



Focus Group Conclusions & Recommendations

Submitted March 2008 by:



Introduction

CERC conducted four focus group sessions to obtain qualitative information:

3/17/08 in Wethersfield (Hartford area)	Group A1 – 10 parents/caregivers Group B1 – 10 service providers
3/18/08 in North Haven (New Haven area)	Group A2 – 12 parents/caregivers Group B2 – 13 service providers

Parents/ Primary Caregivers' Views of Initiative/Programs

- Many from both sessions had heard of the phrase “Ready by Five & Fine by Nine,” but were not familiar with the “Early Childhood Education Cabinet” or the “Early Childhood Research and Policy Council.”
- Few from each group reported having utilized state/local programs; of those who had, the most frequently mentioned were School Readiness and Head Start, Making Connections, Mayor’s program, Birth to Three, Early Learning Center, Discovery Collaborative.
- Most learned of the programs through friends, family or previously enrolled in the program.
- Parents/Caregivers reported the following obstacles to access available programs and services:
 - Limited slots, accessibility, transportation, costs, don’t know the program exists, unsure of quality, not trained for SPED kids, inconvenient hours (need before and after school programs); language barriers; state workers are “a problem”

Parents/Primary Caregivers' Views of State Agencies

- Parents/Caregivers report that state workers are “not helpful,” “judgmental,” have “poor attitudes.” They feel that state workers provide only partial information (if at all) when asked, and do not follow up.
- Perception is that the state needs people who really care and want to help.
- Parents/Caregivers have very low level of knowledge about available programs and services, but report that they would not be inclined to contact a state agency for information.
- Many said they have never been contacted by a state agency to give parents information about available programs and services.
- Parents/Caregivers were asked “How could the state do a better job?”
 - More outreach; door-to-door; get out into the community with the information
 - Advertising, more marketing
 - Training for state workers on how to treat people with respect

Best Methods of Communication Reported by Parents/Primary Caregivers

- #1 source mentioned was Info Line 211
- Community organizations and churches; pediatricians/new mothers
- Grocery stores and malls (SavALot, Stop & Shop, Save More)
- Fairs in parks where service providers are there with their materials
- Registration for kindergarten set up at malls
- Flyers at the Laundromat, libraries, around the community, in kids back packs
- Newspapers – Northend Agent, West Indian News, Hartford Inquirer (not the Hartford Courant, referred to as “the Country Courant”), Hispanic papers
- Billboards and bus cards
- Brochures, newsletters
- Public Access TV (Channel 5, 19, 21); Network TV Channels 3 & 8
- Internet, email

Messaging to Parents/Primary Caregivers

- Tone: Simple, respectful, sincere
- Sample headlines: “Do you need help with your child’s care?” “Do you want your child to have the best in life?”
- Messenger: Another parent or a group of children, someone they can immediately identify with. NOTE: They’re less likely to accept an advertising message from a “trusted source” i.e. teacher, physician, celebrities
- Content and format: Use facts about child success rates; make it colorful, bold, quick, 2-3 bullets

Service Providers' Views About Parents/Caregivers

- Parents need to be educated about proper child development, care, education.
- Parents don't understand that "playing" is part of learning. Believe that children can "play at home"; in a program, the child is "here to learn."
- Parents think that if children don't have a pencil in their hand, they're not learning.
- Parents and families are needier than in years past, and very pressed for time.
- The world of education has changed over the years; roles of traditional mom and dad are different today.
- Parents of various cultures experience a stigma about using services.
- Parents think of the service provider as a "glorified babysitter."

Service Providers' Views About Themselves

ABOUT THEMSELVES

- Need additional funding; better facilities
- Accreditation process is “ridiculous”
- Have a lack of proper programs/facilities for SPED
- Experience language, cultural and social barriers/issues
- Parents can't afford their programs

OUTREACH METHODS SERVICE PROVIDERS USE NOW

- Local newspaper ads; in movie theatres
- United Way does a good job with their marketing
- Parent advocacy groups, physicians offices, day care centers
- Mail brochures and emails to libraries and community groups
- Conduct presentations

Service Providers' Views of State Agencies

- The level of knowledge about state programs/services is very low.
- State workers are viewed as “not helpful.”
- State workers don't provide information.
- There is a lack of outreach to service providers.
- State agencies constantly lose paperwork (finger prints, medical records).

Best Methods of Communication Reported by Service Providers

- Internet
- Other providers
- Community Organizations (Body Shop)
- Newspaper and movie theatre ads
- Open Houses

- Messaging to Service Providers
 - More funding/support, less paperwork
 - Better training is available

- Messaging to reach Parents/Caregivers
 - “This is in the best interest for your child”
 - “Let your child make their own choice through play”