

Discovery Project Profiles 2004-2007

Profiles currently available:

Danbury
East Hartford
Enfield
Mansfield
Meriden
Middletown
New Britain
Norwalk
Wallingford
West Hartford
Windham
Windsor

Danbury

Our Shared Vision for Young Children:

All children in the early grades are succeeding in school and all parents are involved in their children's education. Parents, educators, and early care providers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in fostering the healthy development and early school success of children, from birth to age eight.

Families of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds are comfortable in the schools, parents are involved in their children's education, and educators, school staff and providers understand how to respond to the cultural/linguistic and learning differences to effectively involve parents as partners.

Our Theory of Change:

An increase in parental involvement will lead to an increase in student success.

Objective One:

To increase parental involvement by providing increased access to information, training, and skills to all parents of children, from birth to age eight.

Objective Two:

To expand relationships and promote meaningful communication between parents, teachers and other school personnel, and preschool teachers/early care providers. A clearer understanding and fulfillment of the roles and responsibilities of each as a partner in supporting school success for young children, ages three to eight, will be developed.

Discovery Partners:

City of Danbury
Danbury Children First

Danbury Public School District
Danbury School Readiness Council

Education Connection
Families Network of Western
Connecticut
Greater Danbury Child and Family
Network
Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury

Infoline
United Way of Northern Fairfield
County
University of Connecticut Cooperative
Extension System

Primary Contact:

Linda Kosko

Phone: 203/797-8088

E-mail: lindak@danburychildrenfirst.org

East Hartford

Over the past two years ChildPlan has worked deliberately and fastidiously to position the organization to be the voice for East Hartford children. Included as partners in our journey have been people from various walks of life: parents, retired citizens, a juvenile judge, municipal agents, local legislators, educators, health providers, early childhood experts, clergy, and businesses. Countless hours of volunteerism have been spent working on task forces charged with collecting information, talking to people, hosting family events and analyzing the results. Additional hours were spent with a consultant to map out a strategy and plan for action. A shared vision of ChildPlan members emerged and is evidenced by our mission and goals:

Proactively & effectively collaborate with the East Hartford community to improve the quality of the lives of our children and families.

To achieve this we will:

- *Serve as a planning, advocacy and policy development organization.*
- *Enhance & increase services and foster projects that impact the health, educational status and social conditions of East Hartford children and families.*
- *Promote community agency networking to seek & secure necessary funding to start and sustain programs for children and families.*
- *Involve parents as partners in the work of ChildPlan.*

After review of the Discovery objectives, analysis of our community assessment report, and subsequent strategic planning, ChildPlan has chosen to continue on the path of *improving student's social, emotional and academic performance.*

According to the results of our 2003 Community Assessment, Indicators of Child Well-Being: A Baseline Report there are five areas of significance identified through data collection and analysis, surveys of adults and youth, and focus group discussions and interviews. First and foremost is the staggering increase in the number of young children living in poverty in East Hartford, particularly those under the age of five. According to the Census 2000 data, East Hartford had the woeful distinction of having the highest increase in this category in the past ten years across the State of Connecticut. Second, East Hartford saw a dramatic rise in the Infant Mortality rate, placing it in the same realm as neighboring Hartford, which simultaneously saw a significant decrease. Third, the percentage of East Hartford's kindergarten student's who had a pre-school experience was significantly lower than both of those within the economic reference group and the state. Fourth, anecdotal report provided evidence of a growing concern for the behavioral health of children birth to five as witnessed by child care providers and public school teachers. Finally, the communication system within East Hartford was described as insufficient in linking parents with providers, as well as providers to their peers.

Therefore, ChildPlan will create and advocate for a common early childhood care & education agenda by supporting universal access to high quality early care & education experiences that promote the healthy development and academic success of young children by:

- 1) Providing parent leadership training, e.g. People Empowering People (PEP).
- 2) Increasing the knowledge-base and skill level of East Hartford early childhood and kindergarten teachers in regards to the social-emotional development of young children by providing professional development days on the DECA or related curriculum.
- 3) Creating a task force on early childhood care and education, inclusive of behavioral health, to craft a common early childhood agenda for East Hartford and conducting community forums and preparing position papers to educate the larger community.
- 4) As the liaison for the Mayor, linking with the CT Conference of Municipalities & Commission on Children, and the National League of Cities and CT State Dep. of Education to advance the early childhood care & education agenda in East Hartford based on best practices shared via these national and state initiatives.

Outcomes expected include an increase in knowledge within the community on the importance of early care and education, an increase in parent leaders and levels of involvement, an increase in the number of children having a pre-school experience, and a decrease in behaviorally challenged young children.

Primary Contact:

Cindy Forbes-Guerreri

Phone: 860-568-0181

E-mail: childplan@msn.com

Enfield

Over the last three years of Discovery Enfield has developed and implemented several initiatives in our community to address the early care and education of our young children.

Our first major undertaking was All Aboard for Kindergarten (1) This interactive packet is distributed at Kindergarten registration to all incoming families. Enfield has nine elementary schools. Some schools were doing more than others to welcome children and little was offered by way of curriculum information. In this packet, children will find photographs of all the important people they will see when entering school. Also, there are pages to color and complete that highlight curriculum objectives. It is meant to be user-friendly yet informative and is very well received by the children and their parents. It is important to note that all nine elementary schools distribute the same packet that has been individualized for their personnel. Therefore, our transition to Kindergarten – while not complete is far more uniform and informative than it was and is being sustained by the individual schools.

We now offer semi-annual “Three-Year-Old Birthday Parties.” These hour-long sessions invite parents and their 3-year-old children to become familiar with area preschools, social service programs, and public school personnel. It is not meant to be a screening process for Kindergarten, although we are in discussions to add/create that component. Children participate in hands-on activities like blocks, stringing Cheerios, and coloring with their parents and receive a snack, balloon, and walk-out treat.

Enfield is most proud of its collaboration with Cox Communications. During the past year, we have created three shows which air on public access television. The first one was titled: Rules, Routines, and Structures, the second was Reading with Young Children – the Library Connection and the third was Winning Ways at the Grocery Store with Preschoolers. We tapped our local resources for both people and materials and our local high school students did the media work. Cox Communications trained the high school students for this purpose and currently there are discussions to offer them course credit for their participation. Our next planned show will highlight our Enfield Gets Ready for Kindergarten evening. Each year we hold this event and invite parents to come and explore what their children will be learning in Kindergarten. Babysitting and snacks are provided and attendance is usually well over 100 families. We felt this was great way to offer those families who were not able to attend an opportunity to garner the important information shared this evening.

The School Readiness Council is partnering with Graustein to offer a meeting between early care and education providers and Kindergarten teachers on May 27, 2004.(2) Our Early Care and Education Transition to Kindergarten Team held a similar meeting last year that resulted in expanded interest this year. For this year’s meeting we will have a guest speaker from the State Department of Education discuss the Benchmarks and the

Assessment Tool set by the Commissioners. Dinner will be offered as will an opportunity for guests to ask questions. At this writing 40 people have committed and we expect many more.

Parent Engagement is the one area Enfield really wants to expand. During Discovery 2004-2007 we will work hard to develop parent leaders by offering training and the ability to participate in the ongoing work of Discovery. We have committed a fair amount of funding and time to this endeavor. This is new for us so as such any community that has information or resources please feel free to share them with us. Overall, Enfield has positioned itself for a more effective, efficient and positive Discovery experience. We are building strong alliances with all the entities actively engaged in providing a quality early learning experience for our young children. And, we have sought and encouraged the involvement of our local governing leaders. If we can provide any resources to other communities, please feel free to email Karen Weseliza at KAW9598@aol.com or Amy Witbro at Awitbro@Enfieldschools.org.

Primary Contact:

Amy Witbro

Phone: 860-253-6552

E-mail: awitbro@enfieldschools.org

Mansfield

Mansfield, Connecticut is a small rural town in the northeast corner of Connecticut. We are 40 miles east of the capitol, Hartford, and home of the University of Connecticut, and the Men and Women Huskies, the National Basketball Champions!

Mansfield has a population of 21,554. During the academic year, we have an additional 15,000 graduate and undergraduate students. There are three elementary schools, one middle school and a regional high school shared by three small towns. It is a unique town because of the many influences of the University. In 10% of the homes in Mansfield, English is a second language; there are 36 different languages being spoken in our schools, and Chinese is the primary non-English language spoken. Mansfield has always had a strong commitment to education.

In 1998, the Mansfield School Readiness Council was formed in response to funding requirements for a grant awarded by the State Department of Education. There are about 20 people on the Council and members include parents, educators, social worker, early care providers and directors, and a representative of the local education department. The overall goal of the Council is to improve developmental outcomes of children from birth through age 8. Three years ago this council was instrumental in the award of the William Graustein

Discovery Grant. At present we are working on the third Graustein goal of building strong connections between early care and elementary education.

Primary Contact:

Sandra Baxter

Phone: 860-429-3338

E-mail: baxtersp@mansfieldct.org

Meriden

Goal

We believe that all Meriden children and families should have access - starting at birth - to a comprehensive range of programs and supports that help our children achieve emotional, social and academic success.

Through Discovery, a team of parent and community leaders will work to::

- expand the supply of high quality early childhood education
- build strong connections between early care and elementary education

Community Profile

Meriden is a town of 59,000 residents in the center of Connecticut. While Meriden is tracking and witnessing progress in many areas related to health, safety and education, we remain below state averages on many key indicators.

- Meriden is a young community in which ¼ of residents were under age 18 in 2000.
- 75% of Meriden's children were adequately immunized by age two in 2002.
- Nearly half (47%) of Meriden children enrolled in HUSKY Part A visited the dentist at least once in 1998-99.
- In 2000, 65% of Meriden children (62% of CT children) under age 6 have both parents, or the only parent, in the workforce.
- There is a need for an additional 464 affordable high quality child care spaces for 3 and 4 year olds.
- 78% of Meriden children entering kindergarten in September 2002 attended a preschool program.
- Meriden elementary schools have shown an increase in poverty over the past several years, from 48% in 1999-00 to 55% in 2002-03.
- In 2002-03, 26% (23% in 1999-00) of all Meriden students - and 28% (25% in 1999-00) of elementary students - lived in families in which the primary language is other than English.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of Meriden children who received special education services in 2002-03 were categorized as learning disabled.

- There are an estimated 1,260 Meriden children and youth (under 18) who may have an untreated diagnosable mental/behavioral health disorder, and either have not been identified and/or are not receiving mental health service.
- In 2002, 45% of Meriden fourth graders met or exceeded the state goal for reading on the 4th grade CMT, below the state average of 56 percent.

Where do you want to be in four years?

I Craft and Launch Early Learning Strategic Awareness & Public-Will Building

1. Engage a broad and deep group of trained parent and community leaders who will plan and act on family-friendly policy, budget and program issues.
2. Broader and deeper understanding of the need and value of early child care by community and key decision makers as well as other audiences, such as those without children and older voters and taxpayers. Evidence of this learning will be reflected in new or redirected resources that benefit Meriden families and their youngest children.
3. Updated 'report card' of child and family well-being in 2004 and again in 2007.
4. Coordinated community-wide research, planning, and action on all significant early childhood issues, with support from Children First staff and leadership team. Examples include affordability of child care and behavioral health issues for children.
5. Enhanced and expanded linkages between the Meriden community and the Board of Education on early literacy efforts through School Readiness programs and other providers of child care.
6. Increased public awareness and public will building on targeted issues important to young children and their families.
7. More financial and other resources at the local and state level that will be directed towards early school year efforts.
8. Improved academic, social and health outcomes of children who by measures to be discussed and determined by the group and in relation to other Discovery cities working in the same area.
9. On-going evaluation of process, practice and policies in place.

II Develop and Fund Early Learning Center

1. Early learning center serving an additional 200 young children will be operational. Some of Meriden's unmet need for childcare will be met with this center.
2. Achieve plan in place for early learning 'satellite' centers in other high-need areas in Meriden.

Primary Contact:

David Radcliffe

Phone: 203/630-3566

E-mail: dwradcliffe@juno.com

Middletown

Here is a summary of the Middletown Discovery work for 2004-07. We continue to work on the same three objectives:

1. Implement a Strategic Communication Plan:

The Board of Education will include an advertisement about the importance of early care and education programs in its quarterly newsletter "Spotlight on Education".

Public Service Announcements about early care and education will be delivered on Comcast Cable T.V. Community Channel and WMRD radio. Parenting videos and workshops for parents of young children will be broadcast on Comcast Cable T.V. Community Channel.

We will submit for publication newspaper stories that highlight the importance of high quality early education programs for children with "slice of life" stories from Middletown families.

Brochures about the importance of early care and education programs will be developed and distributed to parents in targeted neighborhoods and through targeted agencies

The Superintendent of Schools will compose a letter that will be distributed to parents welcoming them to the Middletown Schools, encouraging them to send their child to preschool, and emphasizing the importance of early reading experiences. This letter will be distributed at City Hall along with the book "Helping Your Child Become a Reader" when parents pick up their newborn's birth certificate.

Bumper stickers supporting early care and education will be designed, printed, and widely distributed throughout the community.

We will identify and provide keynote speakers to present topical early childhood issues at the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce's annual breakfast each April.

A PowerPoint presentation and a Speakers Bureau on early care and education will be made available to parents, public school staff, Board of Education, health care providers, social service agencies, local politicians, business, churches, PTA's, and philanthropic groups.

Pediatricians and family practice doctors will wear buttons “Ask Me About Preschool” and give parents of young children brochures about early childhood programs at well child visits.

Community forums will be sponsored by the mayor around each of the five goals for Middletown’s young children to determine strategies to improve conditions and outcomes.

We will develop a local campaign to be a member of the "Middletown Children's Posse" and link it to the state “Ready, Set Grow” campaign.

We will continue to collect data about the well-being of Middletown’s young children and issue an updated report in tri-fold brochure format.

The data collection for the South-Central Regional E.C.E.R.S. study being conducted by Yale Child Study Center will be completed and student outcomes will be linked to classroom quality. We will publish and distribute the report and make presentations on the findings throughout the community and the state.

We will conduct a community conversation on universal access to preschool in Connecticut.

2. Implement an Early Literacy Plan:

Pediatric and family practice offices will conduct “Reach Out and Read” or “Prescription to Read” programs for children age birth to five, distributing books to children and early literacy information to parents at well child visits. They will have a cozy book corner in their waiting room stocked with high quality picture books for young children.

Comcast Cable T.V. station will run early literacy workshops for parents on their community access channel conducted by the public school K-5 Language Arts Coordinator.

K-5 Language Arts Coordinator will conduct literacy workshops for parents throughout the community.

The Russell Library will increase the number of story hours for infants and toddlers in our Even Start and Early Head Start programs.

The School Readiness Council will develop a corps of early childhood leaders who will be trained in the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO), Care to Read, and Framework Assessment Program. They, in turn, will be available to train and mentor staff in Middletown early care and education programs.

The School Readiness Council will offer literacy mini-grants to early care and education providers so that they may develop and implement early literacy activities to be conducted in children's homes.

Family Resource Center and Russell Library will collaborate to conduct literacy playgroups for children age birth-3 in targeted neighborhoods.

The School Readiness Council will send trained observers in early care and education classrooms to rate the quality of their language and literacy environments and activities. Early childhood consultants will use the ratings to assist teachers in developing and implementing improvement plans.

The School Readiness Council will employ a parent to conduct a Reading is Fundamental "National Book Program" in early care and education programs for low-income children and at WIC.

Russell Library will conduct their "It's Easy as ABC" initiative to model book reading for parents, provide story hours for children, and get books and alphabet manipulatives into the homes of children most at risk for school success.

3. Transition to Kindergarten Plan:

Preschool programs will complete a Student Information form for each child and share it with the kindergarten teacher. Preschool teachers will receive training on the Framework Assessment Program and will complete a developmental profile of their children for kindergarten teachers.

Preschool programs will share kindergarten registration information with parents and student contact information with the public schools.

Public schools will conduct kindergarten orientations for parents in January/February, prior to kindergarten registration. They will develop a PowerPoint presentation on kindergarten for parents.

Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers will collaborate by exchanging class visits, resources, and materials, and engaging in focused, facilitated discussions.

Attached is a copy of our literacy mini-grant application. Updates on the progress of our activities can be found on our School Readiness web site:

http://www.middletownschools.org/district_programs/school_readiness/index.html

Primary Contact:

Christine Fahey

Phone: 860-346-7354

E-mail: faheyc@comcast.net

New Britain

New Britain's Discovery Collaborative is focused on expanding the supply and improving the quality of care. New Britain has the lowest rate of children attend pre-K of any city in Connecticut. To make matters worse, two childcare centers have closed (a loss of 70 slots) during the past year. At an average \$145 per week per child (\$7,250 per year), full-time center-based care is more expensive than a year's worth of tuition and books at Central CT State University (\$6,384). As such, unsubsidized care is out of reach for all but a small percentage of New Britain's families. The only way that there will be any significant increase in the supply of high quality care in New Britain is if there are additional resources to make that care affordable for the city's families. Given that reality, our collaborative's strategy for increasing supply is to organize parents to advocate for affordable high quality care and to plug into statewide efforts for universal preschool. The first step in this will be to engage parents and the broader community in a planning process to figure out what it would take to significantly expand the number of early care & education opportunities in New Britain.

In the meantime we intend to increase outreach to the home based providers where most of our children spend their early years, to improve their ability to prepare children for school success. The collaborative will work with the Family Resource Centers, Creative Parenting and other organization to offer training for home based providers both licensed and kith and kin.

Primary Contact:

Merrill Gay

Phone: (860) 224-3847

E-mail: merrillg@snet.net

Norwalk

Kids Start Smart: The Norwalk Discovery Initiative

We are focusing on the transition from pre-K to K and are working on Job Descriptions for two positions: (1) Early Childhood Expert to focus on creating a **system** of early care and education out of the existing pieces in place in Norwalk; and (2) a Parent Engagement Coordinator to develop a **network** that will amplify parent voices in the public policy arena by helping existing parent groups understand policy issues and helping parents without a voice create organizations that represent their needs. The first

position will be funded by our Graustein grant in full the first year and matching funds will be sought for the remaining three years. The second position will be funded by the United Way of Norwalk and Wilton through their Community Impact initiative. \$63,000 has been approved for July, 2004 through June, 2005 to underwrite salary, publication of our Resource Directory, partially support Parent Leadership Training Institute and costs of meetings. A \$25,000 grant has been secured by Norwalk's School Readiness Council from the Fairfield County Community Foundation to address the issue of behavior problems in pre-school settings.

In addition, Graustein funds will be used to fund activities that promote a better understanding of the roles of pre-school and kindergarten by allowing kindergarten teachers and pre-school providers to visit each others classrooms by funding substitute teacher time and to pay for the transportation costs of bringing pre-school students to visit kindergarten classrooms to get acquainted with school. A new booklet for parents that outlines the skill expectations for children entering kindergarten and providing parents with activities they can do with their children to develop those skills has been written by a Discovery Task Force and is being published with English and Spanish in the same book. The booklet will be illustrated with photos taken for a student photography project and will be distributed to parents through pre-schools and other means.

Once we have hired the new staff for our initiative, we expect to tackle evaluation issues in a substantive manner. We are working on developing an understanding of the importance of pre-school by reaching out to key groups in our community such as the Clergy and the Chamber of Commerce. Our efforts are reaching receptive ears and we hope to build on those relationships to create a plan for sustaining our efforts when the Discovery grants run out in 2007.

Primary Contact:

Anita Mackey

Phone: 854-4000 Ext. 5087

E-mail: ammackey@optonline.net

Wallingford

Wallingford's Discovery team will be working on building partnerships to enhance the school readiness of children in the community. The first **W. E. CARE** directory is being prepared for distribution to every home in town with a detailed listing of family resources. The acronym **W. E. CARE** [**W**allingford **E**arly **C**hildhood **A**lliance **R**esources and **E**ducation] was created by the Discovery team to draw attention to the needs of families and to highlight the programs and services offered in the community. Based upon the March 2003 Community Conversation series, a group of parents, educators, health and social service providers will develop a series of educational workshops that will focus on school readiness. The first of these workshops is being offered in the Fall 2004.

Working in partnership with the Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce the Discovery team will be connecting with local business enterprises in developing ongoing support for the family resources needed to improve the well-being of young children in Wallingford. The town of Wallingford is also in the initial stages of planning an expansion to the children's section of the public library. The Discovery team will work with the planners on this exciting plan which will expand the early childhood learning opportunities in the community. Finally, the team will be utilizing technology as a working partner to reach out to the community through the development of a website and special programming on the local cable network channel.

Primary Contact:

Roberta Clouet

Phone: 203/949-0100

E-mail: clouet103@comcast.net

West Hartford

West Hartford Discovery will be focusing on three main strategies in the next four years:

- 1) **Awareness:** We will increase the community awareness of value of high quality preschool experiences.
- 2) **Resource Development:** We will work collaboratively to increase the availability, accessibility, quality, and affordability of preschool education and resources.
- 3) **Outreach:** We will engage families in accessing community resources for young children.

Our strategic planning team developed action plans that correspond to the strategies.

Through our Awareness plans, we will:

- Compile and summarize information on early education research
- Increase awareness of the role of community in engaging and education families about the importance of high quality preschool experiences
- Develop a four-year public relations campaign that delivers the message to the community

Through our Outreach efforts, we plan to:

- Establish consumer-friendly avenues for accessing early childhood resources (development of website, multi-lingual resource directory, host an annual early childhood family fair, provide informational booths at town-wide events)
- Identify barriers that inhibit parents from enrolling children in preschool programs (through surveys, focus groups and collaboration with other entities)
- Increase participation in preschool experiences within high need areas (through neighborhood-friendly social events, collaboration with West Hartford Public Schools and neighborhood agencies)
- Engage parents who use informal childcare providers.
- Improve outreach coordination

Our Resource Development efforts will include:

- Provide, within the larger structure of an Early Childhood Collaborative, the opportunity for existing entities (West Hartford Early Childhood Council, Discovery Project, early educators, library services, etc.) to collaborate
- Establish an Early Childhood Fund that will be used to subsidize ongoing monetary needs related to early care and education
- Implement new and strengthen existing early care and education programs to increase availability
- Utilize “best practices” guidelines/concepts (State of Connecticut Curriculum Framework, NAEYC, etc.) to enhance quality of early care and education
- Provide support for the Board of Education, along with the Town to pass a budget with a line item allocating funds for preschool services in high need areas
- Host a “Transitional to Kindergarten” Meeting for kindergarten teachers and early care and education teachers

Since we learned about our grant in March, we ran a press release about our Discovery project in the West Hartford News, West Hartford Life, and Hartford Courant. We also recently held a town-wide “Action On Early Education” celebration meeting, in our first efforts to distribute the action plans to the greater community, and to celebrate the next phase in this project. The meeting also served to broaden the involvement of community members.

Primary Contact:

Paula Stabnick

Phone: 860-521-6304

E-mail: paulastabnick@aol.com

Windham

The town of Windham, with its population of 22,857, is mostly rural but anchored by the small city of Willimantic where nearly 70% of this culturally diverse population resides. The community has a diverse mix of cultures with 34% of the population being Hispanic, Black, or Asian and 28% speaking something other than English at home. Four elementary schools, a middle school, high school, and several nearby colleges and universities, meet the needs of the school aged children and a comprehensive early childcare system helps to prepare children for learning. When registering for kindergarten, over 73% of the students are reported to have had some sort of early childhood educational experience.

Over the years, an active School Readiness Council has worked collaboratively to address the social, emotional, and educational needs of young children. Over the next four years, Windham Children First will continue its emphasis on building and supporting parent/school/community partnerships that encourage parent engagement in all aspects of education from early childhood on. This year, in addition to our ongoing work with the public schools to improve the communication between teachers and parents, we will begin an initiative to establish a one-stop system for preschool

registration where parents can more easily learn about existing educational opportunities. In an effort to better reach Spanish speaking parents with information about elementary school policies and procedures, we will be supporting efforts to train a group of parents to reach out and support other parents in their own communities. Over the next couple of years, we will continue our support for the Windham Parent Network and their community building and advocacy activities. We will also work to communicate the importance of early childhood education to the public in the hopes of winning public support for early education initiatives.

Primary Contact:

Joy Larson

Phone: 860-429-9235

E-mail: joy.larson@sbcglobal.net

Windsor

Windsor is a town of approximately 28,000 people that borders on Hartford to the south, Windsor Locks to the north, Bloomfield and East Granby to the west and the Connecticut River to the east. Windsor's highly diverse population is reflected in its kindergarten school, four elementary schools, middle school and high school. The school population is approximately 57 percent minority, with African-Americans as the largest single minority group. Windsor is economically middle class across all racial and ethnic groups.

One of the unique features of Windsor's school system is the Wolcott Early Childhood Center, which houses kindergarten students from the entire town, as well as special needs and peer learning preschool classes. The school is totally focused on the needs of our youngest students. At present, we offer a limited number of full-day kindergarten classes, which are open on a lottery basis. The demand for full-day kindergarten is far greater than the supply of classes, and the Board of Education has made a commitment to offer full-day kindergarten to all students. A task force met during the past year to examine options for implementation and has reported back to the Board, which has accepted their recommendations.

In its first two years, Windsor's Discovery Project was managed by Healthy People, a collaboration of town and school employees and a few community members, and the fiscal agent was a community organization called Friends of Northwest Park (Northwest Park is an environmental, educational and recreational facility). Healthy People, which pre-dated the Discovery initiative by a couple years, is committed to a mission of furthering the physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being of Windsor's people. It includes representatives of groups involved with many different aspects of the community's life – from the schools and health department to the police department.

Healthy People was a highly appropriate collaborative group for Discovery, as young children were already a focus for the group. In 2000, Healthy People had spearheaded a

program called Start Smart, which offers to all families with young children a free program of parent education through home visits with parent educators.

We began our Discovery project with a research effort to gauge community needs in the area of childcare quality and quantity. The Connecticut Policy and Economic Council worked with us to do the research, which they conducted through community forums and focus groups. Our next steps were to bring a part-time coordinator on board and to form an Early Childhood Council that would bring together parents, childcare providers and professionals involved with young children (e.g., the kindergarten principal and Family Resource Center staff).

We worked through most of our second year to implement those two steps, which took longer than we anticipated. By September 2003, we had hired our coordinator, Tammy Exum, and in November, the Early Childhood Council held its first meeting. It has met at least once a month throughout 2003-2004. During that time, the group became familiar with the Discovery project and with various issues related to young children, developed governance structures and participated in a two-part strategic planning effort. The result of the strategic planning was a revised action plan for our next year of work.

A few words about the Early Childhood Council: The development of a grassroots group that includes a broader group of stakeholders was a priority for our past year's work. We felt not only that their perspective and input would be extremely valuable, but that sustainability really depended on the formation of an ongoing community-based group. To date, we have focused on bringing a number of parents and child care providers on board, and we recruited through child care centers, elementary schools, the Start Smart program, library programs and the media. Approximately 24 parents came to our first meeting in November, and about 16 of them have remained active throughout the year. Knowing how busy people are and how hard it is to get people to meetings (at least in Windsor), we are using a portion of our grant funds to pay parents a small stipend for meeting attendance. We also provide child care and dinner. The result has been quite satisfying – we have always had 12 to 14 parents/providers in attendance, and they have been joined by 6 to 8 town/school professionals (who do not receive stipends).

The plan developed by the ECC for the coming year focuses on finding out more about community needs in the areas of communications and programs/services for children, and then developing ways to meet those needs. To accomplish these objectives, we are in the process of forming a communications subcommittee and a quality of care subcommittee, which will begin work over the summer. We have also received a grant for a Community Forum on Universal Access to Preschool from the State Department of Education, and we anticipate that that event will be a powerful vehicle for increasing community awareness and gauging community needs. We will also be developing and distributing surveys for parents and providers to expand on the information gleaned in our first year.

Primary Contacts:

Ceila Robbins

(860) 687-2000, ext. 272

crobbins@windsorct.org

Tammy Exum

(860) 561-0165

Tammyexum@comcast.net
