

DISCO



Discovery 2011

A Decade of Difference: 2001 - 2011

VERY

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund was created in 1946 by Archibald R. Graustein in honor of his brother, a Professor of Mathematics at Harvard University, who had died tragically in an automobile accident in 1941. The son of an immigrant, Adolf Graustein, Archibald had five siblings, all of whom graduated from college and achieved prominence in their careers. These children of an immigrant won success through education. Archibald believed that academic accomplishment could benefit both individuals and society as a whole. In 1993, the Trustees established a mission that reflects the enduring values that the Memorial Fund seeks to promote as a memorial to its namesake.

The mission of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund is to improve the effectiveness of education in fostering both personal development and leadership.

The storyteller figure symbolizes the values of the Memorial Fund —
educating, supporting and inspiring our children.



For more detailed information, please contact us at:
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DISCOVERY

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Stone Soup

Stone Soup got its name from the folk tale by that name. In the story, a stranger wanders into a small village. Without a cent and no food he begins to make soup. After building a fire he asks to borrow a pot. He fills it with water and places a stone into it. Before long, the villagers come to watch to see how this man will make soup from a stone. He stirs and smells the vapors with delight. And he suggests from time to time that the soup would benefit from an onion or a carrot – which the villagers agree to bring him. In the end, of course, with the help of all assembled, he has made a pot of delicious soup – all from a stone!

For us Stone Soup is a metaphor for the Discovery initiative. The two core values of Discovery are collaboration and parent engagement and leadership. We are guided by the belief that families, schools and communities are partners in the rearing and education of children and that those working in education and in communities are most effective when all stakeholders work together to develop leadership, to set goals, to advocate for policy changes, and to evaluate continuously the effectiveness of current programs. In other words, we believe it takes a village.

In the decade since Discovery's inception, "the village" of communities and statewide partners has made invaluable contributions toward improving the lives of our youngest children. We asked them, in their own words, to highlight a significant achievement that advanced the cause of early care and education and/or community and parent engagement. These stories are a mere sampling of those accomplishments.

This publication comes at an exciting time for early childhood advocates in Connecticut. On October 17, 2011, Governor Malloy signed Executive Order No. 11, establishing an Early Childhood Office within the Office of Policy and Management. The Executive Order requires the creation of a coordinated system of early care and education and child development by July 1, 2013. Throughout his campaign and tenure in office, Governor Malloy has repeatedly stated that his Administration is committed to ensuring that Connecticut's children have access to high-quality care and education. With the Governor's support and the passion and commitment of Discovery communities and statewide partners, we are making strides towards achieving our desired population result:

Connecticut children of all races and income levels are ready for school by age five and are successful learners by age nine.

David M. Nee, Executive Director
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund



DISCOVERY COMMUNITIES

Discovery offers grants and capacity building to 53 communities and six statewide partners. Currently Discovery offers capacity building in the areas of collaboration, parent engagement, results-based accountability, community planning and decision-making, and facilitative leadership. Other Discovery elements include knowledge sharing, communications, and partnerships.

2011 Discovery Communities: Over half of Connecticut's children, from birth through age 17, live in these communities, according to the 2000 Census.

Ansonia	Hamden	Shelton
Ashford	Hartford	Southington
Bloomfield	Killingly	Stafford
Branford	Lisbon	Stamford
Bridgeport	Manchester	Stratford
Bristol	Mansfield	Thompson
Chaplin	Meriden	Torrington
Colchester	Middletown	Vernon
Coventry	Milford	Wallingford
Danbury	Naugatuck	Waterbury
Derby	New Britain	Wethersfield
East Hartford	New Haven	West Hartford
East Haven	New London	West Haven
Enfield	Norwalk	Winchester
Granby	Norwich	Windham
Greenwich	Plainfield	Windsor
Griswold	Plymouth	
Groton	Putnam	

These are among the communities identified by the State Department of Education as priority or other districts qualifying for school readiness funding. More information is available on the Discovery website: www.discovery.wcgmf.org.

Bridgeport Alliance For Young Children



In this age of global and instant information we are sometimes struck by our inability to communicate the simplest information to our closest neighbors. We spend so much time connecting with technology that we have forgotten the time-honored tradition of “word of mouth.”

The Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children decided to address a need for better communication by creating an opportunity to reach parents in their community in a more comprehensive way. The Community Messenger Program was born.

The program was piloted in 2009 with only seven parents, as a citywide grassroots vehicle of communication across ten very diverse Bridgeport neighborhoods. In only two years it has grown to include 34 active volunteers in the program and parents are already registering for 2012.

At the core of the Community Messengers program is the idea that leaders, who have the trust of their neighborhood, can help connect their neighbors to resources in their community. These leaders are members of Parent Advisory Council (PAC), Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) graduates, and parent leaders for Boy Scouts, Head Start, churches and their neighborhoods. They are black, Hispanic and white. Because they represent all of the city’s neighborhoods these parents have the ability to overcome barriers seen and unseen.

BAYC provides cross training of parent volunteers. Their 12-hour training uses specialists from a wide array of local and

state agencies providing an overview of their services and points of entry for those who are in need of these services.

As Community Messengers, parents spread the word about programs and services in their own neighborhood. They point their neighbors in the right direction, help complete applications like HUSKY, SNAP and fuel assistance, and share announcements of free activities for families to learn and play together.

It demonstrates first-hand that parents and caregivers should be empowered with information, family-centered, family-driven support and the skills needed to ensure that they are their children’s first and most important teacher.

As a result of the Community Messengers Program, the BAYC Parent email list has grown to more than 400 contacts, and increased traffic on the BAYC website to over 15,000 visitors. We estimate that more than 2,500 families will be touched by one of the BAYC Messengers during the next year.

The Messengers have been called “town criers,” “walking yellow pages,” and “211 in town.” They call themselves, “a resource you can trust.”

The Collaborative for Colchester's Children

Involvement can be defined as the act of taking part in an activity, event, or situation as well as the interest or enthusiasm that you feel for something. Involvement is about one finding meaning.

Simple, yet full of complexities, involvement is a prerequisite for any successful Discovery Community. Colchester's Discovery initiative, The Collaborative for Colchester's Children (C3), can proudly say that we do in fact possess the incredibly important and sometimes elusive element of involvement in our early childhood efforts. That is, this energy fuels our very existence and has become a staple for our sustenance. One can ask: How long can this energy possibly last, especially since involvement can have a relatively short lifespan? Well, no one can be sure, however, what we have experienced in Colchester is that when one finds meaning in what they do, people seek to become involved and remain committed.

C3 has a remarkable amount of parental involvement in varying degrees, from leadership positions to the one-time volunteer opportunity. Currently, five parents hold leadership positions on our Collaborative. Most members of our School Readiness/Discovery Council have remained with full dedication to their positions for all of our six years. Local leadership has modeled

a high degree of involvement from our onset. Both our Superintendent of Schools and First Selectman are actively involved and each has woven C3 into the work of their respective positions. Amazingly, we consistently have a 70.5% attendance rate at the meetings of all of our 7 early childhood sub-groups.

Involvement in Colchester has another face as well. Take for example, a high school marketing class. Not a usual suspect for a community driven initiative that focuses on children birth through age eight. However, when challenged with developing a public relations and marketing plan for C3 that needed to be implemented with either a no cost or a low cost budget, the outcome was something to marvel at. Their passion and energy is evident in who we have become.

Our local leadership, parents, community members, and our students are discovering personal meaning in supporting our youngest citizens. Their involvement is the foundation of our success. In their involvement, they have found meaning.

Coventry Discovery Collaborative



The Coventry STEPS—Sharing Together Enriches Potential Success—Committee was formed in 2005 with a grant from the State Department of Education.

The Coventry STEPS (Sharing Together Enriches Potential Success) Committee was first formed in 2005 when Coventry received the School Readiness Grant from the State Department of Education. In 2008 we received a Discovery Grant which helped us widen our focus to address the community's needs of children birth to age eight with a specific focus on the pre-school population and their families. Since receiving the grant Coventry has made great strides in our early care and education initiatives.

One accomplishment that we are particularly proud of is that the Town of Coventry now sends out a birth packet to each family who has a new baby. The packet is filled with information such as Library Services, WIC, Human Services and our recently published Resource Guide. The Resource Guide is an 8-page brochure which contains information for families with young children. The birth packets were made possible through the hard

work of our Discovery Collaborative and with the support of our Town Manager, John Elsseser and Town Clerk, Susan Cyr. The Discovery Collaborative gathers all of the materials and then our Town Clerk puts the packets together and sends them out to residents when the copies of the birth certificates arrive in her office. We have received positive feedback from the birth packets and we plan on adding more information to the packets in the coming months.

By bringing together families, schools, and community leaders, we are making progress on ensuring that all families have access to early childhood development resources and that they have the information necessary to make the appropriate decisions for their child in regard to early care and education. We want to ensure that all children in Coventry have enhanced early learning experiences.



Danbury Discovery

Ten years of Discovery work in Danbury have proven that parents can make a difference, not just in our city, but also in statewide policy decisions that have a profound impact on the future of young children.

Our Discovery initiatives, in partnership with Danbury's PLTI and PEP programs, have led to more family-friendly schools and workplaces, broadened the understanding in the community about the importance of early childhood, and changed state educational policy.

Parental involvement and collaboration are the cornerstones to the success of these programs. Discovery, PLTI, and PEP teach parents that their own voices and personal stories can change the way lawmakers think and act. Parents traveled to the Capitol to talk to legislators, and met them here in Danbury. They had the opportunity to express, in their own words, how early childhood programs have benefited their children, their families, and the quality of life in Danbury.

Patricia Morocho, mother of Evelyn, age 3, spoke to Rep. Bob Godfrey about the impact the Morris Street Family Resource Center has had on her life. "Since we began attending the playgroup, Evelyn has learned her numbers and her letters. We love going there. I know she

will be able to succeed." Patricia benefitted from the Family Resource Center's home visiting program, as well as the playgroup. Lauren Halpin, mother of Alex, 6, and David, 3, explained how her oldest son benefitted from state-funded early intervention services and the developmental preschool at Danbury's Mill Ridge Primary School. Alex, who had speech and developmental delays, is now in first grade and reading at the second-grade level. She explained that, "without these programs, Alex may have needed special education services."

Parents learned first-hand that they do have power and they can be involved in the democratic process regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic background.

These activities, and many more PLTI and PEP projects, have made Danbury a better place to live and raise a family. Everyone in Danbury—from our State Representatives, to our City Officials, to our School Administrators—now know that Danbury parents are a powerful force to be reckoned with!

East Hartford Early Childhood Discovery



Community collaboration at all levels is an essential element in the success of any project.

This was certainly the case on April 9, 2011 when the East Hartford Early Childhood Discovery Committee, East Hartford School Readiness, and the East Hartford YMCA teamed up to present the first East Hartford Preschool and Kindergarten Fair and the YMCA Healthy Kids Day.

The event, held at the East Hartford Community Center, provided entertainment for children and families such as a live petting zoo, a magic show, a Zumba demonstration, a police dog exhibition, and a bounce house. Community agencies and services that were family-oriented in nature shared information concerning kindergarten registration, early childhood care and education, and health services.

The event brought in over 50 families with 25 families receiving packets of information and kindergarten backpacks, courtesy of the East Hartford School Readiness Council, concerning registration procedures for kindergarten at the East Hartford Public Schools. Because of the overwhelming success of this event our collaborators and partner agencies have already begun planning for the 2012 Fair.



Enfield Key Initiatives to Early Education - KITE

What makes this effort different than any other reading initiative is the recognition factor.

Enfield KITE (Key Initiatives to Early Education) is a collaborative effort aimed at enhancing early education and child-care opportunities in the Town of Enfield. It is a group of community members consisting of Enfield residents, including parents, businesses, civic organizations, health care providers, religious communities and educators. This group has worked tirelessly to roll out a unique town-wide program, the First Readers Initiative which currently includes kindergarten and 1st Grade students.

KITE, in collaboration with the Enfield Public and Parochial Schools, select developmentally appropriate books for children to read when their teachers feel they are just making the transition to becoming fluent readers. When the child reads one of the designated books fluently, he or she is named a First Reader!

What makes this different than any other reading initiative is the recognition factor.

The Enfield KITE Readers committee felt it was time for reading to be celebrated and recognized just like birthdays, graduations and other significant milestones. The plan was to celebrate each young reader's achievement with their family and the community.

The young reader receives a certificate for their accomplishment and a medal they can proudly display. They also receive a T-shirt that says "I Can Read." Parents are notified of this achievement and are invited to a special town recognition ceremony. Parents even receive a lawn sign that says, "A First Reader Lives Here."

Red Robin Restaurant has supported the initiative with a sister program for summer reading called "Reading with Red," and additional funding has come from the Enfield Rotary Club. KITE hopes other organizations and businesses will follow suit in supporting the First Readers Initiative.

Groton: Literally A Tale of Two Cities

When Children First Groton first organized they committed to embracing Groton's uniqueness as well as honoring its separate and individual neighborhoods. They embraced the diversity of ethnicities and culture in each community.

Groton is often cited for being the home of the US Naval Submarine Base, but Groton is also unique in its municipal makeup. It is a city and a town with distinct governmental structures. The prime catalyst for CFG's success in encompassing community involvement was the group's town-wide community events. These community events, designed to acknowledge and embrace the already naturally formed neighborhoods in Groton, brought 75-100 people together to start working toward common goals for children and families.

The work accomplished during these community wide events provided a segue to our current community planning efforts. During each event, baby sitting with entertainment for the children and dinner was provided. At the first session, we broke people into 5 different neighborhood groups representing the different areas in Groton. Individuals self-selected which group they identified themselves with overall. The groupings were meant to help individuals better solidify relationships in their neighborhoods, to strengthen Groton, with all neighborhoods working toward the same overarching goal town-wide.

By reaching out into the community and building relationships first, we have been able to build a large community, rich with diversity, and representative of the interests of stakeholders.

Children First Groton acted as the convener only, and guided the community as it began working together to create a town-wide result statement. By the time community planning started in Groton, the community had undertaken a town-wide interview protocol of key stakeholders, asset mapping created pockets of active stakeholders in every section of Groton, and solidified relationships with stakeholders of all levels.

We currently have five well-formed, actively involved neighborhood groups. These groups meet regularly, and are largely comprised of parents and residents in the community. They work on the community plan and other interests they have together.

There are many new relationships and resources that exist now because of our Discovery work that would not have been present without this initiative. At a neighborhood level, businesses, individuals and municipal budgets have been mobilized to assist with our work. City and Town resources are both being allocated in different ways to support this initiative. These relationships are thriving now because of the work we have done in engaging the entire community. There is empowerment, excitement, and energy because of the work Children First Groton has done to create relationships across the entire system.

Hamden's Partnership For Young Children

A significant accomplishment for Hamden's Partnership for Young Children through its Discovery initiative is not a single event but a series of actions that have occurred over time related to the transition of children to kindergarten.

The progress has not been quick and linear. A gradual awareness by the professionals involved of the similarities and differences between preschool and kindergarten, the need to provide everyone involved with more information, and the need to adjust the logistics to make them family friendly and more effective.

The continued effort by the Partnership to reach out and facilitate communication provided multiple forums for issues related to transition issues to be raised. Prior to Discovery, there wasn't an entity that pulled together Hamden's early childhood community. Partnership Meetings, workshops offered to early childhood providers, and monthly meetings with Early Childhood Administrators, all started as part of the Discovery initiative and encouraged discussion and examination of what was working well and where changes were needed. The Partnership then took the lead to coordinate specific events that focused on addressing preschool to kindergarten connection.

Five years ago Preschool and Kindergarten Forums were organized for the staff from these two groups to get to know one another. Kinder-Prep, a parent workshop, gave an opportunity for parents and

children entering kindergarten to visit their school and a monthly series of activities were offered to families during the school year prior to their child entering kindergarten.

The relationship between the Hamden Public Schools and the Partnership was strengthened further when the combined Task Force went through a rigorous process to refine the registration process. They established a common registration form for the district that gathered more information on their preschool experiences and how children are functioning, and increased the availability of the registration packet by putting it online and sending it to early childhood programs as well as licensed family childcare providers.

While parents, preschool and kindergarten staff all agreed there was a need to address transition issues, no one had the role of initiating the actions that could lead to change. With guidance and support from the Discovery initiative, the Partnership was developed and there is now a sense of ongoing responsibility to tackle transition issues.

Middlesex Coalition for Children



Middlesex County, comprised of the City of Middletown and fourteen other towns, committed to work toward improving the lives of our most vulnerable young children and their families in a holistic manner.

We often equate the term “Early Care and Education” with only the educational development of our children. Equally as important are the physical and mental health of the whole child in order for them to thrive.

Our health collaborative, Opportunity Knocks, worked with the Community Health Center to establish a mobile dental program. Children cared for by schools, preschools and childcare programs, WIC, and the Family Wellness Center are provided oral health cleanings and screenings and care coordination for those in need of restorative treatment.

The School Readiness/Discovery Council worked with ACES and a host of partners throughout the County to develop an Early Head Start program that offers home visiting services, socializations, and a classroom experience for two-year olds. The Middlesex Coalition for Children heads the Mayor’s Task Force on Childhood Hunger and has developed the summer lunch program, school back pack program, Salvage Patch Kids, and Farmers Market tokens, and was instrumental in the salvation and reconstitution of our WIC program.

The Middlesex Coalition for Children in partnership with the Middlesex United

Way has established an annual Mothers’ Day / Fathers’ Day Diaper Appeal to raise funds for the Diaper Bank so as to establish Middlesex County as a service area. This past spring, they conducted a county-wide diaper drive for the United Way’s annual Day of Caring. As a result of these efforts, 200 families now receive diapers each month through one of four agencies – Early Head Start, Even Start, the Family Wellness Center, and Nurturing Families Network.

Within all of these undertakings have been huge advocacy efforts to educate legislators and public officials on the need for programs and resources to support young children and their families’ basic needs. Each achievement has made significant contributions towards improving the lives of our most vulnerable young children and their families and all were identified in our community’s early childhood plan as important projects to undertake. They are all initiatives that have advanced Middletown Discovery’s achievements are the perfect example of the true meaning of early care and education of the Whole Child.



Family Childcare Toolkit Licensing Project

A partnership with the New Haven Early Childhood Council, All Our Kin, CT Children's Museum and Family Childcare programs

In 2002, the New Haven School Readiness Council (now the Early Childhood Council), created a Home Care Committee to support family childcare providers and other family, friend and neighbor caregivers' efforts to provide high-quality care and education to the children in their care. These home-based providers play a crucial role as the teachers of our youngest and most vulnerable children. The majority of infants and toddlers are cared for in home-based settings, and children with socioeconomic risk factors are the most likely to be in home-based childcare arrangements (Porter, Paulsell, Del Grosso, Avellar, Hass, & Vuong, 2010). Yet home-based programs vary in quality and are often under-resourced and isolated. Unlicensed programs are at the greatest disadvantage; they lack few connections to a professional childcare community, and there is no guarantee that they meet even minimal quality standards.

The Home Care Committee quickly recognized the struggle that unlicensed caregivers face in navigating the complex and daunting process of family childcare licensure and the myriad of agencies, requirement and documentation needed to achieve licensure. In response, the Committee designed a simple, attractive, incentive-based system for providers, creating four beautiful boxes that combined, in one place, all the paperwork and materials necessary to become licensed.

These included health and safety materials and equipment; vouchers to pay for required trainings, such as first aid and CPR; information about community resources and opportunities; and high-quality materials for children. With one phone call, rather than hundreds, a family childcare program could get all the information and materials they needed to be successful!

The New Haven Early Childhood Council contracted with The Connecticut Children's Museum, the lead agency in the project's design, to create the toolkits. The Council chose All Our Kin, a nonprofit with a strong track record of working with low-income childcare providers, to conduct outreach, distribute the toolkits and provide mentorship, counseling and support to caregivers as they moved through the licensing process.

The project launched in late 2003. Initially, it was funded through a federal Early Learning Opportunities grant to the Council. Later All Our Kin took responsibility for fundraising, obtaining grants from a number of private foundations. The Council also continues to provide financial support.

In 2005, All Our Kin secured private funding to expand the Toolkit program to the neighboring "ring" towns of East Haven, West Haven, and Hamden. To date, the Toolkit program has licensed

Family Childcare Toolkit Licensing Project continued



198 providers, with the capacity to serve nearly 1,200 children, in greater New Haven. The program's success has attracted other communities across Connecticut. All Our Kin, in partnership with The Connecticut Children's Museum, piloted the program in Norwalk and Bridgeport in 2010-2011, and will be expanding the model to additional communities in late 2011.

The Toolkit program's impacts are profound. When a childcare provider becomes licensed by the state, we know that the program meets health and safety standards and operates under state supervision. The result: more children spend the day in safe, healthy settings. Licensing is also transformative for providers. Their earnings increase; they gain pride and professionalism; and they are able to serve more children, and serve them better, with the equipment and training they need to provide safe,

educational childcare. The Toolkit program has significant economic impacts as well: a recently completed study from the University of Connecticut (forthcoming in the fall of 2011) finds that every \$1 invested in the program yields \$17 of macroeconomic benefits to the state.

The Toolkit Program, is increasing the number and quality of childcare choices available to working parents throughout the region, while ensuring that young children have the early learning experiences that will prepare them for success in school and in life. At the same time, we are helping providers make better lives for themselves. A provider licensed through the Toolkit Program best described its guiding values and desired outcomes when she said, "This program helped with everything, everything, everything and walked me through, step-by-step, with so much love. This program has changed my life."

Children First New London

The members of the Children First New London have continually discussed and investigated ways to involve the community in moving forward with positive outcomes for the children of New London.

We are a committed group of volunteers hoping to create helpful solutions for the young people of the city. Working together we have been able to foster collaboration among agencies in order to avoid duplication of services. This has enabled the agencies to increase participation in their family activities, therefore being able to serve more families in New London. These agencies have also shared their funding resources to provide a wide-range of opportunities for the families that might not have been available without the financial support of each of these agencies. Some of the free activities that took place were: child focused socialization and literacy groups, parenting trainings, field trips, family passes to Children's Museum, etc.

Children First New London (CFNL) also thought it was important to involve the local business community. Our first collaboration was with The Garde Arts Theater. They provided free opportunities for families to attend programs. They

continue to be a champion for children by setting a positive example for other businesses who might want to collaborate with Children First New London.

CFNL created a kindergarten transition committee that, along with parents and the New London Public Schools, established a more cohesive transition plan for all the schools in the district. This plan included arranging visits on early dismissal days so that families and preschools were able to send children to their designated kindergarten school.

Families are given an overview of the school by the administrator while children are engaged in the classroom with their teacher, given a snack in the cafeteria and even take a school bus ride with a family member. Young children receive a full kindergarten experience before they enter the classroom in September.

Norwalk Early Childhood Council



The Parents as Teachers Program has been a part of the early childhood culture in Norwalk since the establishment of the three Family Resource Centers in Norwalk in 1998-1999.

Due to the success of the program in helping families of young children, and through funding from the Memorial Fund, the Norwalk Early Childhood Council made the decision to expand the program beyond the FRCs. The Tracey School area in Norwalk with its large Hispanic population was targeted as an area that would benefit from the program. Through recruiting efforts in the school we were easily able to enroll families with children birth to age five during the winter of 2009.

The Parents as Teachers Program is designed to help parents become more knowledgeable about child development, child-rearing practices and the importance of engaging in more language and literacy-promoting behaviors with their children.

This knowledge is shared through early learning groups and home visits. One group in particular, the Tracey Early Learning Group meets weekly during the school year and is facilitated by a certified, Parents as Teachers bilingual parent educator, Paula Trujillo.

This past school year the group consisted of nine families with ten children ranging in age from birth to five-years old. Each group meeting begins with forty-five minutes of free play followed by a small snack and activities such as music and reading. They follow a curriculum with themes like health and hygiene, listening

skills and even the effects of television on young children. As part of the program families can also receive monthly home visits from the parent educator.

Marina V, a participant in the early learning group, feels this is a good thing for her son. "I've seen a big change emotionally and in the development of my son. Before he used to point to the things or used to grab them when he needed it. Now he communicates more using his words."

In the parent survey given to all parents in PAT programs each year, 100% of participating parents reported an increase in engaging their children in early literacy activities and an increased knowledge in child development.

Developmental screenings are part of the Parents as Teachers Program. This has allowed Ms. Trujillo to refer children to the Birth to Three Program for evaluation. She has also been able to connect parents with other community services such as housing assistance, adult education and medical services.

The parents are very committed to this program. Even though they were not scheduled to meet in the summer, the parents continued to get together in their own homes to maintain the strong connections they made during the school year.



Children First Norwich

The most significant and beneficial accomplishment has been our ability to build robust relationships and collaborations between and among a number of individuals, agencies and organizations.

The change of the name to Children First Norwich/School Readiness Council occurred in 2006 and reflected the growing dimension of both the Children First Initiative and the School Readiness Council. We have nearly 30 members, representing many agencies and organizations in Norwich from the health care agencies, early care and education, the public schools, human services, and the community at large. We have recently added the Girl Scouts and the parochial schools to our group. The collaboration between all these groups and individuals extends beyond "Council-specific" activities and has led to greater benefits for the community creating a unique environment for a holistic approach for children and families.

Parent leadership has always been a cornerstone of our work and we've been able to extend that leadership training through the work of one of our PLTI graduates. With significant assistance from the Norwich Youth Services Bureau, we created a curriculum for leadership training, Voices for Families, specifically for residents. Several years ago that curriculum was modified and used with high school youth. For 15 years the Norwich Leadership Team has run classes for both teens and adults. Two years ago, a collaboration with Three Rivers Community College allowed us to enhance the Parent Leadership Training so that participants earn CEUs on completion

of the course. While they are participants in the course, they have privileges of TRCC students to use their facilities and resources. They are counseled about how to pursue their education.

Graduates from Norwich's Parent Leadership program have successfully run for elected offices, have worked at the state Capitol, influenced significant legislation particularly around issues of bullying and continue to work for the benefit of the Norwich community.

Norwich, as with each Discovery community, has been working within the framework of Results Based Accountability—data informs the results achieved. The work being done for the Norwich Community Enhancement Plan around the result, "Our children are healthy," has brought Backus Hospital, the Uncas Health District, Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA), the public and parochial schools and the early care community together to create and implement strategies and actions to improve our children's health, particularly in the area of childhood obesity. For our result, "Our children are safe," we are collaborating with Norwich Human Services, the Department of Social Services, the public schools, the police department and others. We are studying bullying in our schools and neighborhoods and figuring out how to stop it.

Plymouth Discovery Family Literacy Program



Plymouth's journey to improve the early development and education of its children and families really started in 1999 with the Family Literacy Program developed by kindergarten teachers Pam Wessman and Laraine Hogan.

Families attending the program enjoyed literacy-based activities designed to show parents how easy it was to enhance their child's reading and writing skills. The next year the program was expanded thanks to a grant from the Thomaston Savings Bank Foundation, which allowed the program to improve communication between home and school and it provided a free book for each child. It didn't take long to see that the program was something that needed to be extended to all pre-K and kindergarten children throughout Plymouth. This was just the first of many gatherings for the Plymouth Center School Kindergartners and their families.

The Literacy program was a proven success but those same two teachers didn't stop there. With the support of the Family Resource Center at Plymouth Center School, they initiated the first gathering of the Early Readiness Transition Team in 2000 to establish open lines of communication between kindergarten and preschool throughout Plymouth.

In the years that followed the literacy program grew and the partnerships for the Early Readiness Transition Team expanded

to over a dozen. The early childhood collaborative gained momentum and obtained a grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. With the Memorial Fund's investment we were able to expand membership to include staff from our local library, special education programs and home day care providers. The Plymouth Early Childhood Council was formed.

While there is no formal measure to grade the success of the program, it has been documented that third grade CMT scores now surpass the State average. In 2005-2006, Plymouth 3rd grade readers were more than 8% below State average. In 2009-2010, Plymouth 3rd grade readers were more than 2% higher than State average. These statistics indicate that children in Plymouth have improved their literacy significantly.

Today, our Council consists of voices that represent the diversity of Plymouth, creating partnerships and working as a collaborative to ensure that Plymouth's children (birth to age eight) are safe, healthy, and successful.



Stamford Discovery

For the past four years, Stamford's Cove Island Park has come alive in May with children of all ages running in every direction, carrying colorful balloon animals, wearing fireman hats, and covered in face paint.

While children explore Stamford police vehicles and fire engines, learn about endangered animals from The Animal Embassy experts, and listen to such musical groups as The Bossy Frog, preschools, day cares, and community programs set up tables to promote their programs and inform parents about available resources in the community.

The Stamford School Readiness Council's Early Childhood Education Fair: Ready by Five is a free event for Stamford families thanks to a long standing collaboration between the Council, the Stamford Public Schools, the Ferguson Library, the United Way of Western Connecticut, and countless volunteers and supporters. It began as a simple way to introduce families to early childhood programs with just a few interested volunteers leading the way. Now it has grown into a morning of fun and education for over 400 people annually. "It's a really important way to

communicate the importance of early childhood education and the resources available to families in Stamford," School Readiness Chair Bridget Fox said. "We really built an event that is representative of the community and year after year families continue to return." We receive positive feedback from parents each year, many explaining that they would not have learned about preschool programs, or summer activities, or even simple things such as the importance of brushing one's teeth, without this fair.

The Early Childhood Fair committee works tirelessly to secure donations of food and water, entertainment, arts and craft materials, teen volunteers, and more. This year, the Stamford Discovery grant allowed us to defray some of the costs assumed by volunteers and enhance our program with the addition of a sound system.

Torrington's Kindergarten Readiness Fair



In 2008, The Torrington Early Childhood Collaborative created its first All-District Kindergarten Readiness Fair.

Incoming kindergartners and their families were invited to come meet their teachers and learn what they could do to help prepare them for school. The Fair helped raise awareness and increase registration from approximately 60% in 2008 to 90% in 2010.

This event is now a part of the school's transition plan and is funded by multiple partners in the community. The value of this low cost outreach is echoed by many and it has become an anticipated event. Since the first Fair was held over four years ago there has been a trend of improved 3rd Grade CMT scores and surveys on the understanding of the kindergarten registration process have been very positive.



Wallingford Early Childhood Discovery

From the beginning of the Discovery project in Wallingford our team was committed to listening to the families of young children.

The needs and suggestions were used to build a foundation for the Wallingford Early Childhood Alliance Resource and Education (WE CARE) council. But from the start WE CARE realized that there was one significant voice missing in the community. Wallingford is home to a large (8%) population of families from Mexico. After setting WE CARE in place with the help of the Youth and Social Services/Town of Wallingford and support from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, families were invited to participate in free playgroups and parent workshops. Our first playgroup space was provided by our partner, the Wallingford Community Child Care Center. Despite local publicity it became clear that our Hispanic population was not joining the programs. The WE CARE council members discussed the problem and decided to go to the families and ask them how they would like to participate. One of the founding members of the WE CARE council was our local VNA of Wallingford. The VNA had an established program, *Mamas y Mamas*, to provide health related information to the families. So with an invitation from the VNA the first contact was made in late 2006.

WE CARE met with the mothers at a VNA *Mamas y Mamas* meeting to learn what type of programs they would find helpful as they handled the challenges

of parenting their young children in this new community. As with many small but expanding immigrant populations, these parents were seeking the best for their families. They indicated that they would like a program where they and their children could learn and practice English language skills. They also asked for an opportunity to make field trips with their children to area sites. Most of the mothers walked to the VNA from the surrounding neighborhoods and never drove out of Wallingford. The young women were not even sure where the Town of Wallingford's family complex was, so a hand drawn map was created for directions. A bilingual facilitator was hired so that part of the first program offered a PEP class for the mothers with childcare provided in the WE CARE Family Resource Center. On January 27, 2007 the first group of twelve (12) mothers and twenty (20) children were welcomed into the WE CARE Family Resource Center. Their first order of business was choosing a name for their playgroup, which became *Bebes Activos*.

Talk of the first series with both the PEP program and the *Bebes Activos* playgroup quickly spread in the Hispanic community. The participating parents wanted to be able to invite friends and relatives to *Bebes Activos* but many of the mothers did not drive.

Wallingford Early Childhood Discovery *continued*



WE CARE reached out to another community friend and obtained free space and time at the local, downtown Ulbrich Boys and Girls Club. This facility is located right in the middle of the Spanish speaking community. With a large gym it proved to be the perfect place during the winter weather for the children to run and play. The growth of the playgroup to an every Thursday schedule also was blessed with the identification of a parent-leader from within the group. The young mother of four children is a graduate of Lyman Hall High School. She serves as the ideal role model for all of the parents, lends her bilingual expertise to the WE CARE council for translation needs and serves as a thoughtful guide in bringing the Hispanic culture into the community partnership. She is now a full time participant in the WE CARE Council providing direction and planning for the group.

By 2009 *Bebes Activos* had welcomed more parents and preschool children to its weekly playgroups at the two locations. From the beginning of the Discovery project the Wallingford Public Library was a valuable team member. The Children's Section of the library has always offered an expansive array of children's literacy opportunities, the addition of a Pre-K information Fair, and the creation of bilingual flyers and a brochure helped expand the program. By 2010, the library had invited the WE CARE bilingual parent-leader to lead a bilingual story time program at the library -!Me Gustan los Libros!

During the early development of the *Bebes Activos* one very important partner was missing, the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW). This agency was going through a rebuilding effort and when the new director was appointed in early 2010, the doors to SCOW were opened wide and WE CARE and *Bebes Activos* were invited in. Funds from a grant provided by the local Rotary Club foundation assisted in establishing a playgroup and a joint venture with SCOW. *Bebes Activos* is now offered at three locations in Wallingford: the Family Resource Center at YSS; the Ulbrich Boys and Girls Club and The Spanish Community of Wallingford.

WE CARE has been able to open a conversation with families in the Hispanic community through play and friendship. Through *Bebes Activos* parents are learning about the opportunities that exist in town and in the school district. Parent involvement in the Diversity in Action Committee (a group of teachers/administrators/parents) has provided another pathway to learn about working in and with the larger community. Wallingford is fortunate in having this concentrated cultural diversity in its midst. By developing a bond with these young families our community will enjoy a richer future for all who call Wallingford 'home'.

Wethersfield Early Readiness Council

The Wethersfield Early Readiness Council has, since its earliest days, benefitted from a strong partnership with and support from the Wethersfield Public Library.

Over the years, the partnership has grown. For WERC, it's a place we can call home.

Like many smaller collaboratives, WERC has no office or "storefront" to give it a physical presence. The library is a welcoming place for all members of the community – equally accessible to parents, educators, and community and business people. It can provide technology and meeting space when WERC offers professional development, yet its environment is also inviting and familiar to parents and children.

The Wethersfield Public Library has helped broaden the reach of the collaborative because it maintains regular contact with parents of young children, on-site and through town-wide communications. This has been a cost-effective and efficient way for WERC to reach community members with materials such as the Early Childhood Education Resource Guide, which includes daycare provider information, and kindergarten transition materials such as its video on getting ready for kindergarten.

Library staff has literacy expertise and a finger on the pulse of the broader community that's unique among our collaborative. WERC would not have the same insight into community needs, especially around early childhood literacy and English

language learners, without the professional insights of the library staff, particularly its Children's Services Department Manager.

True partnerships are mutually beneficial. Regina Aleksandravicius, Children's Services Manager, sums up the relationship this way "Because libraries need to evolve to meet changing needs of the community, for example—increasing use of technology, more English language learners, and a greater emphasis on fostering literacy skills—we need to continually reinvent ourselves." Regina has become an active member of the Leadership Work Group, the Wethersfield Early Readiness Council, and a key member of our community planning Developmentally Successful Learners Subcommittee. "Being actively engaged in WERC and collaborating with its members connects us to the broader community, expands our circle of relationships, and helps us foster early literacy behaviors and pre-reading skills, a key focus of our overall mission," She concluded.

To say the Wethersfield Public Library is a partner is an understatement. They play a unique and crucial role in our collaborative as a convener, promoter and professional resource.

Winchester Early Care & Education Council



A District-wide Kindergarten Transition Policy

In the spring of 2008, our Discovery group was invited to apply for the Kindergarten Transition Institute sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. With our district's permission, we were one of seven teams selected to participate in the Institute. Our team consisted of an elementary school principal, two kindergarten teachers, the Family Resource Center director, a community preschool director, and a parent. As assigned, we established a secondary team of community members, which included the district's preschool special education teacher, our Head Start family service worker, our local children's librarian, and another parent.

At the second session, our parent, who was feeling frustrated along with other team members because an administrator did not attend, made the following comment: "I don't mind investing time in this project as long as the plan doesn't sit on a shelf when it's completed." That's when we decided that our ultimate goal would be the creation of a policy to be passed by the Board of Education. In our search for a sample policy, we found none. We contacted the State Department of Education, CT Association of Boards of Education, and the CT Center for School Change—a

specific kindergarten transition policy was not known. We concluded that we would have the first of its kind in the state.

Our team leader, Ruthann Horvay, presented a draft policy to the district's administrative council for approval for submission to the BOE's policy committee. In June 2009, our Board of Education unanimously approved the policy.

Although the implementation got off to a slow start due to budget issues and reconfiguration of grades, we are now on schedule to meet the timeline of our initial plan. During this time frame, our Parent Leadership through Civic Engagement course was being offered at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. One of our first graduates is now on our kindergarten transition team and our community planning committee and another sits on the Board of Education and oversees the implementation of our kindergarten transition policy.

Our policy has supported an integrated, continuum of early care and education in our small town and has elevated the importance of and attention to early care and education in our community.



STATEWIDE PARTNERS

All Our Kin: All Our Kin trains, supports and sustains community childcare providers in order to ensure children and families have the foundations necessary for future success. The organization invests in children's first teachers through innovative teaching and learning models that support and engage child care providers from all walks of life and at every stage of their personal and professional development: from parents and caregivers to professional educators and business people.

Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance: The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance is an established membership organization committed to improving developmental outcomes in the areas of learning, health, safety and economic security for children birth to age eight.

Connecticut Parent Power: Connecticut Parent Power is a statewide parent action network with a history of strengthening the voices of parents on the many decisions that affect our children and families.

Community Conversations About Education: "Community Conversations About Education" is a valuable tool for a community to rediscover common ground, disagreements, questions, concerns and next steps. The free and open exchange of ideas in a non-threatening environment has brought hundreds of Connecticut residents to a greater sense of community and a clearer definition of their goals.

Connecticut Center for School Change: The Center is a statewide, intermediary, non-profit organization that works with Connecticut's school districts to increase student achievement.

Connecticut Association for Human Services: Founded in 1910, the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) promotes family economic security strategies that empower low-income working families to achieve financial security. Through the unique role as a catalyst and convener, CAHS works to end poverty and engage, equip and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

Connecticut Voices for Children: Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families by advocating for strategic public investments and wise public policies. Connecticut Voices for Children advances its mission through high quality research and analysis, strategic communications, citizen education, and development of the next generation of advocates.

Building an Early Care and Education Listserv

The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) coordinates the Early Childhood and Education (ECE) listserv as a means of connecting individuals and professionals interested in early care and education, sharing important research, and disseminating information pertaining to the legislature. Since its inception in 2005, the listserv has grown to nearly 800 participants.

Information is sent out via the ECE listserv on a daily basis. From job postings to educational opportunities, the listserv provides participants with information that they can use in their everyday professional and private lives. The listserv has also served as a wonderful tool for keeping the early care and education community apprised of legislative changes and for mobilizing people to take legislative action.

Most recently, CAHS used the ECE listserv to keep participants informed of the Governor's proposed Plan B budget cuts

to early care and education programs. Because of the large participant base, we were able to receive pertinent information in a timely manner on what the exact impact of those proposed cuts would have on ECE programs. This information was then used to inform key legislative leaders.

In the past few years, as more demands have been placed on people's time and resources have continue to dwindle, the ECE listserv has provided an opportunity for everyone to stay engaged even if they cannot attend a meeting or be at a hearing. One ECE listserv participant recently called the listserv, "a valuable and important resource for relevant legislative information." CAHS looks forward to our continued work in managing the ECE listserv and to ensuring that useful and relevant information is distributed.



CT Early Childhood Alliance

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance is a group of organizations and individuals committed to improving developmental outcomes in the areas of learning, health, safety and economic security for children ages birth to eight.

Over 4,000 individuals in Connecticut support the Alliance as "Friends." Our member organizations employ over 3,000 Connecticut residents and provide care and education for nearly 20,000 children.

Over the past decade, the CT Early Childhood Alliance has successfully built a unified constituency for early childhood policy in the state. With a growing, vibrant and engaged membership working with one voice, the Alliance continues to gain momentum around a vision that all children in Connecticut will enter

kindergarten healthy, eager and ready for school success. The Alliance has supported communities, parents and providers to become stronger advocates through enhanced communications, media engagement and advocacy events.

Together we have fought budget cuts to early childhood programs and celebrated victories, including the passage of Senate Bill 1103, which creates a plan for a more coordinated early childhood system.

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