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Submitted by New Britain

New Britain's Strategy: Focus on Access

Care 4 Kids: The Impact in New Britain

New Britain, like many other communities across the state, felt the impact of the reduced funding for Care 4 Kids, which provides childcare support for moderate- and low-income families so parents can work. Creative Corner Childcare Center in New Britain closed in 2003 as a direct result of the reductions. Families who had previously used Care 4 Kids vouchers lost them and the center was unable to offset program costs. In a community already struggling to meet the early education needs of its families, the loss of a center was a major blow.

The New Britain Discovery collaborative considered how it might get the word out in the community about this important issue. Then Merrill Gay saw a Connecticut Voices for Children Fact sheet entitled A Review of the Effects of Care 4 Kids Eligibility and Funding Changes in Hartford. This fact sheet compared the number of children receiving Care 4 Kids funding in 2002, 2003 and 2004 and painted a startling picture of the needs in Hartford.

Merrill asked Connecticut Voices for Children staff if they had these same data for New Britain. They did. In fact, they had the data for all of the cities and towns in Connecticut. With the help of Connecticut Voices for Children staff, Merrill was able to produce A Review of the Effects of Care 4 Kids Eligibility and Funding Changes in New Britain. The analysis of the data showed that the number of New Britain children enrolled in Care 4 Kids dropped by over one-third (1,356 to 847) from 2002 to 2004. Further, 606 families were put on a waiting list when applying for Care 4 Kids vouchers in 2004-2005.

Framing the Message

At first, the New Britain Discovery Collaborative decided to use the report to hold a press conference and demonstrate the need for Care 4 Kids funding with the New Britain City Council and the state legislature. "I felt the numbers were dramatic and a press conference in front of the closed childcare facility with a

"For Sale" sign posted would be a powerful image," said Merrill. However, he soon realized that the timing might not be right for such a "negative" message.

The New Britain Community Foundation provided Merrill with an opportunity to speak to a public relations consultant to develop a plan. From this discussion, Merrill concluded that "the negative message that funding for the program had been reduced was old news and using the report to reinforce the negative message

Online Resources:

- Fact Sheet: A Review of the Effects of Care 4 Kids Eligibility and Funding Changes in Hartford (On the Connecticut Voices for Children Web Site at www.ctkidslink.org/pub_issue_9.html.)
- Fact Sheet: A Review of the Effects of Care 4 Kids Eligibility and Funding Changes in New Britain (www.discovery.wcgmf.org)
- Fact Sheet: Separating Fact from Fiction: Myths About the Adequacy of Funding for Care 4 Kids (On the Connecticut Voices for Children Web Site at www.ctkidslink.org/pub_issue_9.html.)

would distract from the good news that Care 4 Kids had been reopened." So, the New Britain Discovery Collaborative decided to spread the word about the program reopening and encourage as many parents from New Britain as possible to enroll.

To that end, the collaborative created posters that read "Need Help Paying for Childcare?" and provided information on Care 4 Kids eligibility guidelines and how to apply, with the phone number and website address provided. The Collaborative produced the posters and hung them around the community in a variety of locations. Legislators still received copies of the report to inform them of the importance of this issue and how it is impacting New Britain.

To learn more about the New Britain Discovery project, visit the project page on the Discovery website at www.discovery.wcgmf.org.

Lessons Learned

Advocacy is sometimes necessarily focused on negative message campaigns, and, given specific objectives, these can be effective. The New Britain Discovery Collaborative realized, however, that in some situations more can be gained by focusing on the positive. By changing the audience for their message from legislators to parents they were able to get more New Britain families enrolled in Care 4 Kids and achieve positive outcomes for New Britain's children.

Background Info

Connecticut's Care 4 Kids child care subsidy program provides support for moderate- and low-income families, helping them to afford childcare so parents are able to work. State funding for Care 4 Kids was reduced by \$53.5 million from 2002 to 2005. As a result of the cuts, the program was closed to all but those already enrolled and families receiving Tem-

porary Family Assistance. Eligibility for the subsidy was also limited and a waiting list developed for families applying for Care 4 Kids.

The decrease in funding, representing 44% of the total funding for the program, resulted in dramatic reductions in enrollment in childcare programs across the state. This reduced enrollment, in turn, seriously impacted many childcare facilities that relied on Care 4 Kids funds to offset program costs. Some childcare centers, forced to accept more affluent families able to pay the full price of care, began serving fewer low-income children. Some were forced to lay off staff to reduce overhead. ■

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund works collaboratively to improve education for Connecticut's children by supporting school change, informing the public debate on educational issues, and strengthening the involvement of parents and the community in education.

