

CELC - Outreach Reflections for 2014-19

As the Community Early Learning Center of the Fox Valley (CELC) completes its fifth year of operation, we reflect on the range of outreach activities that have marked the years since opening.

One of CELC's outcome goals was to "engage in community outreach and coordinate ...efforts with the FVECC (Fox Valley Early Childhood Coalition)." We hope this sampling demonstrates the wisdom of our founders and co-locating partners in seeking this unique pull-together center and the power of collaboration for the benefit of children and families in our community and beyond.

Bringing In...

In particular, the CELC has provided a venue for events and services that support families with young children and advance community understanding and support for the critical, early years of life. Many of these opportunities are offered by individual CELC agencies but equally often, they are the result of collaborations among the partner agencies housed at the CELC*.

Examples include:

- Universal screening days where parents can bring their children for screenings by early intervention and school district professionals in a convenient one-stop setting.
- Regular evening parent and family events such as Parent Cafes and Pyramid Model Family Nights, often with light meals, providing parent education, training, and peer support.
- Annual Week of the Young Child celebrations including child and family activities and resource information.
- Showing of "The Raising of America" (April 7, 2016) as part of on-going community dialogue about early childhood in the Fox Valley.

With a heterogeneous daily census of children (ca. 40% white, 21% Hispanic/Latin, 17% Asian, 8% African-American, and 13% other incl. multi-racial), the CELC's evening activities attract a diverse population, more so than most other community events.

Assessment has been an important part of CELC's launch and learnings. For example, review of developmental screenings reinforced the potential benefit of bringing new Kindness/Mindfulness programming to the community and sharing best practices. Assessment has also resulted in additional programming such as new family events (e.g., family yoga day) and a variety of community presentations and connections.

In addition, the CELC has been used for community meetings such as United Way Board of Directors, AASD Board of Education, a CHAT Early Childhood Plunge, celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Even Start Family Literacy program, and more.

Support for these activities and events has come directly from the partner agencies as well as through sponsorship of an outreach director position (shared with the Fox Valley Early Childhood Coalition – see below) which was initially funded through a federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and then later through joint grants from United Way Fox Cities and the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region.

Reaching Out...

Part of the outreach goal was to coordinate efforts with the FVECC and to build collaborations with the Coalition and other organizations currently or potentially serving young children and their families. The two organizations (CELC and FVECC) took that one step further, working together on major grants to create and share a community outreach director staff position. Building a network of collaborators and advocates is a critical element of community outreach – planting and nurturing the seeds for future impact.

Over the past several years the CELC partner agencies and outreach directors have worked with various organizations. Apologies to any individuals or organizations that may have been inadvertently left off this list:

Organization	Event/Engagement Examples
Appleton Area School District	Summer 4K Institute Appleton Community 4K Teacher Power Hour Professional Learning Community Late Start Community 4K Directors’ meetings
Appleton Public Library	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Boys/Girls Club Fox Valley	
Building for Kids Children’s Museum	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Casa Hispana	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Catalpa Health	CELC Resource Fair(s) Early Childhood Mental Health
Center for Healthy Minds at UW-Madison	Kindness Curriculum/Mindfulness Study
Child Care Resource & Referral	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Fox Valley Literacy Council	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Fox Valley Symphony	
Fox Valley Technical College	Student Teachers (?)
Healthy Minds Innovations, Inc. (affiliated with the Center for Healthy Minds)	Kindness Curriculum/Mindfulness Study
Heid Music	
Lawrence University	Research Committee (Chair) Kindness Curriculum/Mindfulness Study Student Research Volunteers and Internships

Organization	Event/Engagement Examples
NEW Mental Health Connection/United Way Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) task force and Trauma Informed Care initiative	
Parent Connection/Family Services	CELC Resource Fair(s)
Stronger Together Fox Valley	Screening of “The Raising of America”
ThedaCare Community Health	CHAT EC Plunge Planning & Follow-up
United Way Fox Cities Developing Children & Youth and Strengthening Families Impact Areas	
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh	Student Teachers
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh – Fox Valley Campus (aka UW-Fox Valley)	Research Committee Kindness Curriculum/Mindfulness Study
Weight of the Fox Valley Early Childhood Action Team	
YMCA	

One vivid example of reaching out and partnering has been the Kindness/Mindfulness project noted above. UW-Fox Valley’s University Children’s Center has actively participated from the beginning, and the entire third year of this effort will involve outreach beyond the CELC. Learnings from this extensive initiative will be shared well beyond the Fox Valley, with at least four national presentations of our findings.

Looking Ahead...

A third leg of outreach efforts has been to create and pursue a vision for early childhood in the Fox Valley.

A team of the CELC Board President and Vice-President and the FVECC Co-Chairs worked with the outreach director in 2016 to draft a vision and strategy for early childhood in our community. The vision was shared with senior leaders from United Way and the Community Foundation, who provided valuable feedback and advice. This draft vision was put on the back burner during turnover in the outreach director position. Work restarted with renewed vigor as a result of a planning grant provided by United Way and the Community Foundation in 2018.

This collaboration has led to the launch of *First Five Fox Valley*, a recasting of the FVECC with the CELC as a participating member. The future has never been brighter for early childhood in our region!

Meanwhile, in response to community interest in honoring Dr. John and Sally Mielke for their lifetime of community service, CELC leadership played a central role in establishing and seeding a unified early childhood fund for the community in honor of the Mielkes. This fund will provide resources for early childhood initiatives in perpetuity.

In Summary...

Collaboration and outreach are not end points but rather they are philosophies that drive activities which add value. Beyond programs and services, CELC is a lead participant in exploring system change for early childhood. CELC's effort to engage individuals and organizations for the benefit of young children will continue as a core element of its being.

We are still early in the life of the Community Early Learning Center, and the journey continues...

** Co-locating partner agencies at the CELC are Appleton Area School District Birth to Five Programs, Appleton Even Start Family Literacy, Bridges Child Enrichment Center, Outagamie & Winnebago Counties Early Intervention Birth to 3 Program, and University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Head Start.*