

Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County

In 1992, the Plymouth School District received a grant from the Department of Public Instruction to form a countywide council that addressed the needs of children and their families. Members included representatives from schools, churches, social services, health, business, childcare services, professional agencies and parents. This coordinating council began with 30 members and created a vision that all children and families would be supported within their communities. From that vision, the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County became a reality.

The council is now known as the Every Family Coordinating Council (EFCC) and has the mission to “build strong families and strong communities.” It has 98 members and has an elected Board of Directors that serve as the overseeing body of the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County. The EFCC council meets on the third Friday of September, November, January, March and May. The membership elects board members at their annual meeting in May of every year. Each board member serves a three-year term and acts as a member of the governing Board of Directors for the incorporation of the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County. See organizational chart attachment. Official meetings for the Board of Directors are held usually on the third Friday of June, August, October, December, February, and April.

The Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County was incorporated in October of 1996, and established its first countywide center in Plymouth in February of 1997. The 1209 Eastern Avenue location was considered easily accessible and centrally located in the county. The center consisted of a resource library on family issues, a meeting room for parenting programs, parent/child activities and support groups; and a children’s room used for child care for parenting programs and/or where parents can play with their children when the center is open. Trained Parent Educators staff the center and help provide the many programs for families of all ages. In 2001 alone, over 50 different parenting programs and activities were held through the centers for families living throughout Sheboygan County. See sample catalog enclosed.

A new satellite center in the eastern section of the county was established in the City of Sheboygan in February of 2000. St. Nicholas Hospital offered a wonderful site on their campus at 3149 Saemann Avenue that could provide an additional center to the county. The satellite site in Sheboygan also contains a children’s room, a resource library, two meeting rooms and office space for Parent Educators.

Funding for the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County comes from a variety of federal, state and local sources. An annual budget of \$275,000 is supported through grants and donations from the Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Education, CAP Fund, Plymouth, Sheboygan Falls and Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah School Districts, City of Plymouth, Sheboygan Falls and Plymouth United Way, local civic groups and community members at large. Presently the centers employ 5 full time staff and 6 part-time staff members. An annual audit is completed.

The largest program that is provided through the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County is called Parents as Teachers. This program is presently serving over 380 families and is offered free to all first time parents living in Sheboygan County with children between the ages of birth to three years of age. A brochure is attached for the Parents as Teachers program and more information follows.

Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program:

Scientific research demonstrates that during the first three years of life, prenatal care and proper stimulation are critical in the development of a child's cognitive and social skills. Moreover, children learn most effectively and positively from the people who nurture them in their early years, their parents. Therefore, because parents are a child's first and most influential teachers, our home visiting program provides them with the resources they need to build a strong foundation for their children's future success in life. It is imperative that when families identify a time of need, that a program will be able to provide that support as needed.

Personalized home visits are available to all first-time parents living in Sheboygan County through the Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County. The home visiting program is a national program designed for families with children between the ages of birth to three years. It consists of three components: home visits by a trained parent educator, parent discussion groups with parent/child activities and screening for developmental delays in the children. In addition, parents receive developmental newsletters through a monthly mailing and an ongoing education of community resources and support systems that builds on a parent's connection to their community and decreases their feeling of being isolated.

Home visits are designed by the parents in regards to the time they happen, the place they happen, the frequency, and the type of information that they would like to receive. They build on the families' strengths and offer educational parent and child activities, which are developmentally appropriate and relevant to the families' current needs. Child development information and literacy awareness is a strong base for the materials that are shared with the parents during the home visits and group discussions. This increase in the parent's understanding of a child's normal growth and development, also increases their observation skills of their own children and provides them with better approaches to their child's behaviors and growth. The parent educator also helps educate families on the variety of resources available to them and their children and may assist the family in coordinating community services as needs are identified by the family.

The home visiting program was initiated as a pilot program in the Plymouth School District in 1994 in collaboration with Aurora Medical Centers and the Department of Health and Human Services. It was identified in the Wisconsin Goals 2000 proposal to the US Department of Education as a prototype for community collaboration and prevention efforts. This grant received in 1994 helped expand the home visiting program to the eight western townships of the county and establish a centrally located resource center. The Sheboygan County Family Preservation and Support Citizens Council identified a need to expand the first-time home visiting program to the eastern townships of the county and awarded a competitive grant in 1997 to the Family Resource Center of Sheboygan County to provide this service. According to their 1999 Progress Report to the State of Wisconsin, quote, "...the Council has found this program to be a valuable resource for families with young children living in our county. Statistically, the first-time home visiting program data indicates the long term impact to be positive in reducing child abuse and neglect, improved school performance, decreasing emergency room visits, and improved use of community resources." unquote.

Families are recruited through a variety of approaches. Our most popular recruitment technique is through word of mouth by a past or presently enrolled family. Parent Educators also present at all prenatal classes at the three county hospitals, brochures are given to first-time parents by their doctors and at the time of birth. Other county agencies such as the Sheboygan County Public Health Department, Mental Health Association, School Districts, day cares and county churches assist with recruitment. Families from throughout the county voluntarily enroll and are visited by trained Parent Educators.

Since 1994, enrollment in the home visiting program has reached over 900 families. Collectively, the present staff has over 125 years of experience of working with children and families. The director of the program has supervised this project since its start in 1994 and the staff has been recognized for their dedication to families by receiving many community awards in the last two years. The Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County has received the Community Service Award for 1999 from the Healthy Sheboygan County 2010 Council, the Community Collaboration Award from the Wisconsin Community Education Association in both 1998 and 2000, the Optimist Award for 2000 from the local Optimist Club and the 2000 Service to the Community Award from the Mental Health Association. We continue to provide ongoing support for families of all ages through the home visiting program, parenting programs and daily services at each of the centers. Our governing bodies consist of an elected Board of Directors representing many community businesses, social services, education, childcare and the medical field. We also have a Parent Advisory Council that oversees the quality and evaluation of the home visiting program and the development of parenting programs.

The Family Resource Centers of Sheboygan County provide the Parents as Teachers program and the many other parenting programs in collaboration with a variety of other state and countywide organizations and agencies. It is again our motto to work together as a total county in a coordinated effort to “help build strong families and strong communities.”