There are many ways you can bring the local community into your childcare program. As parents, child care providers, and educators, we have been charged with giving our children “roots and wings.” Knowing and sharing your community’s unique story with the children in your program is one good way to connect them with their community, giving them strong roots.

One example of a community embracing its history and unique stories is the town of Windham, Connecticut. Have you ever been to the city of Willimantic and seen the Frog Bridge in the center of downtown? Four huge frogs sit on top of large spools at the entrances to the bridge. Children in Windham know the story of the “Battle of the Frogs.” The story dates back to the French and Indian War in the 1750’s and the spools represent the textile industry that once flourished in this mill town. In many locations throughout Windham, huge brightly painted frogs can be found sitting on spools. Children are curious and certainly ask questions about the frogs, giving us teachable moments to tell the story, share some of Windham’s history, and learn about frogs in their natural environment.

One example of a community embracing its history and unique stories is the town of Windham, Connecticut. Have you ever been to the city of Willimantic and seen the Frog Bridge in the center of downtown? Four huge frogs sit on top of large spools at the entrances to the bridge. Children in Windham know the story of the “Battle of the Frogs.” The story dates back to the French and Indian War in the 1750’s and the spools represent the textile industry that once flourished in this mill town. In many locations throughout Windham, huge brightly painted frogs can be found sitting on spools. Children are curious and certainly ask questions about the frogs, giving us teachable moments to tell the story, share some of Windham’s history, and learn about frogs in their natural environment.

Which story does your town have that makes it special? Check with your local library for books, such as the one referenced below, about the myths and legends of Connecticut.

From the editor...

“Community Involvement” is the theme for our first newsletter of 2009-10. Our editorial board believes that child care providers can use their communities’ resources to deepen the experiences of the children in their care. By involving children with the community, child care providers can help them develop empathy for the needs of others and value the differences in people who don’t look like themselves.

In this issue, you will find articles that suggest how to support kids who come from military families, how to involve our children in community service, and how to form important partnerships with community businesses and public schools. Our lead article presents ways to use fascinating local stories that stimulate children’s imagination and interest in their communities. Finally, one of our authors suggests ways to involve an often overlooked community resource: family men (fathers, uncles, grandfathers, etc.) who can be important role models and helpers for your program and its children. As always, our agency updates, providers’ resource corner, and child care mailbag include important information to use in the months ahead.

We send a special “thank you” to those who completed the “Readers Survey” in our spring 2009 issue; fifteen lucky respondents won a Biodiversity Game for their child care programs. A summary of the survey results is on page 6. For complete results and to find archived issues of our newsletter, go to www.cag.uconn.edu/ces/acc.

Harry Mangle, Editor
Is there a special landmark or historical marker that is recognizable? How did it get there? Why is it there? A field trip to a special site in your community or even a photograph of a site the children will recognize could be the start of an art project. Children love being the experts and will likely repeat what they have learned in story form to their families and friends outside of your program. The stories they learn that have a real, physical connection for them will be remembered long into adulthood.

Many newspapers publish calendars of community events that are free or low cost. Posting interesting upcoming community events on your bulletin board will help busy parents take advantage of these opportunities they might otherwise miss. Use your own curiosity and sense of adventure to discover what makes your community special.

The children in your care are not the only ones who will benefit.

Making Community Connections with Military Kids

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Connecticut Operation: Military Kids

Operation: Military Kids is a national effort to support children of service members during deployment. Connecticut Operation: Military Kids (CT OMK) creates local community support networks through a collaboration of military and non-military partners. Operated through the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, it has four components:

- **Ready, Set, Go!** are in-service workshops offering insight into military culture and facilitate local support networks of youth workers, educators, counselors, and community service agencies.

- **Hero Packs** are back packs filled by non-military youth with a variety of fun items such as stationery, stamps, journals and disposable cameras, intended to be fun and provide ways to stay connected with their deployed parents. Children and youth in child care and after school programs are encouraged to write letters for inclusion in hero packs, donate items for the packs, or help stuff them.

- **Mobile Technology Labs** facilitate connections between deployed soldiers and their children.

- **Speak out for Military Kids** is a youth-led, community supported project that generates community awareness of issues faced by military youth and families.

Demographics of Connecticut’s Military Children

Military children and youth of all ages are dispersed throughout Connecticut:

- Birth to five years: 3,580
- Six to twelve years: 3,589
- Thirteen to eighteen years: 2,287

Do you know how many are in your community?

Deployment Impact on Military Kids

When geographically dispersed military parents living in civilian communities are mobilized, their children take on unique needs for special support and services. Suddenly the lives of these military kids are turned upside down, although the kids still look the same to teachers, providers, and others.

The absence of parents is always a hardship, as children and parents require daily contact with each other to express love. Children and youth need and thrive when parents offer their assurance and guidance. But military kids face additional stress and uncertainty because of the unique demands of their parents’ deployment. Although certain aspects of their routines remain constant (e.g., school, faith based membership, etc.), some children assume additional household responsibilities, family income may be reduced, rides may not be readily available, and household flexibility may be limited by the remaining parent’s schedule.

(Continued on next page)

Reference

Teens typically take on chores previously completed by the deployed parent (e.g., babysitting, meal preparation, transportation, etc.). As a result, teens often cannot participate in teen activities at the same levels as when their parent was at home. Military children need to connect with youth in similar situations as well as community members who are sensitive and supportive while their parent(s) are deployed.

Community Involvement? Don’t Forget Dads and Family Men

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All child care environments, whether family day care or center based, benefit greatly by acknowledging the importance of fathers and family men (grandpas, uncles, big brothers) and intentionally reaching out to them. Providers need to strategically include them as assets essential to the success of children, as men have a specific and unique value to children’s academic, social, and emotional development.

Boys and girls who grow up without the active and consistent participation of a dad in their lives are at an increased risk for poverty, poor school performance, substance abuse, early sexual experimentation, trouble with the law, and dropping out of high school. If we are persistent in finding ways to reach out, include, support, and inspire dads and other family men around the value they are to their children, we could potentially change the negative outcomes for those children.

Events such as Dads and Donuts, Men on Mondays, and Fridays for Family Men include men as supporters, encouragers, and mentors. Many men are eager to participate in school related activities and just waiting to be asked. Men and their children have volunteered to serve their community by creating vegetable gardens in Danbury, planting trees and spreading mulch in East Hartford, and cooking breakfast for moms around Mother’s Day in Middletown.

Something special happens when children do work with their fathers and family men. The poet Robert Bly calls that interaction a “cellular transformation.” When this work is done together in acts of service to the community, additional benefits are gained. The children learn to be stewards of our natural resources, develop empathy, gain compassion, and foster an appreciation of others different from themselves.

Men are an under-utilized resource for children, for moms, and for their communities. Why not tap our men on the shoulder and invite them in? It’s all about the children. To learn more about involving fathers and family men with children contact the CT Fatherhood Initiative. Another opportunity to receive related information will be the 11th Annual New England Fathering Conference (NEFC) in Newport, RI, March 17, 18, and 19, 2010. The theme is “Stronger Fathers, Stronger Communities: Supporting Men’s Commitment to Their Children.”

Resources
Numerous military resources are at www.arfp.org
For CT OMK contact information to get involved in your community, visit www.operationmilitarykids.org

References
CT Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut, www.fatherhoodinitiative.state.ct.us/
One Hundred Acts of Kindness: A Community Service Project

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Here’s the dilemma I faced a year ago: How to get a group of 1st to 5th graders in the Poquonock School Before and After School Tree House Program to realize that the world did not revolve around them while still making learning experiences fun, enriching, and relevant to their lives? It was winter 2009, we couldn’t go outside, the gym was being used, and the boys didn’t want to do arts and crafts. Realizing that the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday was coming up soon, I thought, “Maybe this holiday could tie in somehow.”

Luckily, I discovered the Kids Care Club, a service-learning program for children, which was giving grants to youth serving groups that wanted to do a service project celebrating Dr. King’s legacy. Ok, this could work! But, how could I connect a service project to a man who lived over 40 years ago and led a struggle the kids probably didn’t understand.

With help from the after school program’s parent advisory council, a small grant from the Hands on Network and permission from the Poquonock school principal, our service learning activity took shape. During the weeks between Martin Luther King Day and Valentine’s Day, the children:

- Researched all they could about Dr. King with the help of staff and the school’s computer lab.
- Wrote what they would or could do to keep Dr. King’s Dream alive and how they could celebrate his life and ideals (some stated that they would be nicer to their sister or take the garbage out; a 2nd grader wrote that he would let his sister take a bath first!)
- Worked to commit 100 acts of kindness that represented intentional examples of goodwill toward others.

In order for this project to succeed, we realized we needed a lot of assistance. School staff, parents, and others were recruited to “catch” the kids doing something kind for someone else. The children were intrigued but skeptical that they would be “caught” enough times to make it worth their while. Some of the acts of kindness were small, such as helping a classmate pick up a spilled pencil box and others were big, like helping the school custodian clean up a mess.

By the end of the program, the children were “caught” doing 61 Acts of Kindness. Each act was proudly displayed on a bulletin board for all to see. To celebrate all their Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. acts of kindness we threw a party and meal for the kids, with parents and caregivers as invited special guests. To show their appreciation for parents and caregivers, the children helped prepare and serve the meal.

Our after school program children began to see themselves as part of a larger community and told us they wanted to do more. From this one little idea came other wonderful acts of kindness: hats and outerwear collected for a women and children’s homeless shelter, arts & crafts activity packets put together for the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, and food collected for the local food bank.

Doing community service has allowed children to see the world as being bigger than they are and see themselves as contributing members of society. If they can understand and internalize (to some degree) what Dr. Martin Luther King tried to communicate 40 years ago and make these random acts of kindness happen now as part of their daily lives; can we as adults do the same?

References
1 www.kidscare.org
2 www.handsennonetwork.org
Emergency Preparedness for Child Care Providers

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Nobody likes to think of disasters affecting childcare programs, but the fact is emergencies happen. Although it is important for providers to have a plan for all emergencies, in Connecticut the most probable emergencies involve weather.

Regulatory requirements help build a good foundation. Child care centers are required to have and post emergency plans. Family child day care providers are required to have written evacuation plans for the protection of all occupants. All programs are required to have first aid certification, up-to-date child and staff records, well-supplied first aid kits, and a working telephone.

In addition to the regulatory requirements, it is recommended that child care programs contact their local emergency management directors and let them know hours of operation and the number of children served. In addition, ask for information on local evacuation plans and for input into yours.

Knowing the location of your fire alarms, fire extinguisher, closest exits, and how to shut off your electricity are crucial for being well prepared.

In any emergency, child care programs have two options: "should I stay or should I go?"

“Staying,” or sheltering in place, requires the use of any interior space for the purpose of providing shelter. The following procedures should be followed:

- Gather children inside
- Close and lock windows and doors
- If there is a danger of explosion, close blinds, shades, etc., and keep children away from windows
- Turn off heating, cooling, and ventilation systems
- Do not allow anyone to enter or leave the building until emergency personnel determine the area is clear
- Notify parents not to pick-up children until the incident is over

“Going,” or evacuating, requires you to remove children from your facility as quickly as possible. The following procedures should be followed:

- Make a quick assessment of the situation, attend to any injuries
- Make sure the evacuation route is clear
- Take with you attendance sheet, emergency medical contacts, and supplies
  - Take a cell phone
  - Assemble all children
  - Keep everyone calm
  - If possible, have one adult leading the children and one adult following at the back of the group
- Re-assemble outside at a pre-determined spot
- If safe, return to the building
- Notify parents immediately

Steps that child care programs may take to improve the security of their facilities:

- Ask local law enforcement officials to perform a safety inspection
- Establish code words to use among staff when announcing an emergency
- Develop a telephone tree to notify parents
- Install security doors and motion sensors
- Have at least one cell phone in each room, and use walkie-talkies

Programs should plan on having emergency supplies available in the event of an emergency. Kits can be purchased or supplies may be gathered and stored. Recommended items are:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery run radio
- Tarp
- Simple tools
- Whistle
- Garbage bags
- Water
- Non-perishable foods
- First aid kit
- Child and staff enrollment and medical information

Making a plan, gathering supplies, and practicing the plan are essential steps to being prepared for an emergency. Include staff and parents in its development and be sure to communicate the plan to parents so they know what to expect before an emergency occurs. Awareness and preparedness are the best defense in combating unforeseen emergencies.

For more information on keeping your programs safe, visit www.ct.gov/DPH.
Strengthening the link between Community Businesses and Families

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In this time of declining resources, the city of Bristol has found a way to engage our community to pull together and raise funds for all our schools (public and non-public) by using the educational fundraisers at our local retail stores. All Bristol schools are strongly encouraged to register at retail establishments for any of their customer loyalty programs. Since many families are unable to donate money to support our educational system or other worthwhile related school causes, this gives them the opportunity to contribute.

The following Bristol area businesses promote their programs and assist shoppers in registering their loyalty cards:

- Stop and Shop is promoting the A+ Bonus Bucks Program
- Price Chopper has Tools for Schools,
- Big Y showcases Education Express.

Bristol residents and employees can easily link their loyalty cards with area businesses and specific Bristol schools. Residents can go about their normal shopping experiences and feel good knowing they are doing something to better their community.

Results of “Readers Survey,” Spring 2009

Forty readers answered our survey in the spring issue of All Children Considered. They responded via mail or “Survey Monkey” online. Because of space limitations, only a few highlights are provided below. However, detailed results can be found at www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/accel.

Of those responding about All Children Considered,
98% found the newsletter to be helpful or very helpful
72% would like to receive the newsletter “more frequently than twice a year”
19% would like to receive the newsletter just “twice a year”
95% believed that the readability level is “Easy”

Community Collaboration: An Example

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Collaboration between the Bristol Board of Education and community-based early childhood education programs is an example of how child care and youth-serving organizations can work together for the benefit of children. Two years ago, the Board made the formal commitment to work with all Bristol early childhood providers (Head Start, private pre-school, state funded centers, and school readiness programs) to build on the foundation established by the Bristol School Readiness Council.

The basis of this collaboration was twofold: to share knowledge through professional development and training and formalize a process via Board of Education policy for early care and education programs to access this knowledge. Bristol public school teachers and special education team members worked with community-based teachers by facilitating workshops on methods to assist preschool children on letter identification and other curricular topics. They also shared state learning standards and early childhood assessment strategies to ensure that students entering Kindergarten are ready and able to learn.

Systemic changes were made that enabled and encouraged early childhood community teachers to observe public school Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers. Invitations to attend special education planning and placement teams and sharing of individual education plans (with parent permission) have become the norm, not the exception. Public school and community-based teachers now share strategies and ideas to serve children better by fostering a seamless learning environment. At a time of dwindling resources, cooperating partners are sharing the costs of providing teacher workshops.

This collaboration has been instrumental in eliminating barriers. With increased opportunities for public and community-based teachers to work together, stereotypes and misperceptions between schools and community-based programs are removed. Public and community teachers now see how much they have in common. This partnership is also changing the community beliefs on the value and importance of early childhood education as well as increasing respect in the community for all early childhood teachers.

The City of Bristol is seeing amazing results: Kindergarten teachers remark on the level of improvement of the children coming to their classrooms. Program quality has increased in all our community programs, not just school readiness programs, through the increased communication among parents, community providers, and the Board of Education.
Never, Never Shake a Baby!

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Never shake a baby!!!

Thousands of children are killed or injured every year by being shaken by frustrated adults.

Many people don’t know that it takes less than three seconds of shaking to kill or permanently disable a child for life. That’s because shaking a baby whips its head back and forth, crashing the delicate brain inside the skull and “scrambling” it, like an egg. Like an egg, the brain can never be put together again.

Studies show that 85 percent of the children who die or are permanently disabled by Shaken Baby Syndrome are between the ages of 0 and 1. Shaken Baby Syndrome kills about 35% of its victims. Of those who survive, 80% suffer permanent brain damage. Many will never see, eat, crawl, or walk. Others will suffer from cerebral palsy, mental retardation, behavioral disorders, damaged motor functions, and impaired cognitive skills.  

Despite the drastic consequences of this form of child abuse, studies show up to 50% of Americans don’t know about Shaken Baby Syndrome.  

The Children’s Trust Fund is trying to change this lack of knowledge by educating parents and caregivers about the dangers of shaking a baby, and urging them to pass the information along to anyone who cares for a baby – including siblings and grandparents who babysit – that they should never shake a baby.

Here are some tips from experts for preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome:  

1. If you become frustrated and at your “wit’s end” with a baby’s crying, take a deep breath and lay the baby on its back in a safe place, then--
   • Sit down or leave the room
   • Count to 10 – or more
   • Talk to another adult or call a friend or the doctor

2. Remind yourself that it is normal for a baby to cry – sometimes for hours at a time. This is not an indication that a baby is “bad” or that you are doing something wrong.

3. Some ways to calm a baby
   • Feed the baby or offer him a pacifier
   • If possible, take the baby for a ride in the car
   • Sing or put the baby in a swing

The Children’s Trust Fund offers free informational sessions on Shaken Baby Syndrome at high schools and to groups of caregivers. For more information, or to schedule a session, contact Luz Rivera at 860.424.5629, or email luz.rivera@ct.gov.

References

www.dontshake.org, National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome.

That’s why it is vitally important to tell anyone who cares for a baby – including siblings and grandparents who babysit – that they should never shake a baby.

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Please share the newsletter with all staff.

Child Care 2-1-1 Mailbag

**Question:** I would like to show the children and families in my child care program easy and inexpensive ways to get involved in community service. Could you give me some suggestions?

**Answer:** Difficult economic times offer a wonderful opportunity to teach children ways to give back to the communities in ways that are small but can impact the child’s social, emotional, and mental well being in a positive way. Some fun and still significant ways to get children involved are:

- Find a local organization such as an animal shelter or museum that would appreciate donations or volunteer time.
- Offer to help in the neighborhood by raking neighbors’ yards in the fall and/or shoveling walkways in the winter. These activities can be made even more fun by making leaf piles to jump in or building a snowman out of the shoveled snow.
- Offer to take out the garbage/recycling bin or carrying in groceries for an ill neighbor.
- Organize clothes drives to which children can donate their gently worn clothes that no longer fit.
- Encourage kids to create and mail cards on appropriate occasions such as to ill classmates, individuals who have visited or volunteered at your program, deployed military personnel, or veterans and senior citizens in senior centers.

These activities can increase children’s empathy toward others and may improve their mental health while decreasing stress. There are also social benefits as the children have an opportunity to form bonds with each other and with members of the community.

If you have any questions, need help in brainstorming other ideas, or are interested in any other community volunteer information, please feel free to contact us at 2-1-1 Child Care by dialing 2-1-1 or 1.800.505.1000.