

Discovery Project Profiles 2003

Ansonia

In 2002, a team of people from Ansonia and Shelton came together to determine what might be done to help all young children in the two communities be prepared to begin Kindergarten successfully. This "Discovery Team" decided it would gather data about each community's school readiness issues and opportunities and look at this data in the context of leading school readiness frameworks.

In June 2002, the team hired two consultants to gather information on what licensed child care for three and four-year-olds exists in the two cities and what that child care looks like. The information is now captured in two reports: *Licensed Child Care for Three and Four-Year-Olds in the City of Ansonia*; and *Licensed Child Care for Three and Four-Year-Olds in the City of Shelton*. The Discovery Team then worked with the consultants to design and conduct a series of focus groups in each city in order to compare the viewpoints of those who live or work closest with each city's young children. The information collected has been summarized in a report entitled, "*School Readiness in Ansonia and Shelton, CT - The Discovery Project*."

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Bloomfield

The Bloomfield Discovery Council conducted a door-to-door survey of parents to collect information on the status and needs of children ages birth to 5 in Bloomfield. Survey questions focused on: early care; home activities; community resources; special needs services; medical/dental coverage; and household demographics.

As part of this process, the Council hired consultants to conduct focus groups with home-care and center-care providers, parents and public school teachers to understand their perspectives regarding school readiness. The results of this survey will be used to develop a needs statement that will stimulate community discussion. The ultimate goal of the project is to provide services to Bloomfield children and families to address unmet needs in order to better prepare children to learn.

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Branford

The Branford Discovery Collaborative developed a parent survey to understand the needs and issues of Branford's children. The survey findings indicated parents had specific concerns about their child's social and emotional well-being. As a result of the findings, the Collaborative began hosting family nights, offering activities for the children while giving parents workshops on family stress.

The Branford Discovery Collaborative is now planning several focus groups in 2003-04 to gain input from parents and teachers as well as school psychologists, school nurses and local care givers. A Community Conversation on Early Learning and Care will also be held this fall. We are hopeful that this serves to further the Discovery Collaborative and continues our desire to "build the table" with as many participants as interested in furthering the quality of life for our young.

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Bridgeport

The Bridgeport Discovery Committee is focused on the social and emotional well-being of young children and their families. In the first phase of the Discovery process, Bridgeport embarked upon a comparison study of classrooms that only had a Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) versus those with a DECA and an ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) to better understand how assessment impacts outcomes.

The Committee then conducted parent focus groups, administered a survey to pre-K through grade three educators and community-based program staff, facilitated a conversation of mental health providers and conducted a community conversation. The result of this work was the realization of a shared concern around children's emotional and mental health and some recommendations for addressing the challenges that the community is facing.

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Bristol

The vision of the Bristol Discovery Community Initiative is to integrate and support collaboration amongst schools, families and the community in order to increase the social/emotional competencies of children within the early care system and entering the educational system thus ensuring their ability to learn and to reach their highest potential. A major thrust of Bristol Discovery's work is administering the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) in order to ascertain the social/emotional health of young children living in Bristol.

Additionally, The Bristol Discovery Initiative held a Community Conversation and six additional mini-conversations throughout the Bristol community. Each of these mini-conversations targeted a specific audience for their input regarding early care and education in the greater Bristol community. A Parent Survey was also sent to every parent of a kindergarten student. This survey asked the parents questions about their child's preschool experience and also provided information about GED instruction for those that have not attained their high school diploma.

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Brooklyn

The Brooklyn Discovery Collaborative has focused on increasing community-wide interest and support for high quality early care and education and conducting research to better understand factors that impact school performance and emotional adjustment in early elementary children. The collaborative is guided by a vision for the community, which is: *All Brooklyn children will, to their highest potential, learn and thrive with the full support and encouragement of their caring community.*

In support of this vision, the collaborative has set the following goals:

- Improved town-wide support for programs that positively impact young children and their families
- Stronger intergenerational unity in the Brooklyn community
- Increased awareness of available resources and support for all families of children ages birth to 8 on an ongoing basis
- Increased parent confidence and support of social, emotional and academic outcomes for their children
- Stronger parent-school connection starting in preschool

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Danbury

Danbury goals for 2002 and 2003 were (1) to increase public awareness about the importance of early childhood development, (2) improve transitions to kindergarten for children and their families, and (3) to develop systems of monitoring and evaluating progress toward more positive outcomes for young children.

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East Hartford

East Hartford ChildPlan, Inc. conducted a broad-based community assessment in 2003. The purpose was to best define the strengths of East Hartford, and identify the gaps in service for children and their families, particularly those of ages birth to eight. The assessment process was a significant piece of community building and is best described as progressive community collaboration. It included key stakeholders in East Hartford such as parents, youth, caregivers, service providers, government leaders, educators and businesses. This report serves as a foundation on which to build and enhance effective systems of communication, care coordination, advocacy and policy development. The vision is to ensure positive health and educational outcomes for all young children of East Hartford.

The assessment process was initiated in two ways: 1) precursory review and analysis of the ten year history of ChildPlan, and 2) introduction of the strength-based approach for determining the community's assets, attributes and challenges related to supporting the children and families in East Hartford. Information was collected about young children, youth and families by collecting data on five key indicators: 1) Family & Community Conditions, 2) Economics, 3) Health & Wellness, 4) Education (including early care and education), and 5) Safety.

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East Haven

The collaboration with the Memorial Fund and the Discovery grant has served as a catalyst to begin an intensive early childhood initiative in the East Haven community. Around the same time as Discovery became a part of our community, the district had established two early learning centers -housing all of the district's kindergarten, pre-K and Little Jackets school aged child care programs. The district also had a long running FRC which was somewhat isolated from the other programs.

Through the discovery process all of the components for early child care have been pulled together into a cohesive collaboration. The Discovery grant has allowed us the opportunity to improve our existing programs, establish new initiatives, such as a parent drop in center and a community resource guide. Their expertise and technical assistance has provided direction and support. We have expanded our collaborative table and see the necessity of using data to drive future decisions.

In the coming year we intend to place a greater emphasis on parent involvement through the establishment of a parent center. The Discovery initiative has been an invaluable resource in helping the district implement, improve and expand our early childhood Initiative.

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Enfield

Enfield continues to move forward and refine the Discovery work being done in our community. At the outset, we spent a fair amount of time researching our own resources and what other communities were doing that would be successful in Enfield. Our initial work allowed us to create programs like “Three Year-Old Birthday Party,” and a “Parenting Conference.” Additionally, we put together a Community Resource Directory, a Pediatrician Binder and outreach program, a Transition to Kindergarten packet for families, and helped facilitate a dialogue between Kindergarten teachers and early care and education providers. Survey and other feedback to these programs helped us to further direct and expand our efforts.

Over the last two years, we have gained a better understanding of the importance of inviting true collaborating stakeholders to enhance the work we do. For the remainder of Discovery 2003 and moving into Discovery 2004, we will continue to focus our efforts on better collaborative work, increasing parent involvement, creating a series of programs with Cox Cable and high school students to be shown on public access television and augmenting our pediatrician involvement and early education dialogue.

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Greenwich

Through the Discovery process, Greenwich has focused on the transition from pre-school to kindergarten for parents. As part of our initiative, we have extended our orientation program to include monthly informational sheets sent home to kindergarten parents. In September the parents are given a yellow folder for keeping the 'parenting tips' from school and for storing other information they pick up along the parenting route.

In addition to this work, Greenwich has worked with a program called EPIC (Every Person Influences Children). Parents are trained as facilitators to lead parenting groups on specific topics. The program is available for all age children with lessons for specific age groups. The program has a successful history in other states, particularly New York, and more information about EPIC can be obtained by calling Eleanor Wharton at 1-914-941-1302 or by being in touch with Elaine Murray by e mail at murraye@epicforchildren.org.

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Griswold

During the first year of Discovery, the Griswold team worked hard to create a parent survey. The survey was administered to parents, and the response was great. From the survey, the team learned that parents have little access to information. It was therefore decided that a brochure, possible web site and video might be the best way to get information out to parents.

The team selected areas of concern to parents and divided them into categories. Each category was then researched and the parent brochure was drafted. The response to the brochure has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents have reviewed the draft and they are thrilled. The brochure will be converted into a PDF file and attached to the town's website as well as distributing the hard copy. The team will also do guest appearances on the local cable channel to stir up interest.

In the next four years, the Discovery in Griswold will be focused on bringing home daycares, preschools and our town preschool to a consensus on school readiness with the ultimate goal of getting all children in Griswold on the same page upon entrance to school.

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Groton

Norwich, New London, and Groton are working collaboratively on a grant from the Graustein Memorial Fund, the Connecticut Health Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. The grant is called “Health and Learning of Young Children” and seeks to infuse a strong health agenda into the many environments where young children venture. The proposal looks at nutrition as it relates to oral health, obesity, and physical activity.

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Hamden

Discovery Objective(s) our community is working on:

- Expand the supply of high quality early care and education
- Improve the quality of existing early care and education
- Build strong connections between early care and elementary education
- Improve students; social, emotional and academic performance

Hamden is committed to expanding and improving quality childcare and education for its youngest children, and to developing more affordable childcare opportunities. To this end it eagerly accepted Graustein Memorial’s invitation during the 2001-2002 school year to participate in the “Discovery” process. Our goal, seemingly simple and quite basic, was to learn more about the programs and services currently available in Hamden for children of preschool age. When completing the application we agreed to have our five year-old School Readiness Council facilitate the study, and elected to ask ACES, our regional educational service center, to participate in the initiative.

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Manchester

The Manchester Discovery project addresses two of the four GMF objectives: **improving quality** and **building strong connections**. Last year, we developed a bilateral strategy directed toward accomplishing these objectives, beginning by using two standing committees of the Manchester School Readiness Council, the **Curriculum and Assessment** and **Public Relations Committees**. These committees were expanded to include other community stakeholders and collaborators.

Under the Discovery Project, we formed a collaborative model of seven programs in which to test our assessment tool in early childhood and kindergarten classrooms. During 2003, teaching staff from each of the participating preschool programs and elementary schools were trained in the rationale and use of the tool. Administrators and program staff also met to discuss defining benchmarks and performance standards.

Additionally, we have begun to gather data on the types of preschool experiences Manchester children have prior to kindergarten. These histories of children's social and educational experience will provide us with a more complete picture of each child. It is hoped that when these experiential histories are combined with data on developmental growth, as provided by the new assessment protocol, both teaching and learning will be dramatically improved.

Ultimately, we would like to have all early childhood care and education providers in Manchester use this same developmental assessment tool, and have the information gathered follow children as they transition to kindergarten. This will provide information on children's present level of functioning, as well as an ongoing description of new skills learned and the rate at which learning is occurring.

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Mansfield

The Mansfield Connections Team is made up of preschool and kindergarten teachers, teachers, staff and directors of all of the licensed early child care and education providers in town, as well as home care providers. The goal of this team is to continue to foster collaborations between public schools and early care providers, share knowledge and gain new perspectives on a common educational issue.

Usually this team meets two or three times a year for a presentation by a visiting professional in the field of early education about a topic which has been identified by the school readiness coordinator from discussions with both groups as one of general and common interest. The team shares a simple meal first, and then takes in the professional

presentation. Public school teachers and child care providers are encouraged to connect as part of the program in an effort to strengthen their collaborations.

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Meriden

The goal of the Meriden Discovery project is to develop and operate an early learning center for Meriden children and their families. The grant funding supports a community-wide planning and feasibility process that will result in the creation of a building design and business plan for the early learning center.

The center will feature a nature theme, and provide a range of services for the benefit of Meriden children and their families, especially those ‘harder to reach’ and minority children without formal preschool experience. Services will be provided by a partnership including the Meriden public schools, Easter Seals/Head Start, the YMCA, the Women and Family Center, and others.

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Middletown

To further its Discovery work, Middletown hired a research scientist to analyze the data that we have collected on children in Kindergarten through grade three. A report on this research was generated, as well as a PowerPoint presentation of the findings. We have also developed a report on the Well-Being of Young Children in Middletown,” which we have distributed widely throughout the community.

The next step in our work was to develop a strategic communication plan to educate the community on early childhood issues with the assistance of a consultant provided by the Memorial Fund. We also plan to expand last year’s pilot celebration of the Week of the Young Child to include additional activities, more parental involvement in the planning and execution of the celebration and more media to build public will.

We are also working to establish two Family Information Bureaus—one in the Children’s Room at the Russell Library and the other in the waiting room at Middlesex Pediatrics. As the next step in this process, we will create a comprehensive early literacy plan for our community that expands upon existing work and includes new initiatives and convene public school staff, early care and education providers and parents to develop a Transition to Kindergarten Plan.

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Milford

The Milford Discovery Initiative 2003 has focused on the fourth objective of improving students' social, emotional, and academic performance. Our Collaborative has been determined to seek areas where families and children need support with the intent of strengthening families and education in our community.

In October, 2002, Milford's Promise held a Community Conversation, and this group of people formed the core group of the present Discovery Collaborative. The notes from this meeting are included here. In March, 2003, The Milford Discovery Initiative began the first of six meetings where we began to define needs and gaps in services. After reviewing the concerns raised during this conversation, the Milford Discovery Initiative decided to begin task oriented work in three areas: early screening and registration, parenting education and resources, and gathering data on social and emotional issues in young children in Milford. Three Breakout Groups were formed, and their work has begun.

Breakout Research and Analysis Groups

The Early Screening Breakout Group drafted a questionnaire for screening young children for information on speech and language, social/emotional issues, developmental issues, nutrition, hearing, vision, and any other individual parental concerns.

The Parenting Education and Resources Breakout Group is working on developing an asset inventory to learn what exists in our community that can help parents to nurture their children in beneficial and emotionally strengthening ways and also help support them during the crucial early years

The Breakout Group researching social and emotional issues of young children in Milford has begun to devise a plan for gathering information in the form of hard data about the numbers of children in danger of being asked to leave daycare centers because of unmanageable or hard to manage behaviors.

In addition to the work listed above, the Milford Discovery Initiative has continued the First Steps Initiative begun in the year 2002. This fall we also have implemented a pilot program in adult literacy Motherread/Fatheread, one primary aim of which is in building stronger emotional bonds between parents and their children.

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Naugatuck

The goal of the "Discovery 2003" Grant Committee is to create a "Community Connection" as a collaborative agent to inform, include and empower community awareness and increase family and individual education, leadership, skills and personal and group development within the context of the community's population.

It is the Naugatuck Community's primary objective to both improve the quality of existing early care and education as well as to expand the supply of high quality early care and education. In order to accomplish this, a comprehensive assessment of early care and education services was completed. The assessment identifies and compares the early care and education services currently available in the community to the actual community needs. This fact finding mission was accomplished through parent surveys, parent/community focus groups, and early care and education forums.

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New Britain

The New Britain Discovery Collaborative was convened by the New Britain Foundation for Public Giving in mid 2001. The collaborative has engaged; parents, the school system, the library, the Human Resources Agency which runs Head Start, the YWCA Childcare program, the Spanish Speaking Center, the Family Resource Centers and other social service agencies. 2002 has been primarily a research year. The collaborative surveyed over 750 parents in three languages (English, Spanish & Polish) as well as childcare providers. Using CPEC the collaborative is also conducting a series of 16 focus groups. New Britain Discovery in collaboration with the school district and ASPIRA of CT are currently running a 13-week parent leadership-training program.

The collaborative has focused on the three areas of: Increasing quantity of childcare and preschool slots; Improving the quality of childcare and preschool services, Improving the transition to kindergarten, Additionally, New Britain is one of three discovery communities now working to add a health component. In New Britain this effort focuses on making sure that children have a regular pediatrician (medical home) and that preventative healthcare becomes a regular part of childcare and preschool programs.

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New Haven

The New Haven School Readiness Council is the collaborative entity responsible for the Discovery initiative in New Haven. In 2001, the New Haven School Readiness Council expanded its role to focus on providing high-quality early care and education for all children in New Haven ages 0 – 5. This broader focus for the Council was an outgrowth of the data collected by the Mayor’s Task Force on Early Care and Education and the Task Force’s recommendations.

The New Haven School Readiness Council has selected the Discovery objective of increasing the quality of existing early education, one of the primary goals in New Haven’s early care and education implementation plan. New Haven’s strategies have focused on improving quality in all child care settings: licensed family day care providers, unlicensed providers (kith and kin), and center-based early childhood programs. Specific quality improvement efforts have included conducting the ECERS (Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale) assessments in child care centers to measure quality over time, providing additional professional development and on-site consultation for child care teachers, offering Stay and Play groups for family child care providers at the CT Children’s Museum, and creating and distributing Family Child Care Toolkits to help people become licensed, high-quality family child care providers.

The Council has also worked to increase its capacity as a collaborative group to provide leadership on the issue of early care and education in New Haven. The Council has expanded its membership to include more parents and partner organizations, has organized several committees to do the “work” outlined in the Council’s implementation plan, and has helped develop the ABC’s of School Readiness media campaign. The Discovery funding this past year enabled the Council to hire a consultant to provide staff support to the collaborative.

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New London

Norwich, New London, and Groton are working collaboratively on a grant from the Graustein Memorial Fund, the Connecticut Health Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. The grant is called “Health and Learning of Young Children” and seeks to infuse a strong health agenda into the many environments where young children venture. The proposal looks at nutrition as it relates to oral health, obesity, and physical activity.

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Norwalk

During the first year of the Discovery Initiative, the core group began to make a comprehensive assessment of the status of young children in Norwalk. They engaged the cooperation of Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) alumni to conduct focus groups to learn from parents and other constituencies about additional needs of young children and their families. The Community Conversation Steering Committee also held a conversation.

During the first half of 2003, the groups’ research on the demographic, child care, health care and other indicators for young children was formed into a report on their status. The report was illustrated with photos of children taken by Briggs High School students. It concluded with a set of four next steps for the Initiative to take. The report was made public at a press conference on June 2 at which the Mayor and Superintendent indicated their support for efforts to improve the status of young children in Norwalk.

The community was invited to participate in the Task Forces. Those task forces first focused on building action plans to work on the issues they were assigned. Now each of the task forces is engaged in moving forward with those action plans which are not expected to be completed until well into 2004.

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Norwich

Norwich, New London, and Groton are working collaboratively on a grant from the Graustein Memorial Fund, the Connecticut Health Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. The grant is called “Health and Learning of Young Children” and seeks to infuse a strong health agenda into the many environments where

young children venture. The proposal looks at nutrition as it relates to oral health, obesity, and physical activity.

Additionally, Norwich has completed and released a Community Report Card in June 2003 at the Norwich City Hall with all the stakeholders present. Our next step is to inform different organizations and population segments about the report card results through presentations. In addition, an annual Family Day celebration will be held for the Norwich community where the report card will be displayed and disseminated to the parents of Norwich.

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Plymouth

Plymouth's journey through the Graustein Discovery process started at our School Readiness/Family Resource Center Council. During the first year, we hired researchers, and completed 8 focus groups (Rotary Club, Healthy Families Committee, PTO, etc.) 20 interviews with service providers and a parent survey. During the second year, we produced and distributed: Plymouth: A Place for Children, and Opening Doors, a guide detailing all the many and varied opportunities for families of young children.

We then hired the 4 parents we mentored through PEP (a parent training course) to accompany the researchers as they went back to the service providers and focus groups to disseminate our document and guide. Now, they have met and are connected to stakeholders in town. These parents have started advocacy projects on their own (an example, strategizing to save the DARE Program). These PEP parents are also now members of our Early Childhood Council: full participating members moving the agenda forward.

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Shelton

In 2002, a team of people from Ansonia and Shelton came together to determine what might be done to help all young children in the two communities be prepared to begin Kindergarten successfully. This "Discovery Team" decided it would gather data about each community's school readiness issues and opportunities and look at this data in the context of leading school readiness frameworks.

In June 2002, the team hired two consultants to gather information on what licensed child care for three and four-year-olds exists in the two cities and what that child care looks like. The information is now captured in two reports: *Licensed Child Care for Three and Four-Year-Olds in the City of Ansonia*; and *Licensed Child Care for Three and Four-Year-Olds in the City of Shelton*. The Discovery Team then worked with the consultants to design and conduct a series of focus groups in each city in order to compare the viewpoints of those who live or work closest with each city's young children. The information collected has been summarized in a report entitled, "*School Readiness in Ansonia and Shelton, CT - The Discovery Project*."

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Stafford

In 2001 when the Graustein Memorial Fund invited Stafford to participate in improving the lives of the children in our community, we were thrilled to be included. After considering the fund's four goals, we chose to work on the fund's fourth goal; improving our children's social, emotional and academic performance. To that end, during the first two years, the Discovery steering committee hosted a series of family fun nights designed to help families explore the issues of communication, diversity, conflict resolution, and bias. In the last year the Discovery steering committee focused on providing families with artistic performances highlighting cultures not typically found in Stafford. The fun nights were well received, with attendance increasing with each performance, and the participants expressing a desire for us to continue using this format.

Having completed the first phase, we began the gathering portion of our task. This fall the Discovery steering committee hosted a community meeting inviting a wide cross-section of leaders in our local and state communities. This meeting was very well received with over 25 various leaders in attendance. We came away from this meeting with a great amount of information, and most importantly, four key areas of concern. These four areas are: Parenting Skills, Early Childhood Intervention, Violence and Bullying, and Bias on the basis of race and class. At this time we are beginning to collect data from a wider cross-section of the community so that we may further identify the areas of concern that we need to further focus our discovery work on. We are very excited to be at this stage and look to the future impact our Discovery steering committee will have on the lives of children and their families within our community.

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Stamford

Stamford is focused on enhancing children's transition to Kindergarten. In April, 2002, focus groups were held with groups of parents and preschool and kindergarten teachers. The topic of the focus groups was the status of the current transition process in Stamford. We discovered that while a few local preschool programs offer a relatively comprehensive transition process, most do not and there is not coordination with the Stamford Public Schools.

The Discovery transition team is made up of representatives from public and private preschools, kith and kin, and the Stamford Public Schools. The team is currently developing a detailed plan for presentation to the Board of Education. The plan, to be conducted by an elementary school principal and one or two teachers, will make specific requests of the Board of Education.

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Thompson

The Thompson Discovery Planning Team chose a rather unconventional approach towards "providing academic, social and educational supports for all children birth-to-eight years old." In order to create a resident developed plan for Thompson's children encompassing supports, services and opportunities that all children need to succeed, community building to mobilize townspeople needed to occur.

By introducing an **Asset Based Community Development approach (ABCD) to community problem solving, townspeople are coming to the table collaboratively to answer a shared question "How do we as a community work towards making Thompson a healthier, happier place to live and to raise children."

Through resident input 4 major community initiatives have been defined and action has begun. By combining shared visions, talents, skills, passions and efforts, village boundary lines have been replaced by common ground, successful efforts, recognition and buy-in from the Thompson community.

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Torrington

The Torrington Discovery Grant begun in 2002 and we are finishing our first year. The Discovery group at this time is small in size and consists of service providers, educators, and parents. Our group priority is to focus on growing the membership and diversity of

our group over the next year. Several tasks of the Discovery Grant team this year included assessing community needs for young children, sponsoring a Community Conversation on Early Care and Education, and developing a formal report on Torrington's needs around early care and education. The group will use the data collected to map out a strategic plan for the coming years.

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Vernon

Since receiving Discovery Grant funds in January, 2003, the Vernon School Readiness Council focused on several goals:

- ▶ **Increase the Council's membership and gain a better representation of our community**
- ▶ **Increase community awareness of our mission and objectives, and of the importance of early childhood learning**
- ▶ **Provide support for early childhood learning through a variety of different mechanisms**
- ▶ **Create a collaboration of parties interested in early childhood learning, to share information and to create a strong advocacy group for our community's needs in our town.**

To achieve these goals, the Vernon School Readiness Council created and distributed the Kidirectory, a directory of community resources for families in the Vernon Rockville area in October 2002. Members of the School Readiness Council also delivered a presentation to the Town Council and the Board of Education in March, 2003. Additionally, the Council worked with the Mayor to invite our State Representatives to a meeting to discuss members' concerns about funding reductions.

The Council has also provided resources to the community, including a newsletter that provides information on early childhood learning, fairs to promote services available for 3-5 year olds and a local Get Caught Reading Program for preschoolers.

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Wallingford

Wallingford Discovery is committed to ensuring that all families have access to the support they need to raise healthy, happy children who will experience success in school and as members of this community. The Department of Youth and Social Services has taken the lead in convening a group of concerned citizens who are discovering practical ways to improve the lives and education outcomes for Wallingford's children.

To date, the Wallingford Discovery team has charted a map of services and other community assets in the town, scheduled several informal conversations with parent groups and others, and most recently won a highly competitive grant to bring the League of Women Voters back for a more formal, community-wide discussion of early care and education.

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Waterbury

Major accomplishments

- Data:
 - **Parent Focus Groups** were conducted October 2002-January 2003.
 - **Child Outcome Data**- Screening scores, retention rates, absenteeism data and special education participation on children entering kindergarten 2001.
 - **Early Care & Education Experiences** of children prior to entering kindergarten-a parent survey was completed in the summer of 2002.
- The **Waterbury Community Conversation** about early childhood education and childcare was conducted May 3, 2003 at Kennedy High School.
- **Strategic Planning Session**- on June 25, 2003. The WSR Council is looking forward to broadening its mission, vision and goals to act as the cohesive collaborative body for the City of Waterbury with respect to all early care and education planning and development tasks for children birth to eight.

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West Hartford

The Discovery Project 2002 hired consultants to gather information on the supply of childcare, preschool, social services, health care and dental care for children birth to eight years old. Transportation access to these services was also researched. The results were then compiled into a report of services and issues surrounding early care and education in West Hartford. The Discovery Project also organized a Community Conversation on

Early Care and Education, under the direction of the League of Women Voters. This information will help us to fine tune an action plan to meet the needs of West Hartford families with young children.

Our goal is that all West Hartford children, aged three to five, will have access to affordable, high quality early education so they enter kindergarten with the necessary learning and life skills. This year our objectives are to expand the Discovery Team to include a broader representation of the community, develop our mission and a public statement of beliefs, values, objectives and strategies, organize support to implement the action plans and provide growth and learning opportunities for the collaborative committee members.

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West Haven

The West Haven Discovery team goals are to build strong connections between early care and elementary education and to improve students' social, emotional and academic performances.

Our partners include ACES, the West Haven Department of Priority Grants and Title 1, the West Haven Family Resource Center, the West Haven Pupil Personnel Department, the West Haven School Social Work and Nursing Departments, the West Haven Public Housing Authority, West Haven Youth and Family Services, the West Haven Family Daycare Provider Network, the West Haven Drug and Alcohol Task Force, West Haven School Readiness, Hill Health Center, VNA Services, VNA Well Child Clinic, the West Haven Department of Public Health and parents who are raising their families in West Haven.

The Discovery team has been engaging parents across the city by providing opportunities for small forums and focus groups where we have been able to assess the needs of the community through our "Celebrating Community" events at the Spring Heights Housing Development.

We have found these gatherings to be very informative and of assistance to us in understanding the complexities, wants and needs of the West Haven community of Spring Heights as our first action research community.

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Windham

Windham employed the following strategies during the first half of this year.

- Assess the current status of parent involvement in their children's education from the perspectives of parents and administrators
- Develop and disseminate resources for parents, teachers, and administrators that support parent engagement and parent advocacy
- Support the revitalization of the Windham Parent Network
- Support community events through the Windham Parent Network that provide opportunities for disseminating information, community building, and recruiting parents for engagement and advocacy activities.
- Develop a working relationship with Windham Public Schools

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Windsor

Windsor is currently in the second year of its Discovery work, which is managed by a group called Windsor's Healthy People, a collaboration that includes town agencies, the schools and community members. In the first year, we worked with consultants from the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council to gather information related to the quality and quantity of child care and early education. This data was collected through an initial Community Forum, through a number of focus groups and through surveys that were distributed to all parents of kindergarten students and to all child care providers in town. As a result of this process, we discovered concerns in the areas of cost, hours, availability, quality, information, activity offerings and diversity. The information was compiled and communicated through a final report and a short, informational brochure.

In the second year, our plans include hiring a part-time Discovery coordinator to develop and support an Early Childhood Council; recruiting parents and child care providers to serve on that council; developing a plan for informing and engaging other town and school leaders; developing a communications plan; developing a training/education plan; and beginning to implement the various plans developed.

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Winsted

We have been working on our Community Assessments. They were distributed through our public schools and all of our childcare facilities in the community. When we get them back, we will complete a final report for our needs in Winsted and focus our four-year plan on these issues.

We have been working with a group called Concerned Parents with all of our budget issues. We have had several focus groups on related topics concerning these issues. We are trying to get more parent involvement in our community. The Concerned Parents group has been a great support in involving the parents in the community.

We also created educational workshops for our parents and our teachers. Every week we have scheduled trainings focusing on topics of concern. We offer trainings to all childcare providers to try and limit duplication of services. We created PAT meetings at Bachelor School where representatives from each childcare facility give input on children with concerns. We implement action plans for these children. We have Preschool Network meetings once monthly. This is helping to close the gaps between the public schools and childcare facilities.

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