

Teacher Bios 2022-2023

Infant/Toddlers

Ashley Cattaneo is thrilled to be joining the Purple Circle community again this year as the Lead teacher in the Infant 2 class. She is currently in her eighth year of teaching in an Early Childhood environment. Her former experience includes working with children and families in first grade, infants, toddlers and most recently Pre-K. Ashley received her Masters Degree in Early Childhood Special Education, Early Intervention and Infant and Family Development from Bankstreet College of Education in 2018. She has also enjoyed facilitating parent, caregiver and teacher workshops in different areas of child development. Her favorite activity to do with young children is sing and dance to different kinds of music. Ashley's hours are 8:30am-4:00pm.

Nathasha DeJesus is over the moon to be an Assistant Teacher in the Infant 2 class for the 2022-2023 school year. She has been working with children ages 3 months - 7 years for 10 years with experience in a center based, school and home setting alongside being a personal nanny. What started as babysitting and volunteering flourished into a passion for wanting to create a safe space to nurture children and help them grow. She went to a performing arts high school in which she was an athlete who majored in music and theater which she believes helps her with creative play with the children. Her hobbies include playing sports, baking, reading and dramatic play with children. Nathasha is also a mother to a tiny tot therefore has that experience to give a motherly touch to your child's care without inputting her own personal judgment. Her goal is to create the best experience possible for children so that they have a happy and safe environment where they know they'll always be welcome to be themselves. Her hours are 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Cheryl DiCostanzo is extremely thrilled to be starting her second full time year at Purple Circle and delighted to be paired with the same team she's been with in the Infant/Toddler program since the Winter of 2021. Cheryl's education is in music and theatre and she has taught music to children over the years. She also enjoys cooking with children and often plans healthy recipes to make as part of the classroom curriculum. She started substitute teaching four years ago at various programs like The Bija Project and Union Temple in Brooklyn as well as Presbyterian and the Family Center at Bank Street, both on the Upper West Side. Soon after her substitute work, she started an Assistant Teacher position at Bija in the summer of 2019 where she also prepared lunch with the children and for all of the children and staff daily. She worked in various educational capacities through Spring 2020 before beginning her Fieldwork towards her CDA in the toddler room at the Family Center at Bank Street in June 2021 while simultaneously working part time at Purple Circle as an interim auxiliary teacher. She then was hired as a full time Assistant Teacher in the Infant / Toddler rooms

when the program opened in January of 2022. She is certified as a Newborn Care Specialist. Cheryl's hours are 8:30am – 4:00

Naima Davis has worked in early childhood education with children from six months to five years old. She previously worked at the Bank Street Family Center for over 20 years. During her time at the Family Center she was a paraprofessional for children with special needs. Her experience also includes nannying for a variety of families throughout the years and having two young children of her own. She is passionate for education and enjoys working with young children. Her hours are 8:30am – 2:30pm.

Little Kids

Claire Chang is starting her second year as an Assistant Teacher in the Little Kids classroom. A native New Yorker, she always knew that she wanted to work with children and attended New York University, where she obtained a Bachelor's in Child Development and Education. Claire loves reading stories and enjoys building bonds through books, songs, and sensory activities. She is so excited to join the Purple Circle community for her second year and can't wait to see what this year has in store! Claire's hours are 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Sanghamitra Mukherjee, best known as Tina, joined Purple Circle in 1997 as an assistant teacher in the Middle Kids 2 classroom. She has resided as an assistant teacher in the Little Kids classroom for the last ten+ years. Tina earned a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Calcutta University in India. She expands upon her early childhood education experience through audited courses at Westchester Community College over the past 6 years. Tina's experience has led to a passion in the documentation of young children. During this process, Tina collects children's work through sets of photographs all the while recording their words and stories for a complete view of the child's work from start to finish. Tina's hours are 8:30am – 2:30pm.

Katya Spiro, better known as Kat is originally from Tucson, Arizona and says the Desert sunset will always be the best! She went to college in Vermont and got her associate degree in Liberal Arts and afterwards moved to the East Coast. She worked earlier at Purple Circle but moved to Maryland for two years. She is now back again and happy to be part of the Purple Circle community. Caring for young children and watching them grow and learn about the world is one of her passions, aside from working out and traveling with friends. Her hours are 10am-6pm.

Middle Kids 1

Keila Marie Torres joins Purple Circle as the Lead Teacher for Middle Kids 1. She is so thrilled to be learning and growing alongside you this year! She is a graduate of the Art of Teaching Program at Sarah Lawrence College and hold a master's degree in both Early Childhood as well as Childhood Education. She also completed her undergraduate studies at SLC with a focus on Literature, Creative Writing, and French language. She has had the pleasure of working with children in a variety of educational roles and vibrant settings over the past 10 years. Some of the highlights of her teaching career includes her time as an English language assistant in France and a stint as a LEGO robotics instructor. She is a social justice-minded educator who aims to bring an appreciation for different languages and cultures into the classroom (she speaks Spanish as well as French and would love to know about any other languages you speak at home!). At the end of the day, she is a passionate lover of music, movement, good books, and hands-on, experiential learning who will always put the best interest of her students first. Her hours are 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Yesica Juarez has been with Purple Circle for over 10 years. During that time, she has traveled amongst all classrooms and has gained a lot of experience amongst all age groups. She spent most of those years in the Little Kids classroom but is beyond thrilled to explore Middle Kids 1 for a second year. She has a passion for Art and loves to incorporate it into the exploration and learning of the classroom. She looks forward to supporting the MK1 community and can't wait to learn more about your children as thinkers and learners. Yesica graduated from SUNY Westchester Community College with an AAS degree. There she studied several Early Childhood courses. Yesica's hours are 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Yoranny Lopez, better known as Jada was raised in Upper Manhattan, the Heights. Growing up, her family called her Jada and it stayed with her ever since. She is bilingual , fluent in both Spanish and English, but she also understands a bit of French! Jada holds a BA in Science and Social Work from Monroe College, and worked at the Bank Street School for Children for seven years before coming to Purple Circle last year. Jada's hours are 8:00am – 4:00pm.

Judith Williams was born in London, England and her family migrated to the United States when we was twelve years old. Judith's teaching career began at Pratt Institute where she pursued her interest in Fine Art and Education. She holds a BFA and also a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education from City College. Judith has worked in both private and public school settings, and has worked at Purple Circle for over five years. Judith's hours are 2:00pm – 6:00pm and she is our Late Day teacher.

Middle Kids 2

Aditi Gang (she/her/hers) is excited to begin her first year with the Purple Circle community. Aditi unexpectedly fell in love with Early Childhood Education six years ago and since then has been working with young children across New York City and has received her MS.Ed in Early Childhood General Education and Early Childhood Special Education from Bank Street College of Education. Growing up in the melting-pot of Singapore and in an Indian family, she is fluent in English and Hindi. She loves exploring different cultures with her students and watching them learn more about each other, their communities, and the world around them. She believes deeply that educators and students can learn so much from one another and looks forward to learning and exploring with Middle Kids 2 this year! Aditi's hours are from 8:30 am - 4:00 pm.

Rhoda Muchoki was born in Kenya and has been living in the U.S. for many years. She is tri-lingual, fluent in Swahili and Kikuyu. Rhoda has a BA in Education and Fine Arts from Kenyatta University in Kenya and a Child Development Associate credential from Bank Street College of Education. Rhoda has worked in early childhood programs for many years and has been at Purple Circle since 2007. Rhoda's hours are 10:00am – 6:00pm and she is our Late Day teacher.

Selene Balbuena was born in Mexico and raised in the United States. Selene is starting her first year at Purple Circle. She is bilingual speaking Spanish and English. She started at various programs like the Ideal School of Manhattan as well as the International Academy of New York. Selene started as an Assistant Teacher at the International Academy of New York. At the Ideal School of Manhattan she assisted preparing lunch for the students and for all of the staff daily. She worked in various educational places before beginning her Fieldwork towards her CDA in the early childhood education with children from birth to ages 5. She is so excited to join the Purple Circle community and can't wait to see what this year has in store. Selene's hours are 8:30am – 2:30pm.

Big Kids

Ashley Sinead Lawrence joined Purple Circle as the Big Kids Lead Teacher in March 2022. She is a native of the Republic of Panama and moved to New York in 2007. She is a bilingual speaker in English and Spanish. She has a passion for other languages and has been learning Korean since 2012. Ashley began her studies at Long Island University where she obtained a BS in Communication Sciences and Disorders. She worked as a Science Educator at the American Museum of Natural History's Science and Nature Enrichment Program teaching content areas such as Marine Biology, Anthropology, Ornithology and other natural sciences. At AMNH she found her passion for teaching young learners about the world around them. Ashley enrolled into the MSED Early Childhood Special and General Education program at the Bank Street Graduate School of

Education and is currently still attending. With her love of language and science she hopes to provide a learning environment where children can explore the natural world freely and confidently; and learn about the cultures of diverse peoples. Her favorite activities to do with the children is singing and identifying the interesting plants and animals they discover throughout their day. Ashley's hours are 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Ricky Brown (8:30-4:00) has a BA in Japanese from North Central College, an MA in Theater Arts from Eastern Michigan University and an MFA in Theater from Sarah Lawrence College. Ricky joined Purple Circle in May 2022 as a floating assistant teacher in the Big Kids and MK2 classrooms. He has over 10 years of teaching experience in many capacities. He's a former ALT for Sakurayama Elementary School in Higashi Matsuyama, Saitama, Japan. He's a former Theater Teaching Artist for Sarah Lawrence and Oye Group. He's a former Head Instructor and New Instructor Trainer for the Bebai Language Program in Tokyo. Ricky is excited to teach in Big Kids this year and share his love of play and language with the children.

Charlotte Bonnet is a native New Yorker. She is a bilingual speaker in English and French. She has a BA in French and Francophone Studies from Earlham College and a MS in Studies in Education from Bank Street College School of Education. Charlotte joined Purple Circle in June 2021 as a floating assistant teacher in MK1 and Little Kids classrooms. She worked as an afternoon teacher in MK 2 and a Late Day teacher in the MK2 classroom. Charlotte enjoys reading stories and interacting with children through collages and sensory activities. Charlotte's hours are 10:00am-6:00pm.

Najeera Williams is an auxiliary teacher for Purple Circle. Currently, she is pursuing her bachelors and masters degree at Pace University, majoring in Mental Health Counseling. She has worked with children for about 5 years as a caregiver and a Corps Member at Jumpstart: Children's First. Her hours are M,W,F 8:30am – 2:30pm.