

**FEASIBILITY STUDY
REGARDING
THE VIABILITY
OF A
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER
IN
GRANBY**

Prepared by:

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For the:

Granby Early Childhood Council



Background:

The Granby Early Childhood Council (GECC) is interested in assessing community interest regarding the viability of a Family Resource Center (FRC) in Granby. The concept of a FRC, or a place where parents go for a variety of parenting and family support services, is one that many states have adopted. Currently, the Connecticut State Department of Education supports sixty-two (62) Family Resource Centers throughout the state. The goal of the Connecticut Family Resource Centers is to provide families access to an integrated system of social and educational services while located conveniently in a neighborhood school. For parents who had a positive experience in school, FRC are an acknowledgment that schools are a direct source of learning and support, but for parents who did not have a positive experience in school, the FRC represents an opportunity to “win” these parents back. Each FRC provides a range of educational and family support components. These may include:

- Preschool Child Care
- School Age Child Care
- Families in Training
- Adult Education/Family Literacy
- Support and Training for Family Care Providers
- Positive Youth Development
- Resource and Referral

One of the basic tenets of the "Schools of the 21st Century", a model FRCs use for their structure and philosophy, is that the FRC be housed in a public school. Being in the heart of the neighborhood school has many benefits for the FRC. The positive experience of the FRC can also remove any stigma school might have had. This ensures families stay connected to their child's education. The FRC offers parents many ways to become involved and to take on leadership roles through the Parent Advisory Team, the School Readiness Council, PTA, etc. The FRC also offers opportunities for parents to further their own education, thus improving the fullness of their family life.

Connecticut's Family Resource Centers serve all families, therefore providing an opportunity to share, learn, and gain comfort from a diverse group of people. Families have learned that the FRC is a place for families to get the nurturing and support they need to assist them in the raising of healthy, responsible, successful and caring children.

The GECC contracted with a consultant, Paul Vivian, to conduct this study. Mr. Vivian has a long history of being involved with FRCs, not only in Connecticut but throughout the country. He was hired as the first Program Manager for Connecticut's FRC in 1989 and assisted in their growth and development. In addition, Mr. Vivian works for the Zigler Center at Yale University, the institution that developed the "Schools of the 21st Century." He also worked for Family Support America, a national organization dedicated to the support and development of FRCs nationally.

Process:

The GECC conducted twelve focus groups throughout the community. The sites for these focus groups ranged from people's homes, the Farmington Valley YMCA, the Granby Public Library, Apple Tree Children's Center, the Hunt Glen 55+ Condos, the Cossitt Library, Lite N Up Restaurant, and the Valley Preschool Program. The following questions were asked at each of the focus groups:

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1. Would you attend a Family Resource Center if it was located in Granby?**
- 2. What types of services/activities would you like to see take place at a family resource center?**
- 3. Where do you feel you get, or have received, the majority of your parenting and early childhood information?**
- 4. What would you be willing to do to see that a family resource center is located in Granby?**

In addition, a survey was conducted on line using the *Zoomerang* website to ask these questions and others in a survey format. This enabled Granby residents, who were not able to attend a focus group, to participate in this study.

Results:

In all, one hundred and thirty-two (132) individuals participated in either a focus group conversation or completed an on line survey. Although not an exceptionally large number, these one hundred and thirty-two participants represent a cross section of Granby citizens who committed their time to share their ideas, and in many instances, pledge their time and their talents to some form of a FRC.

It is interesting to note that when this Feasibility Study process began, back in the early fall of 2008, the economy both on a local and national level was in a very different place than it is in January, 2009. The notion of Granby undertaking a new initiative, or the likelihood that the state would fund an additional FRC, is highly improbable. That does not mean that this plan ought to be abandoned. It does mean, however, that any analysis of the results of the surveys or the focus groups needs to be tempered by the economic realities that exist. To do otherwise would be foolhardy and could permanently dampen any long-term plans for a FRC in Granby.

Based on the results of the focus groups and the surveys, there is strong support for a FRC to be located in Granby that would provide parenting information and early learning group activities for young children and their parents. Early Learning Groups are an integral component of the Families In Training Component of Connecticut's FRCs. This component is often the entry point for families to receive the many services of a FRC and a low cost solution to provide parenting and family support services in these tough economic times.

Participants in the focus groups and surveys said it best. One respondent commented, "Granby seems to be lacking in activities for children from birth to the start of preschool (moms, stay at home dads and caregivers can benefit from this as well -- a time to socialize for them too -- and a chance for them to talk and gain more information about their growing child)." This participant also stated that, "Early Learning Groups, reference materials, a PAT *Parents as Teachers* Parent Educator, (would be) helpful links to what the Granby community has to offer families."

Another parent commented about the value of the support offered through Early Learning Groups: "I feel like I am always learning new things that can help me be a better parent. I don't think anyone EVER really knows everything about raising children. We need to talk our ideas and thoughts over with others who share our concerns."

Another common theme throughout the focus groups and surveys was the notion of having a place, a "hub" to get valuable information about a variety of topics that concern parents. One parent stated, "I always think 'resource centers' should be just that: I think there should be resources on many topics including parenting classes, issues children are facing, bullying topics, nutrition and common illnesses."

This notion of a FRC as the place where parents can receive valuable information was articulated by another parent through this response. "If I have a question about my child's development or education, I would like the FRC to be my first stop -- providing me with materials and referrals..."

Another respondent echoed these comments in the following response. "It would be nice to know there is a place I could turn to if I did have a question -- a non-threatening environment - where I wouldn't be stereotyped for going there.... having informal workshops where parents and a facilitator could discuss topics while their children play in the FRC, providing literature (books and handouts on various child development and parenting topics), having a PAT educator available to talk with either formally or informally about any questions or concerns a parent may have, having other parents around to talk to -- other parents are a wealth of knowledge as well -- they can provide good contacts too.... especially if you are new to Granby or new to staying at home with a child(ren)."

Recommendations:

It should be noted that Holcomb Farm has donated space for any "FRC-like" activity that the GECC plans to sponsor. This represents a significant cost-savings and a site or hub where FRC activities could take place. It is the recommendation of this study that the GECC pursue a course of action where they could implement a series of Early Learning Groups at Holcomb Farm. Given the economic condition, it is suggested that these Early Learning Groups be supported through a fee-based system, whereby the participants in the groups pay a fee to participate. It is also recommended that there be scholarships available for families not able to pay for this service.

The Early Learning Groups, operated by a trained Parents As Teachers (PAT) parent educator, would be a terrific foundation to build upon. It would be the hope that as the program flourishes, and as the economy hopefully recovers, that Granby, through a composite of fees, donations and potential local and state support could develop into a fully-operational FRC. First and foremost, Early Learning Groups would help establish these programs so that families could not only participate in their activities but also provide a visible "face" to what a FRC represents.

A further recommendation is that there be a mix of Early Learning Groups and other groups, i.e., a father and child group held in the evening or a Raising Readers group or another literacy group.

After checking with a number of FRCs, the following is a potential budget for the program. All costs are approximate but provide a framework from which to plan:

Expenses

Parent Educator

12 hours per week @ \$18 per hour x 40 weeks = \$ 8,640

Materials

Start-up costs: furniture, rugs, lockable storage containers, toys, books, etc.

(Note: many of these items might be donated) = \$ 5,000

Other Supplies

Activities for the Early Learning Groups, postage etc. = \$ 1,000

Total Expenses **\$14,640**

Revenue

It is the recommendation that all materials and supplies for this venture be sought through donations. It is important to note that many FRCs began with furniture and other materials donated from churches, the school system and other individuals. If this were the case, then just the salary for the Parent Educator would have to be raised through a fee structure.

A parent educator would be hired to conduct four groups in the course of the week. These groups would include Early Learning Groups of similarly aged children, i.e., a group for two year old children and their parent, as well as the above mentioned literacy groups or evening groups. Each group would meet for one hour per week for eight weeks. A group, for the purposes of planning a budget, would consist of two hours -- an hour for the group and an hour for set-up, planning and clean up. The additional four hours per week available to the parent educator would be used to speak to groups in order to solicit additional parents for attending future groups, advocacy and awareness of the program.

In checking with other FRCs, Early Learning Groups often consist of twelve to fifteen children. If we base the budget on twelve children and a parent, it would allow for other children, who could not afford the fee, to be a part of the group and to still keep the group at a manageable size.

For the purpose of this budget, a group would consist of twelve children and their parents, so four groups would serve forty-eight children. We need to build a budget based on eight week intervals, so if forty-eight children were served in the four groups over an eight week period, they would need to sustain the salary of the parent educator. If the parent educator receives \$18 per hour for a twelve hour week, their weekly salary would be \$216. An eight week salary that these Early Learning Groups would have to support would be \$1,728 (\$18 per hour x 12 hours x 8 weeks).

If each parent were to pay a fee of \$36 for the eight week group, it would cover the cost of the parent educator (\$36 x 48 participants = \$1,728.). This \$36 fee represents a cost of only \$4.50 per week. If the FRC were able to garner any donations or small grants, it could be used to offset the fees charged to the families.

Since there are approximately forty weeks in the school year, I would propose that there be five, eight-week sessions. Each session would raise \$1,728 in fees (\$36 x 48 participants = \$1,728.) x 5 sessions = \$8,640.

An additional “resource” that Granby has are the skills and talents of its residents. In the on line survey, participants were asked, “What skills and talents would you offer?” Forty-six respondents provided specific information regarding what they would be willing to donate to the FRC. These “resources” included babysitting, infant massage, Spanish teaching, pediatric dental guidance, reading for children, art related projects, cooking, facilitating group discussions and computer skills to name a few. Utilizing these talents would be crucial for the FRC to develop into a truly community effort.

Summary

Family Resource Centers are a tremendous asset to a community. Many realtors across the country cite a FRC as an attraction within their community and having a FRC in your community increases the value of the homes that have access to this valuable program. The GECC has done a tremendous job facilitating focus groups and conducting an on line survey where participants expressed interest in having a FRC in Granby. With the current economic condition, it is recommended that a FRC begin small -- literally, Early Learning Groups for young children that provide the added benefit as a support group for their parents and that these Early Learning Groups be self-sustaining through a fee-based structure that is detailed above.

This would allow for a FRC to be gradually introduced to Granby residents and demonstrate their value, in hopes that as the economy improves, there might be a greater likelihood that the FRC could grow as it receives public support.