



SUPPORT FOR EARLY LEARNING & FAMILIES

January - February 2012

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

In the field of early education we often talk about parents being their child's first teacher. As a young mother I never thought of myself as a teacher. Are parents "teachers"? The dictionary defines teacher as "one that teaches"; and it defines "teaches" as "to impart the knowledge". So what do you think? Are parents "teachers"? I think the answer is yes, not only are parents teachers we are "teachers" for a lifetime.

Parenting has been the most rewarding and challenging experience of my life. There were times when I wondered why anyone let me go home with a baby I mean really were they crazy???? Did they know how little I knew about raising a child? Even the people I know with advanced degrees in early childhood education find applying their knowledge to their own child tricky. More than once I've heard an early childhood educator say they never felt so stupid when it came to parenting.

There is a lot of research that gives us insights into what children need, and how we can help them be ready for kindergarten. This research is important information that must inform our practices, policies, and the allocation of limited resources. However as a parent it's important to know that many of the things you do every day are the things children need.

So what do children need? As our child's first teacher what should we do?

In short our children need us, our love, our time, our attention. They need us set boundaries, and to love them unconditionally, to play, read and laugh with them. They need to know that through the ups and downs of life they can count on us to be there for them. None of us are perfect, we won't be perfect parents, but our children don't need perfection.

My children now range in age from 26-32. Did I do everything perfectly? No. Were there times when I had no idea what to do? Absolutely! Are there things I wish I'd done differently? Of course. Through the trials and errors as a parent one thing that has always remained consistent was my love for them and my willingness to be the best parent I knew how to be. What is interesting is that while I taught them many things in the end I learned so much from them. We learned and we grew together.

"While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about." ~Angela Schwindt

Debbie Ham
Director of SELF

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT - EOCF

Educational Opportunities for Children & Families (EOCF) has been a provider of comprehensive early learning/child and family services in Clark County and southwest Washington for 45 years. EOCF was the original Head Start grantee agency for Clark County when Head Start began nationally in the 1960's. Here's a brief summary of the services EOCF provides in Clark, Cowlitz, and Pacific counties:

Head Start: 533 children/families are served in a combination of full-day/full-year and part-day/part-year center-based as well as home-based education option models in Clark and Pacific Counties and the Woodland School District portion of Cowlitz County. Head Start includes high quality preschool education for 3-5 year old children who qualify by low-income or disability for service. Virtually all children served in this program are from very low-income families. In addition to the quality preschool education, comprehensive family services such as dental/medical screenings, hearing/vision screenings, parent training opportunities, and assessment/referral to needed community resource services occur through trained Teachers and Family Advocates. Parent leadership opportunities exist through the Policy Council, which shares governance of the agency with the Board of Directors and is representative of the various centers and program options in Head Start/Early Head Start/ECEAP.

Early Head Start: EOCF provides this service to 86 children/families prenatal-age 3 who are served in both center-based and home-based program options in Clark County. The same comprehensive family services are provided by Child/Family Educators and Family Advocates who specialize in services to the prenatal-age 3 population. Like Head Start, all children served are from low-income families and many have identified disabilities.

- Head Start and Early Head Start are funded by the United States federal government and, in our service area, funding is provided to serve only about 25% of eligible children.

ECEAP: The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program: This program is funded by the State of Washington and administered by the Department of Early Learning. EOCF serves 395 children in part-day, part year centers located in various parts of the Vancouver and Evergreen School Districts. Comprehensive

child and family services, such as those described above, are also provided in the ECEAP program. The program is designed to serve primarily children who are 4 years of age and is the state's premier "school readiness" program.

ESIT: Early Support for Infants and Toddlers: EOCF is the Lead Agency for Clark County for this program that provides developmental screenings and service referrals for any child age birth to 3 having or suspected of having developmental disabilities. Services are provided through Family Resource Coordinators and between 300-500 children are served by this program each year. The program is funded through the State of Washington Department of Early Learning with federal dollars passed through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) funding stream. This program is provided without regard to income to any resident of Clark County birth-age 3.

HotShots Youth Basketball: This youth basketball program for elementary aged children is a fee-for-service team sport activity designed to teach fundamentals of basketball in a fun environment stressing fair play, equal playing time opportunities, and physical fitness in a fun competitive atmosphere. This program serves nearly 1,000 children each year in Clark County.

All programs operated by EOCF stress family engagement and involvement as the cornerstone of healthy early learning that provides the foundation for readiness for school and for life. EOCF is governed by a Board of Directors and an elected Policy Council consisting of representatives of parents served by Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP as well as community representatives.

EOCF employs 260 persons and has an annual budget of nearly \$11 Million. EOCF is the 2nd largest social services non-profit agency in Clark County.

EOCF recently relocated its administrative offices from its long-time home in Orchards to the Tech Center area of east Vancouver. The address of the EOCF Administrative Offices is 17800 SE Mill Plain Blvd., Suite 150; Vancouver, WA 98683. The telephone number remains the same: 360-896-9912. EOCF's website, containing further information about program offerings, is www.eocfwa.org. SELF partners and other community members desiring information can contact EOCF during regular business hours, 8:00-5:00, M-F.

continues on the next page

HONORING FAMILIES AS THE CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

"Every child needs to spend time with someone who thinks they are more important than other people's kids, someone who's in love with him or her, and whom he or she loves in return." --Uri Bronfenbrenner, 1989

What Bronfenbrenner says is true--"children need to feel valued and loved by the adults in their lives, and their first and most important experience with this is with their parents. But more than that, parents and other important family members are the child's first teacher. These adults are there from the moment the child is born, forming critical emotional bonds that support later learning, responding to the child's needs in loving, nurturing ways and beginning the process of lifelong learning with the child.

The role of the family as teacher doesn't stop when children enter early learning or public school programs. In every waking moment, young children are learning. Their brains are wired to soak up information like sponges, so everything parents and other family members do with children is sending important information and building new connections in their brain. It is less important to focus on academic skills and preparation than to build and nurture a strong, positive relationship with children. This relationship forms the foundation for self-esteem and trust, and allows later academic learning to take place.

The importance of family involvement has been well researched, and it has several important effects on children's success in school. According to the North Carolina State Cooperative Extension (2003), "when families are involved:

Children do better in school and in life. They are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, graduate from high school and go to college.

Parents develop confidence by helping their children learn at home. Many parents go on to further their own education and become active in the community.

Teacher morale improves. Teachers who work with families expect more from students and feel a stronger connection to and support from the community.

The quality of the schools improves. When parents are involved at home and at school, the performance of all children in the school tends to improve.

Communities grow stronger. Families feel more invested in the school system, and the school system becomes more responsive to parent and community needs."

Family plays such a vital role in early learning and in the life of each child, as well as having a significant impact on schools and the community. Parents, caregivers and teachers can continue to work together to strengthen relationships between the adults as well as honoring the role of the family in the child's education.

For more information:

Websites:

Love. Talk. Play.

Parent Teacher Relationships

Growing Children

Books:

The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish by Brazelton and Greenspan

You Are Your Child's First Teacher: What Parents Can Do With and For Their Children from Birth to Age Six by Rahmina Baldwin Dancy and Rahmina Baldwin

Parents are Teachers, Too: Enriching and Encouraging Your Child's First Twelve Years by Claudia Jones

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Play Group Opportunity for Children with Special Needs!

Parent to Parent, part of the services provided by the ARC of Clark County, is offering a monthly play group for children with special needs and their families. Club Upside provides an opportunity for parents to share and special children to play. All ages and abilities are welcome.

Club Upside

Every 2nd Saturday of the month at 2:00 pm

St. Andrews Lutheran Church

5607 NE Gher Rd, Vancouver, WA

Contact Brenda Tyrrell at (360) 953-1597 with any questions or for more information!

Children's Dental Health Day--Free Dental Care

Free care for Clark and Skamania County children up to age 19 with dental problems. The event serves families who have limited income and no dental insurance. Services provided include X-rays, sealants, fluoride treatment, fillings, and extractions.

Saturday, February 4, 2012

7:30-4:00

Clark College Dental Hygiene Clinic

1933 Fort Vancouver Way

Call for an appointment: 360-397-8000 Ext. 7371 or 360-397-8020

Celebrate the Chinese New Year at the Library!

The event features an introduction of Chinese New Year customs and history, performances including singing, dancing, martial arts demonstration, Gu Zheng (Chinese musical instrument) and lion dance, and craft activities will be available on Level 3 after the program.

2012: Year of the Dragon

Gung Hay Fat Choy (Wish You Prosperity)

Sunday, January 29, 2012

2:30 pm

Free admission

Vancouver Community Library

Level 1 - Columbia Room

901 C Street, Vancouver, WA