Family Resource Centers: Providing Support in Tough Times

Deborah Zipkin, Director
The Family Resource Center at Charter Oak Academy
West Hartford, CT
Deborah@bridgefamilycenter.org
860.233.4701

The call came to our West Hartford Family Resource Center (FRC) in mid-August. Summer programs were finished, and there were still ten days until school began. The woman on the phone, a single parent with two young children, was frantic. She pleaded, “Could the FRC help me get some groceries for the children? There’s no food in the house.” “Yes, of course,” was the answer from our staff, as it would have been in any of the 62 State Department of Education funded FRCs. By legislative mandate, each of these school-based Family Resource Centers provides comprehensive family support and education programs through the following seven components:

- **Child Care and School Readiness Programs**
  - Many FRCs collaborate with other organizations to help parents access high quality early education programs. In some cases, an FRC administers its own program on site. In Norwalk, the FRC runs a preschool for 40 children and about half of the children attending receive financial assistance. “We offer a sliding fee scale for preschool, based on the state school readiness formula,” says Mary Oster, the director of the Naramake Family Resource Center.

- **School-Age Child Care**
  - This service is offered on site from 7:00 AM until school starts, then at the end of the day until 6:00 PM and during school breaks. 

(Continued on next page)
vacations. Here again, FRCs may collaborate with neighborhood providers, or they may administer the program on their own. The East Windsor FRC runs a school-age child care program for 109 children. “Our rates are very reasonable. We also accept Care4Kids and presently several families utilize it,” reports FRC Director Midge Pych.

Families in Training

This component provides a host of services to parents or guardians of young children. Included are personal visits often utilizing the Parent As Teachers (PAT) curriculum, screenings for cognitive or emotional delays, early learning playgroups and meetings where information about child development and resources are shared by parent educators. “We offer free or nominal cost workshops. Our PAT program is free as well as our playgroups and story hours,” says Patty Bryant, Director, of the Family Resource Center in Putnam. In Danbury, the FRCs offer free monthly workshops for parents on topics including health, finance, and family literacy, reports program director Jennifer Traver.

Adult Education

In addition to collaborating with local adult education systems in providing classes in Citizenship, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and high school equivalency (GED), Family Resource Centers offer a range of parent leadership opportunities. In Enfield, the FRC, in partnership with a credit union, presented a free 6-week financial literacy course especially for parents (dinner and child care included!)

Support and Training for Family Child Care Providers

Throughout the state, FRCs offer professional development for providers of home based care. “We offer free trainings using the PAT curriculum, which enhances providers’ knowledge of child development. We provide screenings and also workshops for Spanish speaking providers,” reports Kimberly Jackson, coordinator for the New Britain Family Resource Centers. In Middletown, the FRC offers home visits to relatives who provide “Kith and Kin” care.

Positive Youth Development

Through this component, FRCs provide activities that help children in grades 4 through 6 practice responsible decision making. In Torrington, the FRC provides free activities for school-age children after school. For an hour at the end of the school day, children can participate in their choice of activities from flag football to book clubs.

Resource and Referral

FRCs help families make connections to additional services. The Vernon FRC holds some of its playgroups at a community center that also runs a soup kitchen, clothing bank, and shelter. “This collaboration makes it easy for FRC families to take advantage of the center’s services since they are already there for playgroups,” says director Ardith Crampton. In Bridgeport, the FRC helps families find emergency food and also facilitates the paperwork for energy assistance.

Finally, Connecticut’s Family Resource Centers strive to meet the needs of their own unique communities. In East Hartford every Friday afternoon, the FRC sends home backpacks filled with food with the neediest students while the Torrington FRC offers free diapers. Jean Vitale, FRC director in West Haven says, “We have a small diaper bank going, also. We started it when a mother told me that she had to pawn her jewelry to buy diapers for her twins. I just pray we have a warm winter.”

For a listing of all state funded Family Resource Centers go to the Department of Education website at www.sde.ct.gov or contact coordinator Louis Tallarita at 860.807.2058.

ALL CHILDREN CONSIDERED

Devon Conover, Chief, Community Based Regulation Section, Child Day Care/ Youth Camp Licensing, CT Dept of Public Health

Patsy Evans, Editorial Consultant, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Patrice Farquharson, Director, West Haven Child Development Center

Amparo Garcia, Lead Planning Analyst Child Care Team, CT Dept of Social Services

DeAnna Lia, Director of Prevention, Bureau of Prevention & External Affairs, CT Dept of Children and Families

Harry Mangle, Editor and Educator, 4-H Youth Development, UConn Dept of Extension

Melissa Mendez, Early Childhood Consultant, Early Childhood Consultation Partnership

Gerri Rowell, Education Consultant, Bureau of Early Childhood, CT Dept of Education

Arlene Swatson, Executive Director, SONCCA, Inc.

Poshen Wang, Graphic Designer, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Dean Batteson, Design Intern, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Mary Ellen Welch, Educator, Family & Consumer Science, UConn Dept of Extension

Deborah Zipkin, Director, Family Resource Center, Charter Oak Academy

Tracy Zolnik, Director of Child Care Services, 2-1-1 Child Care

You are encouraged to reproduce articles or excerpts from the All Children Considered newsletter. Please give credit to All Children Considered published by the University of Connecticut Department of Extension. We welcome readers’ comments and contributions. Please send correspondence to the editor via e-mail: Harry.Mangle@uconn.edu, or to UConn Greater Hartford, 1800 Asylum Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117-2659.
Talking About Food in Tough Times

Part I: Lower Those Food Bills Now!

Heather Pease, Education Outreach Program Assistant
Expanded Food and Nutrition Program
UCconn Department of Extension
Heather.Pease@uconn.edu
860.570.9065

As a nutrition outreach educator, I often hear that it costs too much to eat in a healthy way. Particularly at this time of rising food prices, it is difficult to make ends meet. Try some of these tips to serve healthful foods on a tight budget:

Tips for Preparing Meals

1. Most importantly, eat out less and cook at home more using more basic ingredients than highly refined, processed foods.

2. Start with a food budget and know how much money for food you have for the whole month.

3. What about snacks? Try cut-up vegetables, popcorn, cheese, peanut butter, and fruit-- the original fast food; just peel and eat! (Keep in mind food allergies, especially to peanuts.) Check out this source for allergy information: http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnric/pubs/bibs/gen/allergy.pdf

4. Use unprocessed foods to prepare meals. Although you need to plan to use fresh produce so it does not go to waste, bananas can be peeled and frozen in plastic wrap for use in smoothies, pancakes, or banana bread. Frozen vegetables and fruits are also good, inexpensive choices.

5. Repackage meat into single sized servings to freeze for later. Try adding some Italian dressing to steak or chicken before freezing for an instant marinated meal. Look for price per pound, since when buying some meats you are paying for bone and meat per pound. Cut up meat to make one-dish meals that will stretch your food dollar.

6. Use leftovers to make a soup or stew. Try to recycle meals into new ones which can save time and money. For example, a baked chicken can become chicken burritos; a double lasagna batch is a meal plus one frozen for later.

Tips for Shopping

1. Keep a pad on the refrigerator to write down food items as you run out of them so you won’t forget them when at the store. Many trips to the store cost time, gas, and can lead to overspending.

2. Get organized with a list and try to plan meals in advance. Know what you already have on hand so you can maximize your food dollars.

3. Before you go to the store, remember to eat something before shopping on an empty stomach can break your budget.

4. Use the store circular to see what’s on sale.

5. Purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in season when they cost less. Some fruit and vegetables such as bananas, cabbage, spinach, carrots, potatoes and broccoli, are relatively inexpensive year round. Remember that beans are nutritious as well as low cost.

6. Use coupons for the things you buy regularly, especially when they are on sale. If you have internet access, try visiting coupon sites for extra savings but remember to pay attention to the fine print on the coupon. I like to list the coupon details on an old envelop then tuck them inside. If you have to buy 3 of something and only get 30 cents off, are you really saving?

By careful planning and smart shopping you CAN serve nutritious food AND keep your food budget in check!

Part II: Building Capable Eaters and Lowering Stress

Charles Slaughter, Prevention Services Coordinator
Bureau of Prevention and External Affairs
CT Department of Children and Families
Charlie.Slaughter@ct.gov
860.530.6682

Kids’ eating can drive you crazy! Their eating can also distract you from what truly is important during mealtimes: giving acceptance and emotional connectedness. Providing these developmental gifts is more important than how much your children eat or whether they eat their vegetables. Offering these gifts and meals with a positive emotional tone is especially important in tough times when parents, teachers, and adults are experiencing a lot of stress. So, let’s look at one particular area of mealtimes - encountering a new food.

Kids don’t like it when you offer them a new food. They usually do a great job of communicating their displeasure, hoping you will get the message. But, let’s look at this from a different angle - a developmental one. When a new food is offered, you present a challenge to children. That is important because dealing with challenges helps them grow in capability and experience success. There is no feeling of success without first having a challenge.

Whenever any of us have a challenge, it is easier to face and successfully deal with it when we have someone on our side. So, let’s talk about a few ways you can be on the child’s side when offering a new food.

1. Sit with children during the meal and focus on creating a pleasant

(Continued on next page)
Using Collaboration to Strengthen Your Child Care Program

Ken Anthony, Director of Professional Development  
Connecticut After School Network  
kanthony@ctafterschoolnetwork.org  
860.730.2942

In these times of increased food and operating costs, directors of full day and afterschool programs need to be thrifty. One cost saving measure to consider is to strengthen the collaborative relationships in your program. Three principal areas of collaboration can benefit not only your program quality and the budget bottom line, but the children as well. Through effective collaboration with parents, community, and schools, multiple windows of opportunity can be created.

When thinking about collaboration, follow these general rules:

• Be specific — partners want to know what they are getting into ahead of time.
• Be open to their ideas — collaborators come to the table with their own thoughts on what the relationship could look like.
• Be flexible when appropriate — a solid collaboration survives because both parties are flexible as to the level and degree of their participation.
• Be aware that the quality of relationships among collaborators is important.

Collaborating with parents is generally the easiest because access we have to them. First, examine the quality of the relationships your program has with parents. Are there opportunities for them to be involved and do they feel welcomed so that they want to do something to strengthen the quality of your program? Some afterschool program examples are: having parents “coach” a sports game after school, inviting them to talk with the children about their career, or having them help organize a collection for programmatic needs (construction paper, crayons, etc.). This can also lead to collaborating with the larger community.

One way that the community can collaborate with your program would be for civic organizations and businesses to get involved in service learning projects with children during or after school. Projects such as a recycling program or a local artist and children painting a mural over a graffiti wall can raise environmental awareness. Likewise, the community will see the program as a place that values teaching children the importance of community.

When you use these steps, you are providing powerful parenting to your child. Each of these steps is an act of genuine love.

That is priceless!

(Continued on next page)
Involving the schools in collaborative relationships is another way to maintain quality during times of declining resources. One example of this could include the school helping to fund a tutor for students to provide extra academic help or homework assistance. The key to building a successful collaboration with the schools goes back to relationships. Your programs and the schools are there for the children. Finding the commonalities on which to build will in turn strengthen your program.

In a time when resources are harder to find, we cannot afford to stand alone and expect the quality of our programs to stay the same. We need to seek and build effective collaborative partnerships that will add value for both parents and children. Sometimes by just asking, there may be a willing collaborator on the other side of the conversation.
The New Licensing Renewal Process: How Does It Affect You?

Pamela Gardon, Child Care Licensing Specialist
CT Department of Public Health
860.509.8045

During the 2007 Legislative session, Public Act 07-129 was passed specifying that child care licenses renewed on and after October 1, 2008 will be renewed for a term of four years, rather than two years, per former regulation. This new legislation also requires that the renewal fee be prorated.

So how does this new renewal process affect you? To begin with, this new legislation simplifies the renewal process. The revised renewal applications are now only one double-sided page long. This revised renewal application will cut down on the amount of time spent processing these applications for both the providers and the Department of Public Health (DPH) staff. Besides the obvious shorter applications, there are other important changes to be noted. For Family Day Care providers the renewal fee changed from $20 to $40. The fee for a Child Day Care Center changed from $200 to $400. Likewise, the Group Day Care Home fee changed from $100 to $200.

In addition to the new fee schedule change, many additional documents that were previously required to be submitted with your renewal application no longer need to be submitted to the Department. Family Day Care Providers will now keep their adult medical statements and current first aid certificates on file at home for review by licensing staff during routine home inspections. For Child Day Care Centers and Group Day Care Homes, copies of all current consultant agreements, worker’s compensation forms, lead water test and results, bacterial and chemical water test and results (for wells only), verification of Local Health Department approval, and all other required documentation must be maintained on file at the program and available for Department review.

All licensed childcare programs will now be responsible for tracking when these documents need to be updated or renewed. Copies should be maintained in the program’s files and available for Department review at all times. Please be sure to report changes in your program, as required by regulations, within the specified time frames.

As the transition from the former renewal process to the revised renewal process occurs, questions may arise. Please feel free to contact the DPH Child Care Licensing Help Desk, which operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. You can reach the Help Desk by calling 800.282.6063 or 860.509.8045. Happy renewing!

Solving Maintenance Problems Before They Arise

Kevin Eddy, Child Care Licensing Specialist
CT Department of Public Health

Whether your facility consists of one room in your home or twenty rooms in a child care center, maintenance issues always seem to pop up.

What do you do with your last inspection report after you take it off the parent’s board? Does it end up in a file drawer?

Here are a few tips to help you avoid problems down the road. Why not use that report to inspect your own facility on a monthly basis? Share the report with your staff during staff meetings. If your staff knows why they need to do something, they are more likely to do it. Use your own staff to inspect your facility. Everyone sees things a little differently, and they may catch something you missed. You may also request technical assistance for your staff training. A child care licensing specialist will come to your facility and review the regulations and inspection form with your staff.

Still need more help? Developing your own monthly maintenance checklist can tailor your facilities maintenance issues to your site. Do you have a drop ceiling? Making sure ceiling tiles are in place and not discolored may prevent future issues. Are all the light bulbs working? Though this is not a

regulation, you may be jeopardizing the correct lighting per square foot regulation. Create mini-checklists for certain areas of your facility. By taping a list of required supplies to your first aid kit, you and your staff will be accountable when they take that last bandage. Next to your parent’s board, tape the list of required postings. As you pass it, you can double check to make sure they are all there.

There are thousands of licensed facilities in Connecticut, each being unique. Preparing now will help you and the children you serve lead a happier and healthier life.
“Respite money helps me pay for the care of my son while I’m at work or with my husband or taking care of our other son's needs. It also helps with activities John enjoys which I can’t always afford.” Mom of John

“The respite money makes things possible that would otherwise be unheard of.” Mom of Stephen

“I know the program help(s) me out a lot. I’m a single parent with a special needs kid, so I thank you very much. God bless you.” Mom of Dashaun

Respite is a service that provides temporary care, either planned or emergency, to an individual with special health care needs. Children and youth with special health care needs include individuals ages 0 to 21 who have, or are at an increased risk for, a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type and amount beyond that required by children generally.

Sixty-eight (68%) percent of CT families responding to a survey reported that their health had been affected due to the stress of caring for a special needs family member. Fifty-four (54%) percent believed that the amount of time spent caring for a child or adolescent with special health care needs interfered with the amount of time they could spend with their other children. Families noted that respite services, summer camp, and after school programs were needed but not available.

To assist families, the Connecticut Department of Public Health Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program has partnered with the Connecticut Lifespan Respite Coalition (CLRC) to develop “Get Creative About Respite,” a two-part manual consisting of both a Parent’s Guide and a Child/Adolescent Guide. The Parent Guide outlines information including types of respite care available, how to find and select respite providers, and how to prepare for respite. The Child/Adolescent Guide assists the family in documenting important information for their respite providers such as medications, health information, and how a child/adolescent spends their day. Families and providers report they have found the “Get Creative About Respite” manuals extremely helpful.

Respite manuals can be viewed on the Department of Public Health’s website at www.ct.gov/dph under the Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program. For more information on how to access funding for respite services, or to receive a manual, contact CLRC, toll free at 877.737.1966.

Fortunately, here’s something that providers can do that requires no financial investment at all: Encourage the families of the children in your care to read and re-read stories to their children. If the reading proficiency of parents is low, they still can engage their children’s language skills by telling them stories and speaking to them about events in their lives.

Remember, you are providing a worthy investment for our society because what a young child does in the course of a day influences how he or she will learn throughout life. Good early care and education provides children with comfort, fun, an active play environment, and appropriate interaction with adults and peers.

Child Care Mailbag

Question:

In my child care program, I have seen my families struggling with the rising costs of everything from food to clothes to gas. I want to help support them by offering healthy meals and snacks to the children, but cannot afford to do so without exploring the need to raise my prices. What can I do?

Answer:

During these difficult times, parents and providers alike are searching for help with rising costs. A child care program that provides meals and snacks included in their fees may be very helpful for a family that is having difficulty coping with the increasing costs of goods and services. However, adding this benefit can cause a change in a provider’s budget as well. Thankfully, there are some programs that can help.

To ensure that the nutritional needs of children receiving child care are met, the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFCP) provides funds to public and private child care centers, family child care homes, before and afterschool programs, and Head Start. Kith and kin caregivers who reside in Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury and participate in Care 4 Kids are also eligible to enroll in the CAFCP.

Through participation in this opportunity, child care programs can be reimbursed for the meals and snacks they provide. Please be aware that in order to participate there are certain eligibility requirements and records that need to be maintained. Connecticut has nine sponsoring organizations that administer the food program for family day care programs, but child care centers apply directly through the Child and Adult Food Care Program.

For more detailed information on the Child and Adult Food Care Program or to get referrals to apply for the program, simply call 2-1-1 Child Care by dialing 2-1-1 or visit our website at www.211childcare.org.