



FOR RELEASE
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Local Children Make Facemasks on 103 Year Old Sewing Machine

REDMOND, WA – A 1913 Western Electric Portable sewing machine, that quite possibly made facemasks during the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic, is now making facemasks for the 2020 COVID Pandemic, with help from local children.

When MCH (MCHKids.com) teacher Alyx Hodges spotted an antique sewing machine at a local thrift shop, she was compelled to buy it. At \$30.00, she thought that it might be a nice decorative item in her home. However, the machine ended up in her garage where it sat for several years. Then COVID happened.

Looking for a simple project that her summer camp kids could use in her socially distanced childcare room, Hodges remembered the sewing machine. Because the classroom is creating a strong culture of mask wearing, and because Hodges had extra fabric lying around, she found a facemask pattern and put her campers to work.

“The machine had a jammed bobbin door, but once I got that popped off I discovered it still ran,” said Hodges. “Since it’s mechanical, it’s been very reliable and only needs a little oil in the joints. It has a motor that flips up that can push the wheel with a motor, but this machine is missing a foot pedal,” she said.

“Why that's the same kind of machine that I used at the Red Cross!”

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After watching YouTube videos and joining an online vintage sewing machine group, Hodges learned how to operate the machine well enough to teach her campers how to use it. “It might have just started as an idea of a project to do with the kids, but they became so excited to make masks!” Hodges said. “They cut out the pattern with the seam allowance we traced, we lined up the patterns, then they crank the wheel while I sit and just guide the fabric so the needle stays on the pattern line. When the stitch is done, they clip the loose threads. Sometimes when the kids are cranking away I open the bobbin shuttle door so the kids can see the parts in action as we talk about how the machine works.”

The summer campers at MCH have all loved using the machine. Every child has made a mask. Sometimes a mask can be made in an hour or two, other times it takes a few days. “They can crank the wheel as hard or slow as they want. I find that for the more active students, the physical motion of cranking the wheel over and over helps get out that energy in a meaningful way,” she said.

Campers have nicknamed the sewing machine “Mr. Oldie.” The process of sewing the masks on the machine has turned to discussions on how clothes are made from a patch of fabric.

“The kids love giving masks to adults. Almost every day I get a student asking ‘Can I make a mask for someone? Who can I make a mask for?’” Campers have made a total of 26 facemasks with the machine so far.

“I find it so fascinating that some of the first projects this machine ever worked on might have been sewing masks for the 1918 pandemic,” said Hodges.

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Montessori Children's House (MCH) is an AMS accredited Montessori school for children six weeks through eighth grade. Committed to an excellent holistic Montessori education that includes the partnership and involvement of families within our community, MCH is inspired by a growth mindset and is dedicated to serving the individual educational needs for children of all backgrounds.

MCH's beautiful five-acre campus is surrounded by protected wetlands and forested areas and is home to several farm animals including goats, chickens, rabbits, ducks and more. With a fully enclosed Nature Trail, well-developed enrichment and extracurricular programs, this farm-like peaceful setting connects MCH students to their natural world.