

Tuesday, July 4, 2017

FAMILY MATTERS

A community without services for families

By Chloe Learey

The short video “A Day Without Child Care” created by the Local Child Care Planning Council of Humboldt County in California (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGpEXKgU20A>), takes a humorous lens to a very serious issue and demonstrates how everyone is affected when child care is not available. This impact would also be felt broadly if other services to families with young children were to be disrupted as well. For instance, if the services provided by Windham Child Care Association were to have gone away instead of becoming part of the services at Winston Prouty, families would not be able to access and understand their child care options easily, nor would those who are eligible for financial assistance be able to access care. Children who need specialized care would not receive it. The lack of these services might not be as immediate as child care being closed, but it would not take long for our economic engine to slow down because families could not access care. The longer-term outlook would also dim if children were not accessing quality care, and thus building the foundation they need to develop into strong, thriving adults.

All aspects of our community are strengthened when families are supported to be successful, from learning about child development to building their parenting skills to helping them access resources like housing. Community-based integrated early childhood services that are provided at Winston Prouty connect many types of supports and opportunities for young children and their families from the prenatal period through age 6 (and beyond for child care financial assistance). When we have competent, confident families, we have children who can get to school regularly and on time, we have employees who are present and productive when at work, and we have adults who can better access existing services for mental health and substance abuse treatment. These are all things that contribute to a strong community. By adding services from Windham Child Care to Winston Prouty the services become more robust and families can more easily access what they need. Being part of the same organization makes it seamless and helps better align the system.

What will a community without services for families look like? Our struggle with workforce development and attracting young, entrepreneurial people to our region will get even harder. The numbers of children in protective custody in Windham County, which are the highest per capita in the state, will continue to grow. Children who have a hard time getting to school much less being successful there will fall through the cracks more quickly. Fortunately, Vermont is focusing attention on its youngest children and the environments in which they live, learn and play. It recognizes that investment in its youngest, including those least fortunate, will benefit everyone. In order to marshal and leverage our resources for the greatest impact – for all children, and particularly for vulnerable populations living in poverty – we need to help communities engage parents, businesses, government and all residents in building better futures for young children and their families.

James S. Marks, executive vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and former assistant surgeon general and director of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at CDC, expressed a sense of urgency that we act now. “The science is clear, and the need is great,” he said. “We may not know all we wish we knew but we need to act now. If we wait 5 years, we lose a generation.”

As a community, we must find ways to not only engage and build partnerships with families but also secure stable and adequate funding.

If we want our community and our state to thrive, we need to invest in our families and children through community-based programs and organizations that understand that child and family development are integral to our success.

<http://reformer.com/stories/family-matters-a-community-without-services-for-families,512416?>