



Sunflower Montessori School

Traditional Montessori methods at the core as teachers take over Missoula school

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The new leaders of Sunflower Montessori already have a fundraising idea: showing kids that by night, their parents sometimes turn into rock stars.Â

Sam Pollington has taught at the school five years, Evgeniya Strakhova for two. Pollington is also the bassist and a singer for local indie rock band Magpies, and Strakhova is a linguist, originally from Russia.

The pair purchased the school in June, taking over from previous owners Katie Watterson and Correy Harrison. It's in a former church on South Sixth Street West, its high ceiling and beautiful wooden floors and accents providing a serene setting for the children, ages 3 to 6. The school is licensed for 48 children.

Montessori is an educationalÂ model developed by Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator, in the early 1900s. It's based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play. There are at least six Montessori schools in Missoula County.

Pollington said the previous owners sold "because they'd been doing it for eight years."

She and Strakhova have "both been pretty passionate about it for a long time and we'd actually kind of talked together about wanting to start something of our own — just because we wanted to have our own ideas, be a part of it, the planning stages," she said.

Pollington was a para-educator in Clinton before becoming Montessori-certified and heading to Sunflower. Strakhova is also certified, and has a degree in linguistics and education, and previously taught in Russia and China.

They want to get back to tradition.

"We're both really big believers in Montessori, so adhering more to a traditional Montessori setting is important to us," Pollington said. Sunflower "was for part of the day and then part of the day it wasn't, which is pretty typical of a lot of Montessori programs."

A work period happens from 9 a.m. to noon every day. In the afternoons, Sunflower had turned into somewhat of an after-school program.

"It was still really great and there were people that came in and taught fine arts and dance and things like that," Pollington said. "We're going to do more of that, but we'd just like to keep it a bit more community-oriented so the kids are thinking about where they live and what they're doing and how they can help people."

That vision goes both ways. Specialists from all corners of Missoula — drama, science, dance, gymnastics, art, possibly Japanese — will come to Sunflower, and then the teachers want to reverse it, sending kids out into the city to give back.

"[Education for Peace](#) is something that's really important in Montessori and something that I think is really important to us. So (we're) focusing more on the cultural aspects of Montessori and getting the kids to recognize differences and similarities in different cultures, just trying to promote a better worldview," Pollington said.

Strakhova gives the children a different perspective from her own life.

"I bring cultural diversity, obviously, because I'm a foreigner and I lived in China and I speak three languages (Russian, Chinese and English)," she said.

The goal is for children to do a new community service project every month, at places such as the food bank, senior living centers and more.

"We want to be very community-oriented and we want to reach out," Pollington said.

The new ownership also means giving kids a chance to rock out.

"In my other life, being in bands, there's a lot of band friends I have that have children that never get to see them play in their rock 'n' roll band because it's always at a bar at like midnight and they can't bring their kids," Pollington said.

"So we'd like to have a fundraiser where parents that are in bands can come play here at the school at like 5 o'clock and the kids can see a wide range ... they can see metal and they can see country and they can see rock 'n' roll.

"They can see all sorts of different things so that once again that worldview is big and they get to see all different sorts of art and music."

They decided to keep the name, Sunflower.

"We're growing sunflowers and we're growing children," Strakhova said. "All the kids are sunflowers running around outside."

For more information, go to sunflowermontessori.com. Contact the school at 406-830-3025, through email at sunflowermontessori1@gmail.com, or on Facebook by searching for [Sunflower Montessori School](#).

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story contained an incorrect email address.



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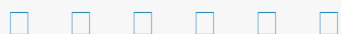
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