almost 5, I know how important it is for parents to have a place where their kids can go to be engaged and active at the end of a long school day while also knowing they are safe and well cared for by adults who have their best interests at heart."



To learn more about Kids Center or any of the Youth Programs at the JCC, see page 14 of this Journal and reach out to Ronna to make your fall game plan now.