

Onondaga Citizens League meeting notes—July 23, 2013

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Meeting held at ProLiteracy, 104 Marcellus St., Syracuse

Co-chairs: Paul Predmore and Laurie Black

Attendees: Denise Androvette, Harold Breon, Ginny Carmody, Mark Clary, Christine Flynn, Stan Goettel, Connie Gregory, Michelle Haas, Kathleen Harter, Peter Knoblock, Sarah McIlvain, Janet Park, Marie Perkins, Frank Ridzi, Kelly Rovtar, Vito Sciscioli

Presenters:

- Peggy Liuzzi, Executive Director of Child Care Solutions
- Peter Knoblock for Tracey Menapace, Early Childhood Direction Center
- Chandra Smith, Directory of Day Care Services, and Brenda Bush, teacher, The Salvation Army

OCL: Sandra Barrett and Becky Sernett

Summary: The Service Delivery System Work Group presented an overview of initiatives and practices that support the creation of a comprehensive, high-quality, collaborative early childhood delivery system.

Upcoming Meetings: All meetings will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at ProLiteracy, 104 Marcellus Street, Syracuse. The next meeting will be:

- Wednesday, August 14—What Does a School-Ready Child Look Like?

Subcommittees:

Committee members are invited to participate on one (or more) of the subcommittees listed below. Subcommittee topics can be considered the main themes that have emerged so far in the Early Childhood Education discussions, and these themes need further research, development and refinement. Subcommittees meet separately from the larger committee to discuss these topics, gather research/resources and eventually present what they've learned to the main committee. To sign up for a subcommittee, contact Sandra Barrett at 315-443-4846 or ssbarret@uc.syr.edu.

- Local Data and Funding: 0-5 population and poverty census data; child care supply and need; local statistics on school readiness, literacy, absenteeism, graduation rates, etc.; public investments in child care in Onondaga County.
- Family Supports: current parenting programs and other family support programs; summer and after-school programs.
- Delivery System: quality and effectiveness indicators; networks and partnerships; priorities.
- Model Programs and Practices: summary of national research findings on early childhood education and learning; examples of effective programs from other communities; examples of local best practices (Chemung County may

be a good place to start).

Today's Topic: Service Delivery Systems

MidState Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC)— Tracey Menapace, director of the ECDC, was not able to attend, but provided a handout (attached). Subcommittee co-chair Peter Knoblock provided an overview of ECDC, a local organization that works with children with special needs. The ECDC may be a model for how to involve and engage parents and for how to comprehensively track at-risk students' progress, Knoblock said.

According to the ECDC's Website (ecdc.syr.edu), the center: "provides information, referral and support to families and professionals working with children, both typically developing and those with special education needs, ages birth through five. We work with families to match the needs of their child with available services, including daycare, preschool, integrated special education settings and community agencies. We offer trainings on transition, development, behavior, the special education system and much more. We also provide mentoring at daycares, preschools, UPK, and Head Start programs to promote positive outcomes for young children."

Services are offered free of charge to families and providers within the following regions:

- Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES
- Onondaga-Cortland-Madison-BOCES
- Oswego BOCES
- Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga-BOCES
- Syracuse City

The ECDC was started by parents. First, it was a "hotline" for parents to call, which would put the family in touch with someone (i.e. another parent) who might be able to help. For example, in the 1960s, it was common for children who were born with Down Syndrome to be institutionalized. Knoblock told of a new mother who didn't want this for her baby. She learned of the hotline, and was put in touch with another parent of an older Down-Syndrome child who had successfully graduated from high school. The new mother was able to receive first-hand expertise and advice for how to raise her child, he said.

The organization grew as word and need spread. It is now located at Syracuse University, in its Center on Human Policy, Law and Disability Studies. ECDC is funded by the New York State Education Department/Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities.

Central New York Coalition for Young Children with Special Needs—Another local organization the OCL study committee should take a closer look at is the CNY Coalition for Young Children with Special needs, Knoblock said. According to its Website (cnypreschoolcoalition.org): "The Central New York Coalition for Young Children with Special Needs is a collaboration of public and private agencies who provide special education and other related services to children with special needs

(ages birth to five years) and their families.”

This includes: sharing information; promoting training for parents and professionals; monitoring and developing regulations impacting service delivery; and collaborations with local and state agencies to meet community needs.

Knoblock said the coalition is run by volunteers, and Tracey Menapace, director of the ECDC, leads its coordination.

“[Central New York is] so advanced compared to other parts of New York State,” said Peggy Liuzzi, executive director of Child Care Solutions. She said Syracuse University was an early leader and proponent of inclusion education, and so this region has benefitted from that.

Smart Start—In 1993, North Carolina began Smart Start & The North Carolina Partnership for Children (www.smartstart.org) to help ready its children for kindergarten. Liuzzi said that in this private/public partnership, “Every community has a planning council that decides how they’re going to make a difference in children’s lives.” The program is partly funded by state grants. “We don’t have that kind of money, but it’d be great to have that type of planning collaboration,” she said.

Chemung County School Readiness Project (SRP)—In 2006, Chemung County began the SRP (www.chemungschoolreadiness.com) to help ready its children for kindergarten. According to its Website: “SRP has created a cohesive system out of an array of services to achieve greater results. Working as a system, the four core services advance strategies to improve opportunities for all of Chemung County’s young children to have positive early experiences that enhance their growth and development: Early Care and Education Strategy; Parent Learning Strategy; Healthcare Strategy; and Nurse Home Visiting Strategy.”

“They’ve had an amazingly powerful impact on school readiness,” Liuzzi said. “All of these [organizations and initiatives] are examples of the power that collaboration and collective planning have.”

Sandra Barrett said the committee will look more closely at SRP when it hears from the Model Programs and Practices subcommittee. SRP has been invited to present to the Study Committee, but declined. There is a possibility that the OCL study committee can do a virtual meeting with SRP at some point in the future.

Connecting the Dots

Part of the challenge with improving early childhood education is bridging two levels: the individual level and the system level. “How do we connect the dots? ...How do we move the dots?” Liuzzi asked. On the system level, it’s important to change how institutions and organizations “interact with families.” She discussed some local organizations that are leaders in family engagement.

ONCARE—Onondaga County System of Care (ONCARE) has been “tremendously innovative” in how it works with families, Liuzzi said. According to its Website (oncaresoc.org), “OnCare is a community initiative that improves outcomes for Onondaga County children and youth (ages 5-21) with significant behavioral and

emotional challenges and their families by developing a more effective system of services and supports. OnCare is a federally funded project, and uses system of care principles and strategies to improve our local service system.”

Liuzzi said that ChildCare Solutions does some similar work in the early childhood education area, but, in general, there isn’t a cohesive, formal organization that does this kind of work to ready children for kindergarten in Onondaga County. “We have pockets of this, but we need to make it bigger and more inclusive,” she said.

Literacy Coalition—A community literacy initiative funded in part by the CNY Community Foundation, the Literacy Coalition (onliteracy.org) is another example of how to innovatively bring many people—especially parents—to the table, Liuzzi said.

Knoblock agreed. “If we can find a way to get family involvement on all of our levels.... Research shows that without parent involvement, it won’t work.” Parents need to be “front and center.”

Parent Cafés—A national model to foster parent involvement and healthy families is being replicated in the city of Auburn, Liuzzi said. Parent Cafés (www.beststrongfamilies.net) serve food and invite parents and children to come to socialize and discuss parenting topics. A trained facilitator leads the discussions. “We need to think out of the box for how people like to get together to talk,” she said.

A Challenge: How Early Childhood Education is Funded

Bridging the needs of individuals with the needs of the system is made more challenging by the complexity of how early childhood education is funded, Liuzzi said. For programs that serve special needs children (NY Code Section 4410 schools), the funding follows the children. Otherwise, the funding follows the parents (and is usually determined by the parents’ income). For example, Head Start, which offers 12-month continuity and is funded by the federal government, has income qualifications. Most universal pre-K programs, though, don’t have income qualifications, are funded by the state and local governments, and are usually part-time programs. Childcare, on the other hand, is very expensive and it is designed to meet the needs of working parents. “Most parents pay out-of-pocket,” Liuzzi said. Parents can get a tax credit, but it’s usually not enough. Some low-income parents can get subsidies, she said, but if a parent starts to earn more money, he or she may no longer qualify for the subsidy program.

Quality Stars New York

Next, Liuzzi provided an overview of Quality Stars New York—New York State’s only quality rating and improvement system for preschool and childcare programs. More than 40 local providers voluntarily participate in the rating system, which she said encourages providers to improve their quality of care.

Resources, training and support are made available to providers to make improvements to their early childhood education programs, maintain their high ratings and improve their ratings. The system: uses a common set of standards; emphasizes continuous quality improvement; monitors programs and holds them accountable for how they use resources; provides some financial support; and

facilitates communication and outreach.

The system evaluates: learning environments; family engagement; teacher qualifications and experience; and management and leadership. “A program that is not well managed will not have the resources it needs to take care of kids,” she said.

For parents, the five-star rating system is easily recognizable, she said, and it clearly identifies programs’ strengths and weaknesses. For funders, the rating system is a “dream,” she said.

The rating system can even impact policy, she said. In North Carolina, parents who receive subsidized childcare benefits can’t enroll their children in a program that is rated three-stars or below. In Utah, parents receive a larger tax credit if they are using a higher-rated childcare program. “It’s a huge policy lever,” she said.

But, she added, “We’re not sure that [Quality Stars] is even going to continue.” Funding for the initiative ends in 2014.

(A detailed explanation of the system’s components can be found at qualitystarsny.org, and Liuzzi’s full PowerPoint presentation is available on OCL’s website in the “resources” section.)

Childcare Collaborations: The Salvation Army

Salvation Army’s childcare, universal pre-K and Head Start programs participate in the Quality Stars NY initiative, said Chandra Smith, director of the Salvation Army’s daycare services. Quality Stars has given the Salvation Army specific steps for how to improve its programs. “Everything we do has a purpose,” she said.

The Salvation Army’s programs are examples of collaborative childcare, in which one classroom will have students whose tuitions come from multiple funding sources (Head Start, universal pre-K, childcare subsidies, private tuition), but will function as a cohesive classroom. This means the Salvation Army has to keep track of the multiple requirements and standards that come with different programs’ funding sources, but it also allows the Salvation Army to be seamless and a “one-stop-shop for parents,” Smith said.

The collaborations help the Salvation Army harness its financial resources. “Without the collaboration, we wouldn’t have been able to afford a Brenda Bush, who is a master’s level teacher,” Smith said.

Many childcare programs don’t have the resources to employ such high-level staff.

Next Study Meeting

The next meeting will be at 11:30 a.m. at ProLiteracy on Wednesday, Aug. 14.