

## Supporter Spotlight!



Meet Dr. Gerry Highsmith, a long-time (I mean a *really* long-time) supporter of Learning Together. She has worked with every Learning Together Executive Director from Julia to Kyle!

I had the pleasure to sit down with her and learn more about her historic involvement and support of Learning Together. Dr. Highsmith began her engagement with Learning Together only a few years after Learning Together was founded. She began volunteering for the organization in 1974 and continued her involvement as she studied physical therapy at UNC Chapel Hill. Most recently, she furthered her education by earning a Doctorate of Physical Therapy at Boston University.

After graduating from UNC's Physical Therapy Program, she was able to continue her involvement with Learning Together through her work for Specialized Services and later for Early Intervention. From 1976-1979, she worked with several developmental day centers, including the Tammy Lynn Center, Frankie Lemmon School, and Hilltop Home in addition to her work at Learning Together. She met our current Director of School Operations and Education, Jan Baker, and one of our past Executive Directors, Nell Barnes, while working with the Tammy Lynn Center.

During those years, Learning Together was the only place committed to offering an inclusive environment, where children with and without delays/disabilities learn together, side by side; a model we still follow today.

When describing her commitment to Learning Together and why she has remained such an advocate for the organization for over 40 years, Dr. Highsmith responded, "I have a few *good* friends, Learning Together is one of those friends."

In 1988, she began her own practice, [Pediatric Therapy Associates](#), which has grown to include locations in Cary, Garner, and Wake Forest in addition to the original Raleigh location. Learning Together and Pediatric Therapy Associates work together closely to provide occupational, physical, and speech therapies for our students. This partnership has provided crucial services that enable Learning Together's students to meet their academic and social-emotional goals and reach their full potential.

Just like Learning Together, Dr. Highsmith believes in the importance of offering therapeutic services in the classroom. "When therapy is done in the classroom, there are many benefits for everyone involved." She outlined just a few: typically developing children become peer models for children with delays/disabilities; teachers are able to watch the interactions with the therapists and learn strategies for use throughout the classroom; and therapists are able to see the relationships between children and their peers and help create buddy systems to benefit each child.

We at Learning Together are incredibly fortunate and thankful to have someone like Dr. Highsmith on our team! We know she will always be there for the children and families we serve.