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A Newsletter

for Child Development Professionals

this issue **Economics in Child Care**

You Can Bank on This: How Relationships with Families Affect Your Bottom Line

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Not since the Great Depression has the American economy seen such a drastic downturn as in recent times. A statewide survey published by the North Carolina Child Care Resource & Referral Council (NC CCR&R) in September 2009 <http://www.childcareservices.org/downloads/Provider%20Econ%20Impact%20Report.pdf> showed that unemployment of parents is adversely affecting child care providers throughout North Carolina. Budget cuts to child care subsidy at the county level have caused declines in enrollment, as have cuts in hours and pay for parents across the board. Parents who have experienced job loss also may have lost their child care subsidy or had it severely reduced. The need for child care providers and families to partner with one another to manage their shared experience in a difficult economy is more urgent now than ever before. In particular, creative strategies for attracting and recruiting new families for enrollment, remaining responsive to families' needs, and offering flexibility and support to struggling families can be instrumental in sustaining enrollment and staying afloat in these difficult economic times. This article discusses commonly encountered scenarios that present opportunities for relationship building with parents that may keep programs competitive in these tougher times.

First Impressions

A parent stopped to visit a child care program close to her home. Previous searches for child care had proved unsuccessful, and the parent decided to use this opportunity to inquire about enrolling her child. At the front door, the parent was informed that tours were by appointment only. She was handed a brochure and told to call to schedule an appointment.

While this occurrence may have been an isolated incident, it made an impact on the parent. During a discussion with a CCSA Family Support Counselor, the parent revealed that she often used this method of a "drive-by" to choose services. She had used that method to find several apartments and, coincidentally, the job for which she had recently been hired.

The initial point of contact with any business can make or break one's decision when choosing with whom to do business. This is equally true when parents are shopping for child care; customer service is high on the priority list. Parents are quick to observe the disposition and attitude of



administrators from the moment introductions are made. The immediate economic effect on the provider might seem simple, in that they missed the opportunity to enroll a child in their program. However, in that one instant, the provider potentially missed several opportunities for adding children to their program. Word of mouth is one of the best forms of marketing in this industry, so when providers don't make time for prospective families, the news travels fast. Refusing to see a family on the family's time also places the parents in a difficult situation by forcing the parent to request additional time off from

work or make special arrangements to continue their search. Parents may instead choose to seek out unlicensed babysitters, friends or neighbors to help close the gap in care, or even, in the worst-case scenario, quit their own jobs to care for their child or children until trustworthy child care can be secured.

One simple way to improve parent reception is to expect the unexpected. In other words, prepare ahead of time for unannounced visits by developing a procedure and protocol for handling them. If at all possible, try to make time to take a visiting parent on a tour of your center, even without an appointment, and to answer questions. After all, the way in which parents are received may say a lot to them about how their children will be received and treated at your center. Even at times when stepping into classrooms with a person unfamiliar to the children may be disruptive, take time to help a parent understand why this may be the case, focusing first on the needs of the children. Consider the message you may send, however unintentionally, to a parent when you turn them away. Left to interpret the reason a tour was denied, parents may believe you are simply too busy or uninterested in their business or that you fear your program may not meet their expectations. Additionally, if you already have someone at your front desk or administrative area at all times, help this person to be intentional in connecting with a visiting parent and offering information about your center. Prepare in advance a few questions this

Early Educator Certification Passed into Law!

A new day has dawned for professional standards for early educators.

The new law: On August 2, 2010, a new law was passed affecting all child care facilities licensed by the North Carolina Division of Child Development. The law requires all teaching staff, administrators and family child care home providers working in or operating a licensed child care facility to be certified by the NC Institute for Child Development Professionals.

 Normally \$50, Early Educator Certification (EEC) is currently being offered at a reduced rate of \$25 between Oct. 1 & Dec. 31, 2010.

If you are:	Certification deadline:
Staff hired on or after October 1, 2010	Complete application submitted within 60 days of hire
Staff hired before October 1, 2010	July 1, 2012
Administrators (regardless of hire date)	July 1, 2012
Family child care home provider licensed before October 1, 2010	July 1, 2012
Family child care home provider licensed on or after October 1, 2010	Complete application submitted within 60 days of licensure

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Apply today!

Visit www.ncicdp.org

for an application or to learn more.

Contact us at 919-942-7442 or info@nceec.org for questions about your application or for more information about EEC.

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"Staff" includes any position counted toward child/staff ratios. To be eligible for free/reduced fee, applicants must work in a licensed child care center or home in a staff position.



point person can ask to engage the parent, such as, "We're happy you found us. Can you tell us what brought you to our door?" or "What are the most important things you're looking for in a center?" In this way, parents are more likely to feel heard and to perceive that their needs are understood. You may ask your point person not only to hand over a brochure, but also to open it and talk through important program features, focusing on items that interest the parent most and that highlight your program's quality. If your center requires that tours be scheduled, again, help the parent to understand the reason for doing so and have the appointed person work with the parent's needs and be flexible about the time and day to be sure it does not overtax a parent's ability to return.

Open Communication

A single mother dropped off her son at his child care facility and expressed concerns to staff about his teething. Calls to the program throughout the same day went unanswered, which was a recurring problem the mother had experienced for quite some time. Immediately following the parent's expression of a concern, things would improve, but only in the short term, and the lack of consistency had the mother searching for a new provider. The mother chose to move her child to a new program, increasing her morning and evening commute from five minutes to thirty, which not only caused inconvenience, but also incurred increased travel costs for the family and an additional hour out of their day.

In this particular case, one simple solution for the provider may have been to invest in a cordless phone. Certainly, such an investment ben-

efits not just one family but the program as a whole when a program administrator is able to respond to parent concerns more efficiently and effectively. Not every situation can be rectified with a simple, inexpensive equipment purchase; however, the willingness of a provider to remain flexible and seek solutions that satisfy the needs of all involved is crucial to building positive relationships with families.

Use of Resources and Support

Often, financial stress in a family can filter down to the children, who end up expressing their insecurity by "acting out" in their preschool classes. Consider what your program's typical response might be to a child who bites, hits, kicks, throws things or otherwise behaves in an unruly or unpredictable manner. Family Support Counselors receive at least a few calls a month from frustrated parents who are looking for emergency care because a center has "expelled" their children for behavior issues.

One way to address this issue is by utilizing CCSA's free or low-cost initiatives. CCSA offers the services of a Healthy Social Behavior Specialist to help providers improve their rate of retention and better address the needs of children who may be more highly stressed than others. The behavior modification strategies and environmental modifications that a behavior specialist can help bring into a classroom can make all the difference not only for one child, but for the entire classroom as well as for the teachers and parents. To access these services, call your local CCSA office using contact information at this link:

<http://www.childcareservices.org/contact.html>. Just ask for the Healthy Social Behavior Specialist for your region.

Additionally, professional development opportunities regarding behavior management and a host of other issues with which your center may be faced is just a click away in the Regional Training Calendar. This calendar is always available on the left-hand menu of CCSA's website, www.childcareservices.org. Choose the first link on the training page to access the online calendar. Also note that in addition to the host of sessions offered in person at a CCSA facility, there are now training options offered by phone and video. These lower-cost alternatives may save your center money and increase your team's ability to participate in professional development activities.

By using the resources available to programs, many at no or low cost, programs can avoid sending the unintended message that a struggling child is "not good enough" to stay. Instead, the center that chooses to use resources tells the child that she or he is worthy of their time, attention and daily preparation by doing everything possible to improve the skill sets, knowledge and experience of staff. In this way, providers can be pro-active in retaining families, modeling good conflict management skills for the children, and improving the marketability of the program.

Flexibility with Fees

A stay-at-home mother called CCSA worried about how to provide safe child care for her three children, ages two, four and eight, during her recovery from cancer surgery. She knew that she would be off her feet for between four and six weeks, and the family depended on her husband's mid-range salary to meet the rent, utilities and other expenses of the family, plus the insurance and treatment costs for her illness. The family qualified financially for subsidy, but faced a long waiting list. Because of the emergency nature of the family's situation, a child care program the family was interested in chose to waive the application fee and their over-market-rate fees. The provider also had a 10% sibling discount already in place, which helped lower the family's burden of care even further. The family enrolled in the program and eventually received additional help from a local charity and emergency subsidy funds, which covered a significant portion of the family's child care costs. Because of the child care program's willingness to make accommodations for the family, the program was able to secure the steady enrollment of three children, and the family was able to procure care so that the mother did not have to risk her health caring for the children, and the children did not have to be preoccupied with caring for their mother during her recovery.

Child care professionals, as a community, can and do help the children whose parents are struggling just to provide basic needs for their families. Some providers have chosen creative strategies to support their valued families such as offering staggered payment plans, sliding-scale fees or tuition, partial scholarships, and/or multiple child discounts. Some programs are even able to barter care for services parents may be able to provide, such as painting, repair, cleaning or landscaping. Some providers have even gone the "extra mile," literally, as they've begun to provide limited transportation to and from children's homes when families have transportation limitations. Each child care program must decide what their own abilities and priorities are in working with some struggling families. Certainly, those that require a cost to the program are not always practical, but creativity and flexibility on the part of both family and provider can keep kids in quality care even when hardship presents obstacles.

A quality child care program provides a critical component in the lives

of the children in care. Providers offer support and stability for children while their parents struggle to juggle multiple financial needs, responsibilities and priorities. Child care providers as a whole have stepped up recent efforts to engage existing families and to attract new ones, and families can tell which programs are making that extra effort to attract and retain their business. Families see and absorb the messages in the smiles on their children's faces, the interactions they observe in the classroom when they tour the facility, and the professional demeanor of office staff when calls are answered promptly by friendly, knowledgeable and helpful staffers. Moreover, families who receive encouragement, understanding and positive feedback from providers tend to be more engaged and involved in the program. Increased parent involvement is a plus for everyone, helping to enhance children's experiences in the classroom as well as the provider's relationship with the family as a whole. And those positive relationships ultimately ARE your bottom line!



Be a Part of Child Care Services Association's FREE Child Care Referral Program!

Every year, CCSA provides child care referrals to over 5,000 families!

How does listing with CCSA's Referral Program benefit your child care program?

- **FREE** advertising!!
- Assistance building your enrollment and filling your vacancies in a timely manner
- Eligibility for a wide range of CCSA's other services, including technical assistance and training, placement of children on scholarship, meal service and nutrition education
- Easy access to your program for families through CCSA's Online Child Care Search

Build your enrollment. **Sign up today!**
Call **779-2220** for more information.



Passing the Torch: NAEYC Accreditation for Early Childhood Programs

By Tracey-Lee Drummond Lucas, Accreditation Specialist
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Early childhood programs are always looking for ways to raise quality, provide professional development for staff, and market their programs to attract more families. These goals can be challenging in the best of times but may prove especially difficult when enrollment is down and budgets are low for professional development. One way to address all of these needs is through accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, www.naeyc.org).

What is NAEYC accreditation?

NAEYC accreditation began in 1985 with the goal of providing an accrediting system that would raise the level of care and education in early childhood programs. Ensuring the quality of children's daily experiences in care and promoting positive child outcomes lies at the heart of NAEYC's accreditation standards. NAEYC's symbol for the achievement of high quality in early childhood education is the torch. Today, over 7,000 programs nationwide have risen to meet NAEYC's elevated standards and bear the torch as a mark of their achievement.

Why pursue NAEYC accreditation?

To be sure, NAEYC accreditation is a rigorous process. It takes time and preparation. Here in North Carolina, pursuing NAEYC accreditation does not offer immediate monetary rewards or a higher reimbursement rate per child. So why bother? "Because it will separate me from the other programs," says Pam Holt, Director of Preston Children's Academy. "Having five stars is not enough anymore; achieving NAEYC accreditation will make our program even more unique to families." This distinction may be an important component of your center's marketing plan.

Besides the obvious appeal to future families that an identifiably higher-quality program may bring, the benefit to the children, families and staff associated with the center is reason enough to consider accreditation. By working toward NAEYC accreditation, the program administrators, teaching staff and families who engage in the process have the rare opportunity to examine and reinvent their program, making themselves more attractive to new families seeking high-quality care for their young children. By using the self-study tools and free online resources provided by NAEYC, programs have a road map to meeting research-based standards and criteria, developed on best practices for young children.

First Environments Early Learning Program in Durham decided to pursue NAEYC accreditation "because of the great respect we have for NAEYC," shared director Beth Lake. "I don't need to recruit families... I have a long wait list." Rather, Ms. Lake sees accreditation as a holistic process that serves the entire school community. "It looks at strengthening the relationships with our children, families and staff, which is the core of our early childhood program." Ms. Lake is attracted to how "accreditation looks at the community which creates the school," something she feels provides an even broader picture of her program than licensing alone. The First Environments staff will embark on the accreditation process this summer. "I know that this will be a great educational opportunity for the entire staff," it's an opportunity that will create learning communities within the entire early childhood program.

What are the benefits of being a NAEYC-Accredited program?

The goal for any program going through the accreditation process is the commitment to examine their program more closely, make the necessary changes to meet higher standards, and become part of a select few programs nationwide that have chosen to lead the way for higher quality early childhood education in their communities. NAEYC lists the following specific benefits to accreditation at <http://www.naeyc.org/academy> under the "Interested in Accreditation" tab:

- Helps to build a stronger team of teachers, administrators, and families working together to improve quality for children.
- Improved standards for the overall program
- Recognition through NAEYC, including program listing on the NAEYC website in the Program Search section
- Announcement of program's accreditation in the NAEYC Early Learning News weekly newsletter to programs, members, media, and others.
- Use of NAEYC Accredited logo for marketing purposes
- Attracts more families to enroll their children at program



What's the first step?

Even if a program is not ready to undergo accreditation, simply using NAEYC's resources can be a great professional development tool. The self-study process, which is available to any program, does not require the help of a consultant or trainer. In fact, registration for The Online Resource Community Headquarters (TORCH) of NAEYC's website is free at www.naeyc.org/torch and contains all of the standards and criteria involved in NAEYC accreditation. Once you arrive at the TORCH website, see the instructions for first-time log-in under the NAEYC accreditation logo to get started. TORCH can provide programs with all of the information and resources needed to explore the possibility of NAEYC accreditation, even before an application or fee is submitted. Programs also may purchase a self-study kit, which helps program staff to engage in the following beneficial program activities, regardless of whether the program expects to apply for accreditation:

- Create study groups to share understandings of key concepts about accreditation, the standards, the criteria and the implications for their program;
- Determine strengths and areas for improvements using the standards and criteria as a measure of quality for their education component and administrative practices;
- Develop program improvement plans with timelines as needed;
- Make improvements and document progress through portfolios; and
- Evaluate the results and determine next steps.

Who will help my program carry the torch?

NAEYC provides scholarships for application fees and self-study materials. Interested programs can learn about fees and access a scholarship

application at <http://www.naeyc.org/academy> under the "Fees" tab at the top of the page. Locally, CCSA also provides scholarships. Visit www.childcareservices.org, click the orange block on the right for program support information, and choose the Technical Assistance option for more information. Additionally, information sessions on accreditation are placed on the Regional Training Calendar regularly. While you're on CCSA's website, click on the Regional Training Calendar link on the front page and look for "Climbing the Ladder of Quality-Steps toward NAEYC Accreditation." Through CCSA's Technical Assistance services, the agency's Accreditation Specialist, Tracey-Lee Drummond Lucas, is available to consult with and assist programs during the four steps to accreditation. Her services come at no cost to programs and can be an invaluable support to seeing a program through the accreditation process. Programs interested in more information on NAEYC accreditation or with questions about their readiness to begin the accreditation process should contact Tracey-Lee by phone at 919-403-6950 or by e-mail at traceyl@childcareservices.org.

Creating Quality School-Age Environments on a Budget

By Janet George, School-Age Specialist
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Quality school-age programs offer a safe environment, qualified leaders, activities and materials that are interesting and developmentally appropriate for all ages of children in the program. Many programs faced with tight budgets struggle to include the variety and number of materials necessary to provide engaging, positive environments. This article identifies materials and activities for school-age programs to meet School-Age Care Environment Rating Scales (SACERS) requirements and to keep children's interest, as well as ideas and resources for creating or obtaining the materials at a low cost or at no cost to programs.

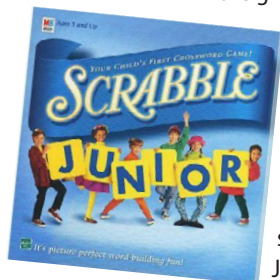
Suggested materials and equipment for a school-age environment:

Art

A variety of art materials should be available daily for independent use by children. Children should have freedom to create on their own. Some suggested materials include: markers, pencils and pens, crayons, color pencils, water color or tempera paints, white marker boards and non-toxic markers, chalk boards and chalk, sidewalk chalk, drawing paper, construction paper, tissue paper, scissors, white glue or glue sticks, clay or play dough and accessories, collage materials, and craft supplies.

Blocks

Use anything that children can build with, including at least three different styles of blocks (LEGO®s, gear builders, wooden blocks, marble run, etc.). Also include things like cars, community people and vehicle signs. In rooms with children in 3rd grade or higher, include at least one or more challenging style such as K'Nex®, three-dimensional puzzles or magnetic items.



Music

Classrooms need a variety of material. Include a CD or tape player and three different styles of music, such as kids' dance music, classical or kids' rap music. Instruments that do not go into the mouth to play should be included as well as dance props, such as twirlers, scarves and microphones.

Dramatic Play

Items in this area should allow children to use their imaginations. Consider fantasy props, such as a wand, a bride's dress, a shield and armor without a sword. Miscellaneous props might include a cash register, phones, dolls, dress-up clothes, food and dishes. Choose to represent at least three careers with at least three supporting items for each. For example, you could represent a doctor using a fake prescription pad, a smock and a stethoscope; a veterinarian using animals, a smock and a fake vet's kit; a restaurant worker using menus, food, dishes, an order pad and fake money; or a mail carrier using envelopes, a mailbox, labels, paper, pencils, old stamps and a mail bag.

Math

Items in the math area should help children learn money, numbers, colors, patterns, logic and time. Include at least three for each age group, such as scales; Unifix™ cubes; pattern blocks; piece puzzles of varying difficulty; number puzzles; measuring utensils, like cups, spoons, rulers and tape measures; paper; pencils; calculators; flashcards; tell-time clocks; bingo; and popular board and card games.



Language Arts

The language arts space needs to have at least two books per child. The books should include appropriate selections for all ages of children in the group and should not contain any material that is violent; inappropriate, such as adult activities; or that shows risk to a person. Include fiction and non-fiction books and magazines. Choose some that represent diversity in a positive manner, including differences in race, ethnicity, sex, special needs, age and more. A variety of additional materials should be available such as word puzzles, a children's dictionary, writing paper and pencils, letter stencils, word puzzles, letter stamps, and age-appropriate games, such as Apples to Apples Jr.®, Pictionary®, SCRABBLE®, SCRABBLE Jr.®, SCRABBLE UPWORDS®, Boggle® and Boggle Jr.®

Science

A variety of materials should be available daily, such as science-related books, posters, games and puzzles; plastic animals, including reptiles, insects or dinosaur collections; collections of natural items, such as rocks, shells, a variety of pinecones, leaves and flowers; as well as living things that children can help care for like plants, an aquarium, a hermit crab or an ant farm. You should also have a variety of equipment such as magnets and items to test them, magnifying glasses, binoculars, scales and measuring tools, a tornado tube, color paddles and a microscope.

Ideas for getting what you need:

Consider creating a very **specific wish list** that you can share with parents, churches and civic groups to help secure materials you need. Non-specific lists may bring you an abundance of items that are not of use to your program. A specific list for your dramatic play area might look like this example: dress up- 2 sport blazers, 2 jersey style sports shirts, 1 pair cowboy boots, 1 pair men's shoes, 3 men's button down shirts, 2 pairs men's pants, 2 women's casual dresses/skirts & blouses, 2 women's formal dresses, 2 pairs women's dress shoes, 2 pairs scrubs, 2 lab coats, sunglasses, hats, jewelry, handbags, wallets, etc. You might also ask for menus, old telephones and other dramatic play props. You might consider listing other things you need as well, such as shelves, a love seat, floor pillows, games, toys, books, rugs and other items.

Go to **local businesses** and ask for donations such as aprons or vests from businesses that provide them for employees, such as home improvement stores or restaurants; menus from local restaurants; scrubs from medical or veterinary offices; old stationary, ink pens and calendars from insurance agencies and business offices; pots, soil, seeds and garden tools from gardening centers; uniform shirts from service industry businesses, such as gas stations, convenience stores and mechanic shops.

Yard sales and thrift shops are great places to find bargains on furniture, games, toys, blocks and materials or props for dramatic play. People are often willing to negotiate price and, if they know items are for a classroom, sometimes will donate them. Be sure used items are in good repair and can be well cleaned.

Make your own! You can get some great ideas from the library or the internet for making things you need in your classroom. Here are a few online resources for making play dough, puppets and rhythm instru-

ments: <http://www.amazingmoms.com/htm/artclayrecipes.htm>, <http://www.nancymusic.com/PRINThomemade.htm>, <http://www.kids-fun-and-games.com/puppet-making.html>.

Visit the **library** to add to your book collection. Ask if your library offers a "business" library card for child care centers. Take the children on a weekly visit to pick out their own books! You will need to monitor the content to assure books are appropriate for your setting.

Check It Out!

Wake County, Durham County and Chapel Hill Public Libraries all host their own Kid's Page at the following links:

- Wake: <http://www.wakegov.com/libraries/kids/default.htm>
- Durham: <http://www.durhamcountylibrary.org/kids/events.php>
- Chapel Hill: <http://chapelhillpubliclibrary.org/txp/?s=Children&id=98&pageClass=programs>

Click on the library link for your area to view story times, kid-friendly web links, age-appropriate reading lists, caregiver links, blogs and more.

Additionally, the Orange County library features kid-related events at its branches on this page: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/kidsprograms.asp>.

Click, Communicate and Keep Your Cash

By Kelly Eppley, Grants and Special Projects Manager
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How does your program currently communicate with families? Do you create flyers for announcements and spend time stuffing them into children's boxes for parents to take home? Do you mail a monthly newsletter to keep parents up to date on program activities, events and celebrations? Do you copy your program's menu weekly to distribute to parents? Well, stop the presses! By doing so, you'll also stop the drain on your program's staff time and material resources. Click the following links for tips on using the low- to no-cost technology available at your fingertips to both enhance communication for those connected to your child care program as well as reduce spending on paper, ink, toner, postage and staff time spent preparing and distributing paper forms of communication.

Blogs

Getting out well-timed announcements about your program's activities, fundraisers or celebrations; staff changes; weekly menus; weather-related or holiday closings; quality maintenance or enhancement achievements; and other updates as they happen is possible through blogging. If the thought of blogging kicks you right out of your

comfort zone with technology, read the simple,

(continued on page 7)



(continued from page 6 - Click)

step-by-step pages at http://www.blogger.com/tour_start.g

for a pleasant surprise. You'll learn not only what a blog is and how to set up and use one, but also that blogs are much simpler than they may seem to the uninitiated. A blog is basically an individual web site a user can customize and employ to get her or his unique message across to the people who care most about what he or she has to say. Even the most basic ones can store and archive your posts—or messages you write on your blog—along with pictures and links to other websites.

If you follow blogs or feel comfortable using them already, you can click on <http://en.wordpress.com/features/> to learn about slightly more complex blogging features that may meet your needs. If one of these two resources seems right for you, they both make sign-up easy and blog space free. Other blogging resources are also available online, so explore and find out what's right for you. With any blog, you'll receive your very own web link to send to families and others who may wish to follow your program's activities. With blogging, carefully considering and constructing your content will be important, as blogs are public, and posts often allow readers of your messages to leave their own comments. Additionally, setting aside time to update your blog will be important so that readers stay interested in and engaged with your program.

Even if you're not yet ready to use this type of online communication, consider orienting yourself to the style and content of blogs related to early childhood topics by following a few that may be of interest. For example, The New America Foundation offers an Early Ed Watch blog at <http://earlyed.newamerica.net/blogmain> and covers news of national interest to early educators. Additionally, NC Children, a blog developed by The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., can be found at <http://ncchildren.wordpress.com/> and provides political and legislative updates of interest to the early childhood community in our state. The NC Children blog also uses one of the free blogging resources offered in this article.

Group Pages and E-mail Lists

Group pages, e-mail lists and similar group communication tools are available through a dizzying array of free sources these days. Any of the following links or a host of others available on the web may be right for your communication needs: <http://groups.yahoo.com/>, <http://groups.google.com/>, <http://onlinegroups.net/>, <http://www.keepandshare.com/>. Groups generally allow you to keep messages and content more private than is possible by blogging. Although most group sharing resources offer plenty of privacy settings, review those at the group of your choice to be sure you're fully aware of your group's social boundaries. Paying attention to privacy features as you set up your group will help you to share with only the parents and stakeholders with whom you intend to communicate about your program's activities. Often, groups can be set up to



remain unlisted in any public directory and to be joined by your invitation only.

A few advantages of using groups include that users, and in this case that means your families, are required to keep their own e-mail addresses updated in order to receive messages. If you happen to send messages to your group frequently, users can also choose whether to receive your messages instantaneously as you send them or receive a single daily e-mail, or digest, with a list of all the posted messages from the day. You may also have the option to send outgoing messages only so that the group does not receive unintended communication from other group members. Group pages make getting e-mail communication out to families streamlined

and simple and often include features that allow you to upload and store files, such as program policies, parent forms, children's artwork, pictures, menus, past newsletters and more in electronic format so that users can view or download them at any time. Some groups also offer special features like polling, which allows you to capture the thoughts, preference or opinions of your group members on a particular topic.

Again, if you feel one step removed from initiating communication using group pages or e-mail lists, try joining one first to get a feel for how they work. You could search the directories at any one of the links in this section to find and join groups that center on topics of interest to you.

Social Media

The web is full of opportunities to connect with everyone from former classmates to third cousins twice removed via social media sites, such as Facebook (www.facebook.com), where users create individual identities and express their every thought, action and opinion by way of electronic updates and posts to each other's pages. Because of the public nature of social media sites and the limited control users typically have over the design and daily goings on at their personal pages, social media sites may have some limitations for child care programs that must first consider the best interests of the children and families they serve. However, one advantage social media sites do offer child care programs is their potential as program marketing tools.

By creating a group page or fan page on Facebook for your child care program, for example, parents can "become a fan" of your fan page or they can "join" or "like" your group page, any of which connects them to any messages, photos or notes that you post to your page. Often, your fans and followers will publicly comment on or indicate that they "like" your post, which alerts their entire network of friends to your message. Consider the following examples of ways in which this kind of networking is useful for any number of program marketing and resource needs a typical child care program may have: Enrollment is low and you want the parents connected to your center to let their friends, neighbors or co-workers know of open spots; your teachers are fans or members of your page and can help to attract other teachers to your program when positions open; you need to recruit volunteers for playground clean-up

or landscaping one weekend, and a simple post may connect you to hundreds, possibly thousands, of people instantly; you are easily able to announce in a public venue your newly upgraded five-star license or your recent accreditation by NAEYC or NAFCC. By using social media to spread the word, your reach could expand exponentially as friends of friends find you, join your page and become more involved with the success of your center.

Though the possibilities for connecting with families and future friends of your program are endless, as with all public dialogue, care and consideration are always warranted in order to preserve the professionalism and dignity you want associated with your program. But with a little thought and planning, you can use social media to market your program to unfathomable numbers of people, creating an audience you may otherwise never have reached in another way. In fact, for a few examples of how marketing through social media can get you connected to others who care about the same things you do, go to Facebook and search for any organization you care about. For example, Smart Start, NAEYC, Durham's Partnership for Children, Orange County Partnership for Young Children, Family Child Care Association of Wake County and Early Educator Certification all have Facebook pages. You'll also find Child Care Services Association's own Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ChildCareServices. And while you're visiting, **become a fan!**

The Small Business Owner's Book Shelf

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For anyone who has made it a life's work to care for and educate young children, numerous concerns may guide day-to-day work, such as getting to know and supporting each child's unique development and educational path, providing a safe and stimulating environment for all children, and working together with families on each child's progress and school readiness. Certainly, these items occupy their rightful place at the top of any early educator's priority list, and no doubt the bookshelf of any child care program contains titles focused on just such topics. Check your own shelf, though, because the one topic that may get missed in the midst of the important daily work of supporting children is the very element of your program that makes all of your work possible—your child care business.

No doubt, attending to the needs of the staff members, children and parents who make up your clientele may seem to absorb all of the attention you have to give, but making room to focus on the fiscal management of your business is essential. Take a look at a few of the titles in this article that could add variety and needed assistance to your child care program's resources.

The Montana Resource and Referral Network produced *Dollars & Sense: Planning for Profit in Your Child Care Business*, by Janet Bush. This self-study curriculum offers clear and easily absorbed lessons in business communication and financial management, including helpful worksheets. For more information or to order, visit <http://www.montanachildcare.com/> and click on "Resources and Publications." Choose the "Provider Resources" link and look for "Dollars and Sense" in the list.



Tom Copeland is a consultant for the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) and an attorney. He has written extensively on the subject of running the business side of family child care. Visit <http://www.redleafpress.org> and click on "Our Authors" in the menu at the top. Choose his name from the alphabetical list by last name, and you'll find a number of helpful guides on legal issues, taxes, marketing and business planning for family child care homes.

At Child Care Information Exchange, <http://www.childcareexchange.com/>, look for the following books on money management for child care businesses: *The Bottom Line for Children's Programs: What You Need to Know to Manage Your Money*, by Gwen G. Morgan and Bess R. Emanuel; and *Not Just Small Change: Fund Development for Early Childhood Programs*, by Roberta L. Bergman. Additionally *Managing Money: A Center Director's Guidebook*, by Roger and Bonnie Neugebauer is available at this site as well as the NAEYC store at <http://www.naeyc.org/store/node/157>. NAEYC describes this valuable resource as "packed with expert advice on every aspect of money management, planning, fundraising, financial reporting, cash flow analysis, salary schedules, fee policies, and more."

While most of these resources are available for less than \$30, you can find very low-cost or free information online, as well. Child Care Information Exchange, <http://www.childcareexchange.com/>, offers article downloads for around \$3 each on a wide range of topics, and many business management options are available. Additionally, at The United States Small Business Administration's Office of Business Development, you can also download for free the publication *How To Start a Quality Child Care Business*, which replaces its earlier publication *Quality Child Care Makes Good Business Sense*. Visit www.sba.gov and enter the publication's title in the search bar. Whether you are starting, growing or just trying to maintain your child care business, this publication may be a helpful tool to keep on hand.

Beyond a well stocked bookshelf to keep yourself fresh on the topic of child care business management, also always remember that Child Care Services Association offers 8 credit hours of training on child care business management in the "Business Side of Child Care" course. The course is available for \$30 and is offered regularly through the agency. Check the quarterly training calendar linked to the agency's website at www.childcareservices.org for up-to-date listings. For details about Family Child Care Association of Wake County's December training, "Making Your Child Care Business Work for You," visit <http://familychildcareassociation.web.officelive.com/> and click on Events. Additionally, Early Childhood Administration I and II, known as EDU 261 and 262, are offered by community colleges around the state. Many community colleges are making increasing numbers of courses available in a variety of formats to suit the adult professional learner, including in-person, online and hybrid, which incorporates both. Check individual community college websites for details and registration information.

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