



The Community Group

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Dear Friends:

We wanted to take this opportunity to send you our best wishes for the holiday season and to share highlights from the many programs of the Community Group. Though the budgetary challenges of the past year, which have been among the most difficult in recent memory, will continue to have an impact in the year ahead, we are ending this calendar year having retained 92% of the employees and contracted professionals that work to deliver education and support services relied upon by thousands of children, families and educators in Greater Lawrence and throughout the Merrimack Valley. The incomes derived from the work performed by these valued educators not only support their families but also help to support the local economies of communities throughout our region.

Community Day Care

Nearly every one of the 750 children enrolled in Community Day Care's licensed and nationally accredited center-based and home-based (family child care) programs received needs-based financial assistance and/or supportive care based on findings of abuse and neglect. Our programs, which are located throughout the cities of Lawrence and Methuen, provided developmentally appropriate, enriching educational experiences for children in every age group, from infants, to toddlers, to preschool, kindergarten and school-age children, and teen/young adult parents.

Community Day Care's largest center, the **Community Learning Center**, just completed its first year in a new location at 7 Ballard Way in Lawrence. In May, just six months after relocating/consolidating programs previously located at the Wyman Street and Merrimack River centers, Community Learning Center achieved accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This accomplishment is significant both for the speed with which staff completed all of the work necessary to accomplish this goal; but also that they are one of the first programs in the country to earn accreditation under NAEYC's newly revamped standards of quality.

Community Day Care's center-based and family childcare preschool programs qualified for continuation grants from the Massachusetts Dept. of Early Education and Care Universal Preschool Program based on their continued efforts to assess and monitor children's progress, employ highly-qualified teachers and providers, and implement developmentally-appropriate literacy-based curriculums that give preschool children the opportunity to develop the readiness skills essential to their long-term success in school.

The Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education awarded Community Day Care the highly competitive **21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Grant**. Community Day Care developed this grant to build upon the work of educators from Community Day Care's Latchkey School-Age Program and Lawrence's Guilmette and Wetherbee Public Schools to collaboratively develop and implement project-based learning activities that give elementary school students additional opportunities to apply and strengthen academic skills and knowledge outside of the regular school day and year.

The Community Group's education coordinator is implementing an **exciting in-house professional development program for Community Day Care family child care providers**. This model gives experienced providers that are CDA (Child Development Associate) credentialed the opportunity to develop leadership and management skills by mentoring family child care providers pursuing the CDA credential through Community Day Care. The CDA is a respected national credential that demonstrates that a provider possesses the knowledge and skills needed to support children's developmental progress. The CDA also provides a foundation for career advancement through college course completion and/or degree attainment.



Community Day Care’s partnership with *Raising a Reader* continues to thrive, expanding from center-based programs to include family child care providers who are assisting *Raising a Reader* and Harvard University to measure the impact of this program on children’s literacy development. All of the participants report that children and parents look forward to sharing the beautiful books contained in the *Raising a Reader* backpacks.

Child Care Circuit

Despite enduring significant cuts in state funding that impacted staff assigned to both its Lawrence and Beverly offices, over the last year the Child Care Circuit provided child care resource and referral services for more than 7,200 children and managed a monthly caseload of 8,500 child care vouchers for families living in 53 cities and towns throughout northeast Massachusetts.

The Circuit’s training department provided workshops and courses for 5,250 early education and care professionals. On-line and distance learning training services were expanded, and the collaboration with the Urban College of Boston bilingual early childhood certificate program continued to give language minority early education professionals an entry-point to college. In November the Circuit earned certification as an Authorized Provider by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). This certification qualifies the Circuit to offer IACET continuing education units (CEUs) for all training courses that meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI)/IACET standards, further evidence of the Circuit’s commitment to deliver high-quality professional development services for early education and care and out-of-school-time providers.

Community Day Charter Public School

Our school continues to maintain the enrollment capacity of our charter, serving 331 Lawrence students in Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 8 (with a waitlist of 900). Early in the year we completed the application and on-site verification for the charter renewal resulting in renewal of our charter for another five-year term (2010-2015). Based upon our students’ continued strong performance on the MCAS, Community Day Charter was again selected by New Leaders for New Schools, a national nonprofit focused on improving the performance of urban schools, as the recipient of a Silver-gain EPIC (Effective Practice Incentive Community) Award. This award highlights charter schools that demonstrate significant academic achievement gains in communities of high-need to encourage educators throughout the country to replicate their best practices and programs. In June our 10th class of grade 8 students, 20 in all, graduated with many options for secondary school enrollment. We are most grateful to a local benefactor (who prefers to remain anonymous), as well as the Lawrence Exchange Club Joseph L’Italien Scholarship Program, and the private high schools themselves, for providing scholarships and financial assistance that make it possible for our graduates and their parents to consider private and public school options. More than half of the graduates entered private secondary schools including Phillips Andover, Pingree, St. John’s Prep, Central Catholic, and Notre Dame High Schools.

Evidence of our school-wide commitment to a code of conduct that values personal responsibility and citizenship was on display throughout the year; it was reinforced through many community service opportunities. The *Essex Street History Project* is one example; this summer project involved Upper School students and teachers who worked together to assist the Lawrence History Center to research and document the changes that have occurred to Essex Street from the Civil War era to the present. In addition to the service projects that they organize at school, our faculty members also model a commitment to service in their private lives, as demonstrated by Upper School teacher Mike Neagle, who was recognized as a “Playspace Activity Leader of the Year” by the Horizons for Homeless Children in Lowell. Parents also modeled the power of civic participation; passionate in their commitment to charter schools, Community Day Charter parents have been working energetically with other parents, charter teachers and leaders from across the state to encourage adoption of legislation that will lift the cap on charter school enrollment.

Community Training Initiative

Our efforts to disseminate the agency’s best practices through professional development, training and consultation services served a diverse array of educators, including public school (charters and districts) teachers and administrators, as well as early education and school-age practitioners. Our Data Manager, Bruce Bean, co-authored an article published by the Pioneer Institute, in which CPI’s innovative use of MCAS data to drive



school reform was highlighted. Teachers from Community Day Charter and the Community Day Latchkey Program have continued to collaborate on the development of PAL- *Projects for After-School Learning* – a CPI program focused on designing curriculum and training services to support skills and content areas required for school success. PAL suggests fun, hands on activities and interactive field trips that strengthen children’s initiative and problem-solving skills and support the Standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum in ways that children do not identify as “school.”

Despite the economic and other challenges that lay before us in the year ahead we look forward to putting forth high-quality, innovative programs and services that improve the lives of children, families and educators of our community.

From all of us at the Community Group we offer best wishes for a joyful holiday season and a happy, healthy new year!

Sincerely,



Sheila Balboni
Executive Director

The Community Group is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to achieving our mission to *create, manage and nurture high quality programs focused on education and related services that support families.* Contributions to The Community Group are tax deductible.

