

Participate in “Because It Matters” to become a “Community of Caring”



Because It Matters is a community-wide campaign, sponsored locally by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice to promote civility in our workplaces, our schools, our neighborhoods and civic organizations.

Research tells us that emotions are contagious. When we feel good we extend those good feelings to the next person we encounter. When we communicate in a respectful and effective way, our brain chemistry signals us to feel better about the world around us. When we feel better about the world around us, we pass it along. Data now suggests that interpersonal relationships can actually shape our brains and alter our physiology.

Because It Matters is about improving our quality of life by increasing overall politeness, good manners, and making connections to the community. Being kind, respectful and mindful of other people - those behaviors are the glue for creating the social network we need to live happy, healthy lives.

In 2007, when the Gulf Coast Community Foundation invited the community to participate in the Because It Matters initiative, many businesses and organizations quickly embraced the concept, including the Early Learning Coalition. Our local school district took its participation a step further and adopted a nationally recognized character education program, **Community of Caring**, built around five core values that empower young people to be responsible and caring members of a community: **Caring, Respect, Responsibility, Trust, and Family**. These five values serve as a foundation for school activities and initiatives in Community of Caring schools and are woven into every aspect of school life and curriculum. Developing the school community as caring, respectful, responsible, trustworthy and family-oriented fosters those same qualities in children, teachers and school staff.

The national Community of Caring program has a newly created preschool component and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation has offered to support our local early care and education programs to become part of the Because It Matters Community of Caring initiative. Through this program child care providers will be able to become a Community of Caring site and offer a character

education program that strengthens parent involvement, can be incorporated into existing programs, and can be continued when children enter kindergarten. It is also very complementary to themes already introduced by the Early Learning Coalition over the years and to existing programs that support children's social and emotional well-being. This offers an excellent opportunity to strengthen and solidify all of these efforts.

Call 954-4830, ext 4 if you are interested in being part of the pilot group to implement this exciting new program. Learn more by visiting the websites where the information above was taken: www.becauseitmatters.net & www.communityofcaring.org

Outdoor Environments Follow Up

Many teachers and directors attended Betsy Thigpen's thought-provoking workshop on the importance of creating outdoor environments that let children experience the natural world. At the end of that meeting participants were asked to send pictures of any changes they make to their own outdoor spaces. We hope to have some to share in the next newsletter!

Special thanks to Sarasota County licensing inspectors Jill Jacoby and Eva Balcar, who attended the workshop and gave good advice on how to stay within licensing regulations while creating mud ponds, using water outside, and adding natural landscaping.



Information on evaluating outdoor spaces, ideas on creating natural outdoor environments, fact sheets and a power point can be found at <http://www.poemsn.org/>, including the following example showing what can be done by starting small, but still making changes that create a more inviting area:

- Wooden benches \$40.00
- 6 stepping stones \$15.00
- 2 large tubs for water play \$15.00
- Potting soil \$8.00
- Supplies to make bird feeders \$6.00
- Old tires and paint for planters \$5.00
- Materials to make giant wind chimes \$5.00
- Fabric for banner \$5.00
- Clothesline/clothespins for art display \$3.00

Total 100.00



VPK NEWS

Summer VPK has started and the 2008/2009 School Year VPK program is just around the corner. **The Coalition must have your complete and accurate VPK**

application in our office by June 27th. Providers whose applications have not been received by June 27th will be removed from the VPK list parents are given. Complete VPK applications include the signed **VPK Agreement**, **VPK 10**, **VPK 11** for each classroom, and **calendar**, along with documentation that director and teacher credentials and background screening are in place and current. The **VPK Checklist is enclosed**, and forms and other VPK information are on the Coalition website, www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org.



NOTE: The VPK payment for the 2008/2009 school year program will be **\$2,629.84**, which is **\$4.87** an hour.

Directors should check teacher files to be sure credentials and background screenings are current within 5 years. Remember that it can take up to 8 weeks to receive the results of the Level 2 background screening, which included FBI fingerprinting. **No teacher will be approved to be in the classroom if their background screening is not in place.** With questions or for assistance call Julia Smirnov at 954-4830 ext. 4. **The Coalition is looking forward to working with you!**

More on Kindergarten Transitions...

Ideas for teachers to help make this big step a positive experience for children:

- Read books about going to kindergarten, such as **Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten**,
- Make a graph showing what kindergarten the children will be attending
- Have children make a family portrait to give to their new teacher
- Have children write a letter to their new kindergarten teacher describing the things they like to do in preschool
- Talk about things that might be different in kindergarten, such as taking the school bus
- Practice some "kindergarten things" - lining up, eating lunch on a tray, and self-help skills



Be sure to check out the Resource Room for books and information on kindergarten transition.

Visit our website! Minutes of meetings and scholarship applications are posted. A calendar of meetings is also available, as well as the community training calendar. Look us up and give us your feedback! If any director or teacher would like to receive a copy of this newsletter via email, contact the Coalition at the general email address below.

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Sponsorship by Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, Agency for Workforce Innovation, Office of Early Learning, State of Florida, Sarasota County Government

LOOK for the STARS



Super Kids + Super Care = Star-Bright Futures

It's been quite a lengthy process, but the end is in sight! The Devereux Team will finish all additional classroom assessments this week and Candy Exline, Cindy Wentzel, and Marjorie Fondacaro have been following up on the staff qualification checklists and other items that will factor in the total points.

Providers will be contacted with information on their assessment results throughout the month of June. These initial results are considered **preliminary**.

For the past several years (and longer for many of you) the Coalition and our early childhood community have been focusing on the importance of high quality programs for our young children and working on ways to make the goal of high quality a reality in the classroom. Many providers have always had quality programs, many have made significant improvements to enhance quality, and many are continually working to achieve that goal.

Now, with the Look for Stars, there will be an objective measure to help providers see the strengths in their programs and areas that may need to be improved. Look for the Stars progresses along a continuum with criteria that is higher than minimum licensing standards. These quality criteria are attainable, and they are worth attaining because quality programs ensure positive outcomes for children. Through the Look for the Stars QIS, there are a number of new benefits and supports that the Coalition will be able to offer participating providers, including additional assistance in the areas where help is needed as well as supports for providers who have already achieved quality to help sustain that level.

All of us at the Early Learning Coalition are eager to start this new process with you. We are grateful to our community funders for their commitment to Sarasota County child care providers and to our young children, and we look forward to working together to make the goal of quality child care a reality. **This is a great opportunity - let's make the most of it!**

