SCORES OF PARENTS view the MU Child Development Laboratory largely as a service that provides high-quality child care in the heart of Columbia.

Yet it’s that and more, say both the lab’s administrators and graduates. The Child Development Laboratory (CDL), operated by the HES Department of Human Development and Family Science in Stanley Hall, is on campus primarily as a teaching and research facility, notes Lawrence Ganong, professor and co-chair of the Human Development and Family Science department. That means the CDL is staffed by full-time university faculty members focused on finding and applying innovative ways to improve education, Ganong says. And he adds, CDL students reap the benefits. “There’s plenty of evidence that putting your children in high-quality care like CDL is really good for them in the long term,” Ganong says.

Read more below about a few of the many CDL graduates who have gone on to make a difference in the community.

At the heart of LESLIE TOUZEAU’S memories of her years at the CDL is the time she spent there exploring outdoors, with the lab’s playground, sand area and climbing net coming quickly to mind. “It was a place for a lot of creativity,” Touzeau recalls. “I really developed a love of being outdoors and of interacting with a more natural environment.”

Though she earned art history and psychology bachelor’s degrees from Washington University in St. Louis in 2007, Touzeau returned to that early love of the outdoors in selecting her career path. She became an organic farmer, working as an intern at what was then called the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture and the Three Rivers Community Farm in Elsah, Ill. before becoming a partner in a small farm near Ashland, Mo. in 2011. Touzeau and her partner, Liberty Hunter, grew a wide variety of organic vegetables on the farm—called The Salad Garden—that they sold at the Columbia Farmers Market and to local businesses.

Touzeau, who now lives in Columbia, relishes a sense of accomplishment by growing her own vegetables. “You’re outside, you’re moving and you’re sore—it’s just a very different thing from sitting in an office all day,” she says.

In 2013, Touzeau branched out, joining MU’s Bradford Research Center as a research specialist. She touched base with her former stomping ground while studying no-till vegetable production at the center, starting plants for the CDL’s children’s garden that opened last May. Now Touzeau is managing a student farm for the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources sharing her hands-on connection with food and cooking.

For pediatric dentist MAICE SCOTT, the CDL is something of a family tradition. Scott attended CDL’s after-school and summer programs as a youngster. Both her brother and sister attended the CDL as well, Scott says. Scott’s 1-1/2-year-old daughter, Lucy, has been part of the CDL program since she was about five months old.

“It’s not just a preschool or a day care,” says Scott, a Columbia resident. “You really have access to so much more, being on campus.”

Scott remembers participating in some of those activities, such as strolling around the campus grounds or visiting the student center then known as Brady Commons. Since then, Scott has earned a bachelor’s degree from MU in interdisciplinary studies and a doctor of dental surgery degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry. She completed a two-year residency in pediatric dentistry at Children’s Hospital Colorado in 2011 before returning to Columbia and joining Columbia Dentistry for Children as a partner.

Scott’s CDL days continue to create memories: Scott recently acted as bridesmaid for a friend she met at the CDL. As warm as those memories are, Scott points to CDL’s place within the university and its role as a teaching facility to explain her family’s continued relationship with the lab. She believes the lab’s teaching environment and implicit emphasis on education helped prepare her for future accomplishments.

“Being in a place where education is so valued—being in that environment just instills those values in you too,” Scott says.