

Shanna Truffini and *You Are a Gardener*

By Lauren Kolacki

Parenting is about supporting your children in all instances; they grow up to be what you believe. When Shanna Truffini's daughter, Anna, was five years old, their family encountered an 'unforeseen' obstacle in their path. This hardship entered Anna into a state of post-traumatic stress. Knowing the necessity of getting to the root of this stress, the family tried everything from cognitive behavioral therapy to homeopathic remedies, yet they could not find a method to alleviate Anna's angst.

One day Shanna was out with a friend who compared stress and anxiety to "watering weeds," which first planted a thought in Shanna's mind. That night she sat her children down to explain to them what she had experienced that day; she went on to tell her children that they were gardeners growing the most beautiful gardens inside of them. The flowers were the happy things like baking cookies and snuggling, while the weeds were the things that make you feel sad, scared or mad.

When she asked Anna and Aidan, her daughter (then 7) and son (then 5) if they had any weeds that day at school, she was taken back to hear them both open up about what they had experienced that day that had caused them to feel stress. Her children talked about the things that they had encountered and how it made them feel. Shanna could actually see their shoulders come down as if a weight had been lifted.

Shanna would always talk to her kids about their day at school such as who they had lunch with, an upcoming project, a song they learned in music, but they were never consistently talking about the things they experience that may cause them to feel stress. That night, after she tucked her kids in, Shanna wrote her first book, *You Are a Gardener*.

Before that night Shanna had never written any other publications. As a child, she loved poetry, especially Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein. She always appreciated a good rhyme, so much that *You Are a Gardener* just spilled out of her as she wrote the poem in about 15 minutes. The skills Shanna had acquired from being a General Manager and Creative Director for a women's clothing boutique for over 17 years contributed greatly to her self-publishing her own book. Shanna believed the message was too important to wait and find a publisher, so just like that she did extensive research on doing it herself. She enlisted the talents of her friend Kelsey DeLaney, and together they constructed and laid out the book.

Despite the title, this book is not literally about gardening at all. It is about planting the seeds of emotional education in children and adults alike while using child friendly vocabulary that kids of all ages can easily understand. The method is to "pull your weeds, plant new seeds and enjoy the flowers along the way." It is a systematic way to teach children to identify and recognize life's everyday challenges (the weeds) and talk about them with someone they trust like a parent, teacher or friend. It encourages open communication and problem solving (turning weeds into seeds) while taking the time to appreciate and be thankful for the bright and positive experiences (the flowers). These metaphors allow children, in a vocabulary they are comfortable with, to recognize and communicate their feelings while understanding they have the power to control the way they feel.

From that day on, the Truffini Family started to "garden." Everyday they would talk about the weeds and the flowers they experienced. Shanna found that consistency is everything when it comes to "gardening." When you introduce the gardener lifestyle into a family it is helpful to do it frequently; the more children use the vocabulary the more comfortable they become with talking about the things that may not be sitting right.

In only a few short months Shanna witnessed her daughter getting more to the root of what had been weighing her down. She was feeling lighter and more in control. As Shanna's son started using this approach in his kindergarten classroom she could see how it helped him communicate with his teacher and his peers. This drastic change is what inspired her to self-publish the book as she knew this was a faster route than looking for a publisher. She wanted the book out there and she did not want to wait.

Through this process Shanna has been meeting regularly with therapists, teachers and counselors and all are in agreement that stress levels in kids are at an all time high and they are seeing it younger and younger. Shanna has also written a *You Are a Gardener* curriculum that infuses with most elementary environments. She feels very strongly about getting this method into the school systems. If everyone begins to understand and apply this mechanism, it is encouraging for children to know we are all speaking the same language in schools and at home. Shanna is currently booking workshops and programs for schools and parenting groups for this fall.

Last summer Shanna's daughter, Anna, proposed an additional tool to add to the *You Are a Gardener* brand. She had the idea to start a YouTube series called Hello Gardeners and every episode Anna and her brother Aidan would help other children pull their weeds and finish the episode with an enjoyable DIY project. The video series is like a modern day Dear Abby for kids. The family produces one video a month and they are currently working on the 7th episode. People love the series and The Truffini's started receiving stories from all over. Hello Gardeners gives kids a voice and here they can see how the vocabulary is used and applied in a bright and positive setting.

The Truffini family would love to travel across the country and educate families, schools and therapists about their gardening method and the importance of emotional education in children and adults alike. Until then, the family will continue to spread their seeds locally through their workshops, website, newsletters and through family and friends. If you are interested in how you can help spread the seeds of *You Are a Gardener*, you can buy the book at YouAreAGardener.com. Here you can also watch the videos, schedule a workshop, download free resources and links to their social media.

