

Early Learning NH Center-based Network Meeting
Thursday, February 11, 2010
1:30 - 3:00 PM
Two Delta Drive, Concord

Attendees:

Jack Lightfoot – Child & Family Services
Jesse Ransom – Easter Seals CCR & R
Julie Sackett – Belknap-Merrimack Head Start
Lisa Ranfos – CFDC at NHTI
Jane Marquis – ECAP at the Adult Learning Center
Carol Garhart – Holy Cross Early Childhood Center
Edna Coates – Monadnock Community Early Learning Center
Amie Patterson – Monadnock Community Early Learning Center
Mary Jane Wallner – Merrimack Valley Day Care Services/Blueberry Express CCC
Julie McConnell – NH Community Loan Fund
Heather Coburn – Milton Children’s Center
Susan Whiting – Wolfeboro Area Children’s Center
Marianne King – Ossipee Concerned Citizens Childcare Center
Dawn Collins – Somersworth Early Learning Center
Tammy Labonte – Farmington Children’s Center
Marti Ilg – Lakes Region Child Care Services
Julie Rothmund – Lakes Region Child Care Services
Tricia Patten – Lakes Region Child Care Services
Kim Bruneau – Lakes Region Child Care Services
Cindy Wallace – CCR&R
Susan Sullivan – Minds in Motion, Inc
Lori Harris – NHAEYC, DHMC Child Care Center
Jan Richards – CCR&R
Carole Thibodeau – Concord YMCA CDC
Jackie Howe – North Conway Day Care
Brenda Lafratta – Early Enrichment Center
Carol Michael
Dague Clark – Division for Children, Youth and Families
Ellen Wheatley – DCYF/Child Development Bureau
Katie Brissette – Early Learning NH
Jackie Cowell – Early Learning NH

1. The meeting began at 1:30 pm with welcome and introductions.
2. Background – Jackie Cowell, Early Learning NH
 - A. To start with good news, Jackie discussed an amendment to the jobs bill that Senator Shaheen is planning to introduce which could put \$1.6 billion into child care nationally. This could bring an extra \$2 – 4 million to NH alone, which won’t solve the budget deficit but will help. The Senator has heard from NH House Speaker Terrie Norrelli, NH House Majority Leader Mary Jane Wallner, and her daughter Stefany Shaheen about the issues we’re facing.
 - B. At the last meeting we were unable to make the anticipated announcement regarding changes to the child care scholarship system. This turned out to be a good thing because even though the changes are still very harmful, they are less so than they could have been last month. Many community partners were invited to the table to offer feedback on which plan would be the least harmful

to the least number of people. Many other provider groups were not included in the discussions and we are fortunate to at least know about the cuts ahead of time.

- C. Due to the economic downturn there are many more families needing assistance than originally predicted and even though no cuts were made to the child care budget, the funding is not sufficient to serve all needy families. There is a 320% increase in infants, there are more full-time, there has been an increase in the very poorest families and more families are choosing licensed child care which costs more.
 - D. Some changes already in effect include the suspension of the Licensed Plus and Accreditation awards, suspension of the Strengthening Families Centers stipends, the start of the wait list and the suspension of the infant/toddler trainings. We understand that SF Centers have been hit the hardest and are very concerned about how harmful these new changes are.
3. Changes Being Made – Dr. Ellen Wheatley, DCYF/Child Development Bureau
- A. Letters were sent out to parents and providers about the changes to go into effect March 1, 2010. Family's cost shares will increase steadily from step 1 to 7. The chart included in the letter shows an example of a family on step 1 going from paying 1% of their income to 5.25% of their income towards child care. Each step after that increases at least this much or more. The new cost share is per child not per family.
 - B. There are still 7 steps but families on steps 6 & 7 zero out because based on the new percentages it puts them above the \$187 the state can pay. Programs should still bill for these families even though they receive no money because if a program does not bill for 90 days the family gets closed and placed on the waitlist.
 - C. School-age children will be most affected by these changes. Only school-agers on step 1 will receive any assistance but it is important to keep the link open for all children so they can receive assistance during vacations and summer months.
 - D. Starting March 1 all children will only be allowed to link to one provider. If the child currently has two providers, the parent will need to tell the district office which one they want to continue to be linked to. There can be multiple providers per family as long as each child has just one.
 - E. Some of the alternatives to this change were much worse including a reverse wait-list which would mean 2500 families would be without benefits, stopping all assistance for families during April, May and June of this year, or reducing eligibility for all families.
 - F. A letter will go out during the last week of February stating what the new cost share will be for each family.
 - G. A total of 582 children will zero out with these changes. The Department anticipates that these new cuts will cover the \$9.5 billion deficit.
 - H. The CCR&R agencies have been a listening ear to families and provide support to stay on task and communicate what's happening. Some areas, such as Keene, are creating provider groups and others, such as Lakes Region, are working with local providers to raise community funds.
4. Public Messaging
- A. We need to be careful not to state that programs can absorb these cuts because they are not that big. It is employment support based on the percentage of these families income and it allows them to gradually go off assistance and stay off for good.

- B. Early Learning NH will begin collecting stories from parents and programs. Some of the early feedback includes families, especially those with multiple kids, who feel it makes more sense for them to quit their job and go back on TANF because they can't afford the increase. A family with one school-aged child and one preschooler could jump from paying \$38 per week to \$128 per week.
- C. We are looking for feedback on the Parent Story Form that was distributed. Please look it over with your staff and parents and let us know how it can be improved.

5. Mobilizing Strategy

- A. Cuts have to be made, but it doesn't mean we're going to sit by and not mobilize. We need to say what the impact is on families and programs.
- B. The point was made that these cuts aren't going to mean savings in the long run, just a cost shift for the Department because these families are going to need assistance elsewhere. At Commissioner Toumpas' stakeholders meeting Julie McConnell asked if a system will be created to track the state cost-shifting to TANF or unemployment but there is nothing planned at this time.
- C. It was asked why we should mobilize if the money is simply not there. Jackie responded that we need to remain vocal about the problems or there's no chance for change. Also if any federal money comes into the state we'll be poised to receive it.
- D. At the Fiscal Committee Meeting on February 5, Senator Kathy Sgambati stated that it can't just be a DHHS problem, the responsibility needs to be shared. Rep. Marjorie Smith stated that she is worried for these working families.
- E. We will be looking for programs in each district to host their Senator for an informational night so please let us know if you're interested. Once we have talking points finalized we will also be asking you to make calls and send emails to your senator and mobilize others to do the same.
- F. More cuts are looming because projected revenues are down and the state lost the \$110 million it planned to use from the Medical Malpractice Fund. Families won't be able to take any more hits and so there has to be other places to look to cut.

6. NH CAN Budget Watch

- A. You have a draft of the NH CAN Budget Watch messaging and we ask that you take a look at it and get back to us with any changes or corrections you see are necessary.
- B. Every Child Matters and NH CAN will be working together to create videos of families telling their stories and posting them online. This is an opportunity to use "new media" to get the message out.

7. Meeting Adjourn