

Community Investment Report

April 2007

Community Impact

Here at the United Way of West Central Connecticut, all investments are about *improving lives*. Local people, like yourself, invest in our United Way and your investment stays local.

You can be assured that when you invest in the United Way of West Central Connecticut, your money is being used in the best possible way to benefit your community. Through United Way's community impact model, careful analysis at the community-level identifies needs that are specific to the communities we serve – Bristol, Burlington, Plainville and Plymouth.

Resources, both monetary and human, invested in United Way get leveraged with resources from other community partners to create collaborative, lasting changes that one organization could not achieve by itself.

We are a local organization, governed on the local level, supported by local investors, trying to bring about real and lasting change, right here where you live and work, because that's *what matters*.

community matters.™

United Way of West Central Connecticut's (UWWCC) early childhood initiatives, *Born Learning and Discovery*, help our communities provide their children with the best opportunities to succeed when they enter school. United Way's early childhood initiatives are a collaboration of community partners.

Born Learning

Early childhood education is a priority for the UWWCC that is mirrored on the national and state levels. On a national level, *Born Learning* is a public engagement campaign that is about creating lasting community change. It provides parents and caregivers tips and advice to create quality early learning opportunities for young children.

Our **local** Born Learning strategies:

1. Extending language and literacy through talking, reading, telling stories, writing and singing and rhyming with young children.
2. Responsive caregiving through responding sensitively to children's needs; establishing routines, sharing love and affection; and talking lovingly with young children.
3. Reinforcing the valuable role of parents and informal caregivers in supporting early learning.
4. Using everyday moments – fun, loving interaction – to reinforce learning.

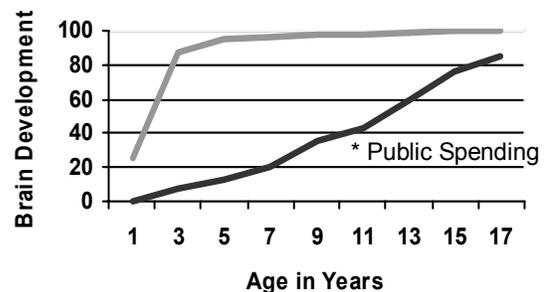
Discovery

UWWCC has been involved since 2001 in a state-wide *Discovery* initiative to help ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn. The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund has provided funding to 49 Connecticut communities and other statewide partners to improve the lives of young children from birth through age eight. The UWWCC has provided a 50% match to these funds, resulting in over \$128,000 given back to our communities through *Discovery*.

Our **local** Discovery strategies:

1. Expanding the supply of high quality care and education and improving the quality of existing programs.
2. Building stronger connections between early care and elementary education.
3. Improving students' social, emotional and academic performance.

Public spending priorities do not match research findings, which indicate that investment in a child's early years is critical to future success.



Source: Hochstein & Halfon.

Turn over to find out more about the local return on your investment



The Problems Are Clear:

A child in Connecticut is born into poverty every 2 hours.¹

- * **In our region**, 427 children under the age of five, or 7%, live in poverty.² This means that by age 3, children from these families with impoverished backgrounds have less than half of the number of words in their vocabulary as children from other families. This gap grows over time, and by the first grade these children know only one-quarter as many words as other children.³

Research shows that parents underestimate the role they play in preparing their children for school, and this contributes to the problem: almost half of America's kindergarteners enter school unprepared.⁴

- * **In our region**, the level of preparedness varies. 87-91% of families report that their child attended preschool, but the quality of that experience differs.⁵ And if a child does not receive a quality early learning experience, it can impact school preparedness.

While there is no magic formula for school success, every family, regardless of socio-economic background, can support their child. Exposure to diverse and stimulating experiences like museums and farms, creative opportunities like finger-painting and playing "dress up," and learning the sounds that go with letters, all support children's school readiness.

The Return on Investment in High Quality Early Education is High:

In our region, children who attended a high quality preschool typically performed better than their peers on kindergarten assessments such as Letter Identification, Concepts About Print and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).⁶

In Plymouth, kindergarten teachers reported that by January all of their children had met or surpassed goals on the DRA. They attribute this unprecedented success to collaboration and cooperation with community preschool teachers.⁷

In Bristol, Greene-Hills piloted an early kindergarten registration process in 2006 called "Great Beginnings." The goal was to give parents resources to help them prepare their children for school, and to give children a chance to get comfortable in their new classroom. Children who attended Great Beginnings tested higher than their peers in five out of six literacy concepts in September.

We are Ensuring Success:

Since 2002, **United Way of West Central Connecticut** has spent nearly \$875,000 to raise awareness about the importance of quality early childhood education as well as to provide opportunities for children to attend preschool. Your current investment supports local activities such as:

- * Preschool opportunities for more than 450 children at Bristol Preschool Child Care Center, Bristol Boys & Girls Club, The Family Center, Plainville Day Care Center and Wheeler Regional YMCA;
- * Distribution of *Born Learning* materials to parents of babies born at Bristol Hospital;
- * *Born Learning* launches at local libraries with guest speakers including superintendents and mayors;
- * Community outreach to families in low-income neighborhoods;
- * Needs assessments and data collection;
- * Parent support through the Bristol Hospital Parent & Child Center

We convene community partners, including parents, to address solutions that are at the root of problems, and we are partnering with community leaders to create an early childhood blueprint to ensure that all children are successful.

(1) Children's Defense Fund, 2004. (2) US Census, 2000. (3) Hart & Risley, 1995. (4) Zill & West, 2001. (5) CT State Department of Education, 2005. (6) Bristol Board of Education, 2003-2005. (7) Plymouth Board of Education, 2007.

BRISTOL * BURLINGTON * PLAINVILLE * PLYMOUTH

Upcoming Events and Programs:

Day of Caring 16
May 18, 2007

5th Annual Community Builders' Reception
Thursday, May 3rd at 5:15pm
The Lyceum, Terryville

For more information:

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