



exceptional parents unlimited

Assessment Center for Children Prepares to Welcome First Families

Following several months of planning, staff have been hired and are preparing to see children and their families at the Assessment Center for Children at 4420 N. First Street, Suite 110, just south of EPU's main center at 4440 N. First Street between Gettysburg and Ashlan.

The community will soon be able to refer young children experiencing difficulties in development, learning, social interactions, behavior or emotional health. Our Children's Services Coordinators will link children and families with community resources and assist in scheduling children for assessments.

What makes this program unique is that, depending on the individual needs of the child and family, the assessment team can include representatives from Central Valley Regional Center, EPU, Fresno Unified School District, and Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services, Children's Mental Health, and Employment and Temporary Assistance as well as developmental pediatricians – all of whom are co-located at EPU. This assessment process will eliminate the need for families to go to multiple locations for assessment services.



What is this?

Learn about our latest gifts from East Fresno Kiwanis on page 5.

Exceptional Times

Spring / Summer 2005



Plan to join us for the 15th annual Fiesta de los Niños at Coombs Riverbend Ranch on Saturday, July 16, 2005. Fiesta is our signature fundraising event, and we welcome your support.

Come enjoy the festive marimba band, handmade tortillas, sit-down tri-tip dinner, and music and dancing under the stars. Our silent and live auction items are highly prized, and you won't want to miss the action! (Volunteers are needed now to help with requests for auction items.)

Invitations will be mailed in June. Individual tickets are \$45, and a table for ten is \$450. Corporate sponsorships are welcome.

For more information, call 559•229-2000.

"Ages and Stages" Throughout Fresno County

The primary screening tool to help identify young children who would benefit from a referral to the new Assessment Center for Children is called the Ages and Stages questionnaire (ASQ). Child care providers and pediatricians' offices throughout Fresno County may be able to help family members complete an age-appropriate Ages and Stages questionnaire about their child's development. Completing a supplemental screening tool, called the Ages and Stages Social/Emotional questionnaire will provide additional information.



Heart to Heart



The winter months have been very busy with hiring staff and readying offices to start the new Assessment Center for Children at EPU. We've had such wonderful support from our community partners, all the new staff we've hired, and the representatives from other agencies that are co-locating with us. Guiding all this work has been our vision for the children and families who will be receiving assessments and services through the Assessment Center for Children. That vision includes easy access to information and a warm, welcoming environment where children and families can feel comfortable and get answers to their questions about their child's development.

Any new venture can bring uncertainty and things that don't go exactly as planned, but it has been a joy to see what we can create for our children when we put our hearts and minds together. The Assessment Center for Children has become a reality following two years of intense planning. We have been guided in this process by parents of children with special needs who shared their stories, their challenges, and their hopes for a system that responds to their needs. We will continue to look to parents for guidance as we begin these services.

Through grant funding from First 5 Fresno County and blended funding sources from partner agencies, we have been able to hire a core staff of dynamic individuals who are dedicated to making the Assessment Center for Children a success. The team includes a physician, nurse practitioner, infant mental health specialists/psychologists, an occupational therapist, speech therapist and other professionals – all of whom are experienced in working with infants, young children and families.

Our Children's Services Coordinators bring a wealth of knowledge and cultural sensitivity to their new positions and are able to assist families in several languages. We also welcome representatives from our partner agencies which will be co-located at the Assessment Center for Children. Together we're looking forward to welcoming children and families.

Marion M. Karian
Executive Director

Rural Services Growing Again

The small house we were renting in Firebaugh has been sold, and we have been welcomed back to the Firebaugh-Mendota Methodist Church where we are now serving children and families from the Firebaugh and Mendota areas on Fridays from 1:00-3:00 p.m. The church is located at 1660 "O" Street in Firebaugh, three blocks east of the previous location.

At the same time, we have accepted the opportunity to offer services in a new portable building on the campus of the Raisin City Elementary School. This program will meet with children and families from San Joaquin, Bowles, Riverdale, Huron, and Tranquillity on Wednesdays from 12:00-2:00 p.m.

Families currently participating have expressed an interest in getting together at least once a month for education, friendship and support. Examples of educational programs are trainings on Individual Education Plans (IEP's), Individual Family Service Plans, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The new Raisin City site will help us reach more families living in southwest rural Fresno County areas. For more information call 559•229-2000.

Kids Enjoy



Community

Helpers

Day



Children and families had a great time exploring on Community Helpers Day at EPU on January 21. The Fresno Fire Department brought a big red fire truck, the Police Department brought motorcycles, and American Ambulance brought an ambulance for children to touch and feel. Children could ask the officers about their jobs, and the California Highway Patrol helped parents with car seat safety checks.

Other organizations participating included the literacy program at KVPT public television, Marjaree Mason Center, Usborne Books, and Fresno EOC's Early Head Start.

EPU Caregivers Receive PITC Training

EPU home visitors and Play & Grow staff members recently completed the Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC). This is an intensive 32-hour training that teaches best practices on how to provide relationship-based services that establish a safe and nurturing environment for the children. Our staff learned how "responsive caregiving" can encourage child-directed learning.

Responsive caregiving includes having small group sizes, primary caregiving (having the same caregiver assigned to a child whenever possible), speaking the same language as the home language, and helping the child to feel safe and nurtured. This approach helps families to feel safe and supported as well.

Play & Grow Program Manager Cindy Lopez says she is already seeing a dramatic difference in the way children are exploring their environment, interacting with other children, and expressing their creativity.

*Appreciation
for Special
Grants and Gifts*

A Special Woodworker Helps EPU

Dick Herboldshimer is a special friend to children at EPU. A retired woodshop teacher, he now uses his home woodshop to make wood toys for our children to decorate. His gifts have included shamrocks, turkeys, trees, flowers and hearts. Our children love adding paint, photos, glitter, ribbons and feathers as keepsakes to treasure. Their parents always appreciate seeing how creative their children can be, and we all send a special Valentine to Mr. Herboldshimer for his thoughtfulness over many years.



EPU Loves East Fresno Kiwanis

Our friends with East Fresno Kiwanis responded to our call for help by making 42 handcrafted corner chairs and 41 tables for EPU. The corner chairs will help our therapists and home visitors in their work with babies and young children with special challenges who would otherwise be unable to sit upright.

This equipment will be used in our centers in Fresno, Selma, Firebaugh and Raisin City, and our home visitors will be able to work with children in their homes as well. The chairs provide guides for how the children's muscles can work, and the chairs and tables make social interaction possible with other children who are able to sit on their own. This makes a profound difference in their self-esteem and ability to learn and grow.

Says June Pearson, Kiwanis liaison, "Everyone who worked on the project truly felt it was a labor of love."



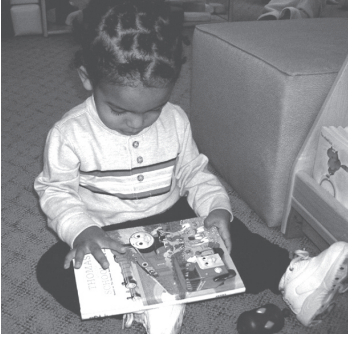
Worth Watching

KVPT public television is now airing a new series of "0-5 in 30 Minutes" featuring resources and developmental tips for parents of infants and young children. The series airs on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday mornings at 10 a.m.

Parents and children from EPU will be featured on the Wednesday, April 27 at 7:30 p.m. and repeating on Sunday, May 1 at 10 a.m.



Ronald McDonald House Charities Sponsors “Family Fun Literacy for Tots”



Ronald McDonald House Charities has awarded EPU two grants totaling \$2,100 for a new literacy enrichment program for infants and toddlers with special needs, their siblings and parents.

Cindy Lopez, Program Manager for our Play & Grow program, has been using the StoryQUEST curriculum in our centers this past year. “It’s really exciting to be able to expand this program with home-based literacy and learning activities for the whole family to enjoy. The grant funds are helping us buy books parents can use in take-home activities with their children and in building home libraries that foster the love of learning.

“Language and literacy are grounded in relationships, activities and play that each infant and toddler experiences throughout daily routines with family members, caregivers, and in the community.

“Family members and caregivers can encourage infants and toddlers to handle books, recognize objects and pictures, understand pictures and stories, imitate actions from pictures or stories, and distinguish between words and sounds. A helpful approach is meeting the child’s pace, waiting for her or him to respond, and then building on that response. Interacting with others around books, stories and songs and playing with sounds and words help children build a strong foundation for learning and school readiness.”

Early literacy activities are infused in Play & Grow activities, and our home visitors are also sharing literacy enrichment activities with the children and families they see in the home.



Books from Barnes & Noble

Barnes and Noble donated nine boxes of children’s books – more than 400 books – to EPU during the holidays. Barnes and Noble asked customers to donate to the “Seasons Readings” program, and the store matched their gifts.

These books were distributed to children during the holidays, and some are being used in our programs with children and families. We are thrilled with the quality and variety of these books

Target Sponsors Expressive Art

Target Stores has provided a \$1,500 grant toward “Expressive Art for Children and Families.” promote family communication and enhance parent-to-parent support and interaction.

Cindy Stoops, Program Manager for our Learning About Parenting (LAP) program, says, “These funds are helping with materials and training so our staff, including home visitors, can incorporate expressive art activities with families.

“Expressive art means doing art with others, which in turn encourages individual expression and promotes positive family interaction.”

Worth Doing

Rotary Storyland at Roeding Park invites children and families to enjoy “Story Saturdays” beginning in March. Costumed storytellers will be reading and telling stories from 10 a.m. to noon. Occasional “Story Festivals” are scheduled through July 9.

For details, call Storyland at 264-2235.

Our heartfelt thanks to our Circle of Friends in 2004

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