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Family Matters: Celebrate the Month of the Young Child

By Chloe Learey

The National Association for the Education of Young Children began celebrating the "Week of the Young Child" during the third week of April in 1971. Fourteen years later, in 1985, the Michigan state affiliate, MiAYEC started the Month of the Young Child. Many other states and regions have done the same, including greater Windham County and other parts of Vermont. It is a time to focus on the importance of the early years, the needs of young children and their families, and to recognize the programs and services that support them.

While early care and education is one of the areas that is highlighted prominently, it is important to consider the range of supports that touch young children, from pediatricians to child protective services and from health departments to housing support. One of the hallmarks of working with young children successfully is working closely with families and caregivers as well. I often say that people should not go into working with young children unless they are good at working with adults! Celebrating the Month of the Young Child means celebrating families, too.

The earliest years are such a critical time for development. When 80 percent of a child's brain is developed by age 3, and 90 percent by age 5 it is imperative that we pay close attention to all aspects of a child's life and the environments in which they exist. Early education is what is happening all the time for young children as they absorb the world around them – at home, in the classroom, with other caregivers, at the doctor's office. Conversations about early childhood education often end up focusing on programs, whether center-based or home-based, and certainly this is a primary place that many children spend their days. However, keeping the conversation more broad helps to reinforce that early learning and development is happening across all settings, and it is not so much the setting that matters, but what is happening there to support the optimal development of children.

On an upcoming edition of Family Matters, the BCTV Cable talk show where we discuss topics of interest to families with young children, Sueño LeBlond shares her experience as an early educator and someone who is involved with planning this year's Month of the Young Child events in our region. As the Early Education Outreach Coordinator, Sueño interacts with many children, families and providers as she drives around the county in the Early Learning Express. She shares that this MOYC celebration creates opportunities to bring families together and connect them to each other and the community. Raising children is joyful, and can be very challenging! Supporting families to have the tools they need to support their child's development is some of the most important work we can do.

A full schedule of the free events happening around the region can be found at www.windhamchildcare.org. The 12th Annual Children's Art Exhibit is a wonderful kick-off for the month, and it is happening at the River Garden in Brattleboro on Saturday, April 2 from 10 a.m. to noon. Please join us as we strive to make our community aware of the importance of early childhood.

Chloe Learey is the executive director of Winston Prouty Center for Childhood Development in Brattleboro. You can watch episodes of "Family Matters" by visiting <http://winstonprouty.org/>.

http://www.reformer.com/columnists/ci_29694235/family-matters-celebrate-month-young-child