

# support for families

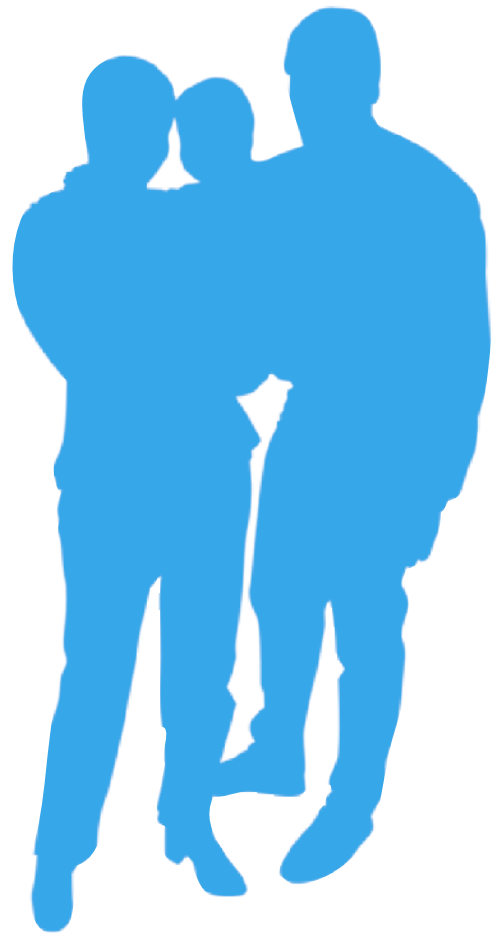
Families play the primary role in helping their children get out the door to school on time each morning. They also play the primary role in preparing children socially, physically and intellectually to enter school ready to learn — a role that begins at birth. Children are born to learn and learn best through everyday experiences with the people they love and trust the most — their families. Families are children’s first and most powerful caregivers, teachers and advocates.

What does it mean to have a child socially, physically, and intellectually prepared for school? Some examples include:

- Socially, by age five, a child should cooperate with other children and adults, accept responsibility, and build relationships of mutual trust, understanding and respect for others.
- Physically, a child needs to be healthy. This includes up-to-date immunizations, and regular dental and medical care. A physically healthy child can focus better on school and is less distracted by ailments.
- Intellectually, a child should be able to apply early reading skills, use writing as a means of expression/communication and seek answers to questions through active investigation.

In addition, families themselves must be prepared by having the essential elements present in their own lives to care for their children. These elements include economic stability, parenting support and instruction, and support from their employers.

Most parents want to be their children’s best teachers and want to feel confident that their children will enter school prepared to succeed. Through the efforts of the following agencies and programs, families in Greater Kansas City have many support services and resources available to help them prepare their children for success in school and in life.



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# Family Support Services in Greater Kansas City

## **Child Care Source ● 913/573-CARE(2273)**

Child Care Source is a community partnership with The Family Conservancy and Midwest WholeChild Development Group that helps connect parents with resources and early learning programs that will meet their individual needs. Child Care Source assists parents by:

- Providing consumer education on choosing quality child care.
- Providing individualized child care referrals to families based on cost, location and other program factors.
- Offering training and resources to early learning professionals so that families have access to higher-quality early learning programs.
- Helping employers with referral services that make employee searches for early learning programs faster and easier.

## **Early Learning Opportunities Grant Family Support Programs**

**HOMEFRONT ● 913/342-1110**

**Midwest WholeChild Development Group ● 913/341-6200**

With support from the Early Learning Opportunities Grant (ELOA) awarded to the Mid-America Regional Council in September 2003, Midwest WholeChild Development Group and HOMEFRONT offer staff training for early learning programs throughout Greater Kansas City on how to engage and work in partnership with families. The training includes a facilitated “Family Engagement Night,” which provides an opportunity for the staff and families to interact and discuss the concept of family partnerships. In addition, HOMEFRONT coordinates the establishment of parent-support groups in collaboration with various agencies and area faith-based organizations.

## **El Centro’s Center for Continuous Family Improvement**

**913/677-0100 ● [www.elcentroinc.com](http://www.elcentroinc.com)**

El Centro, Inc.’s Center for Continuous Family Improvement helps families make educational gains, realize employment opportunities and achieve major goals such as home ownership and the ability to build their assets. El Centro links children, youth and adult services with one another to maximize results. The center helps participants:

- Improve their economic, physical and social well-being.
- Increase their economic power and ability to support their families.
- Increase their knowledge of English and be more comfortable with the language and customs.
- Increase their level of education and find increased employment opportunities as a result of GED and job-placement programs.

**For more information on family support programs in Greater Kansas City, call the Midwest WholeChild Development Group at 913/341-6200 or HOMEFRONT at 913/342-1110.**

## **Family Support Learning Community**

**APOYO ● 913/281-9848**

**El Centro ● 913/281-1186**

**Family Focus Center of The Family Conservancy ● 816/418-8400**

**Family Resource Center ● 816/822-7241**

**Seton Center ● 816/231-3955**

The Family Support Learning Community (FSLC) is a collaboration of five family support organizations in the Greater Kansas City area. Its mission is to promote practices and standards that strengthen families and communities. The FSLC's vision — that all children will grow and learn in healthy families and healthy communities — is fulfilled through proven practices such as:

- Broadening family participation in decisions that affect service delivery.
- Collaborating to expand training opportunities for staff.
- Identifying and filling gaps in services.
- Promoting system reform by working to strengthen family-supportive policies.
- Increasing understanding of and appreciation for ethnic and cultural differences.
- Building a constituency for family support in the community.

## **Grandparents as Parents Programs**

**Children's Mercy Hospital's GAP Program ● 816/234-3676**

**UMKC GAP Program ● 816/444-7012**

Since 1992, Children's Mercy Hospital's Grandparents As Parents program (GAP) has worked to provide support to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Through case management, support groups, training and conferences, the program addresses a growing population that has traditionally been unrecognized and underserved. Children's Mercy Hospital's GAP program uses grandparent "mobilizers" to identify relative caregivers and provide them with information, education, support and access to services.

The University of Missouri–Kansas City's Grandparents As Parents program focuses on empowering grandparents, grandchildren and the family unit by providing developmental opportunities to both grandparent and grandchild. It also works to nurture the grandparent/grandchild relationship. UMKC's GAP program services include parent education, health education and promotion, life skills education, resource and referral, transportation, legal assistance, personal counseling, youth mentoring and summer camps for grandchildren.

## **HOMEFRONT ● 913/342-1110**

Founded in 1995 with seven partner agencies, HOMEFRONT is a collaborative of 54 organizations with a solid history of coordinating efforts and resources to deliver information, training and assistance to parents and other caregivers in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

HOMEFRONT's initiatives include:

- **Kansas City BrainChild:** A campaign to educate parents, professionals, policy makers and caregivers about brain development and the vital role early education plays in the social, emotional and intellectual growth of children.

# Family Support Services, continued

- **ACT — Adults and Children Together — Against Violence:** A program designed by the American Psychological Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children to teach violence prevention beginning with young children.
- **Family Support:** A self-assessment and peer review tool designed to help organizations involve families in developing programs that support the growth and development of children. This program is sponsored by Family Support America (FSA) in conjunction with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

## **Parents as Teachers ● 866/728-4968 ● [www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org)**

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a national, non-profit, parent-education and family support organization. PAT services are available through local public school districts, although districts may contract with other public or private not-for-profit agencies to provide the services. The program's core components consist of personal visits, group meetings, developmental screenings and links to a network of community resources.

PAT is based upon the premise that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers, and is designed to maximize children's overall development during the first three years of life. There are over 50 PAT programs in the eight-county Greater Kansas City area, and more than 2,500 programs operate in all 50 states and internationally.

## **Seton Center Family and Health Services ● 816/231-3955**

Seton Center Family and Health Services support and empower children, youth and families in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri. Seton Center is located in the Washington Wheatley neighborhood, approximately five blocks from the 18th and Vine district.

Seton Center provides a variety of services with a family-supportive approach, including health and dental services, parent education courses, employment services, adult day care, emergency assistance, food pantry, thrift store, art classes, women's empowerment groups and an alternative school. Seton currently serves 200 people daily and 6,000 annually.

## **State Children's Health Insurance Programs**

**HealthWave (Kansas) ● 800/792-4884**

**MC+ for Kids (Missouri) ● 888/275-5908**

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) provides health insurance for low-income children, up to age 19, who are not already insured. In Kansas, *HealthWave* covers uninsured children whose gross family income is up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level; Missouri's *MC+ for Kids* covers uninsured children whose gross family income is up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Children receive physical health services that include office visits; regular checkups; immunizations; hospital services; prescription drugs; eye exams; hearing services; and speech, physical and occupational therapy. They also receive dental care and mental health services. In Kansas, some families qualify for no-premium health insurance, while others pay minor monthly premiums. In Missouri, families' out-of-pocket expenses are limited to 5 percent of annual income.

## A Family's Role in Early Learning Programs

Families with children attending early learning programs need to be actively involved in improving the quality of those programs and continue learning in the home. Research overwhelmingly affirms the benefits of meaningful and important relationships between parents and educators.

In Greater Kansas City, only 41 percent of early learning centers have parent advisory groups. Of the remaining centers, only 13 percent have any type of parent group that meets on a regular basis. Family involvement in these types of groups is imperative to improving program quality and children's success. Where parent programs do not exist, families and centers need to work together to establish them.

Parents searching for quality early learning programs need to carefully evaluate their options. Child Care Source provides a quality checklist of questions for families to consider when choosing an early learning program.

### Child Care Source's Quality Checklist Questions for Parents Evaluating Early Learning Programs

#### Physical Environment

- Does the area look and smell clean?
- Is play equipment in good condition, and is there enough for everyone?
- Are toys and activities provided for children of all ages?
- Is the program accredited? If not, is it working toward accreditation?

#### Staff

- Is staff friendly?
- What early childhood training or education does staff have?
- Do individuals play with and talk to children in a manner appropriate to their ages?
- If the setting is a home, do family members spend time with the children in care?
- If the setting is a center, are there enough caregivers for the number of children present?

#### Children

- Do the children at the location seem happy?
- Do they play with and talk to each other?
- In larger centers, are children grouped by age?
- Are the children doing activities that your child would enjoy?

#### Program

- What kind of curriculum does the program implement? How was it selected?
- Are parents given regular updates on activities and their child's progress?
- Does each age group have its own planned activities and exercises?
- Do activities cover all areas of development, including language development, getting along with others and improving physical skills?
- Is there a mix of indoor and outdoor activities? Individual and group play?
- Are parents encouraged to ask questions, make suggestions or to observe and volunteer when they choose?
- Is the program licensed? If not, why?

## Creating Family Friendly Workplaces

The workplace has become a community for many employees, as they spend a greater percentage of their waking hours at work than they do in their homes. Yet, according to the 2002 *National Study of the Changing Workforce*, employees with families report significantly higher levels of conflict between their work and family lives than employees 25 years ago.

More and more employers are realizing the need to create a workplace culture and environment that helps employees balance work and personal priorities according to their individual needs. This need is a result of current economic trends and changing workforce demographics, including the growing number of women in the workforce, the increase in single parenting, and competition among companies for talented workers. A study of American companies and their employees found that one in three working parents is willing to change employers or trade salary and benefits for work-family programs that fit their needs.

From the small business to the large corporation, it is possible to create an environment supportive of family and work life, provided there is commitment at all levels.

**Early Learning  
Community Innovation:**

**Work and Family Balance**

### **WholeFamily Matters: Family Friendly Workplace Program Midwest WholeChild Development Group ● 913/341-6200**

Through WholeFamily Matters: Family Friendly Workplace Program, the Midwest WholeChild Development Group will work closely with area employers to assess their employees' needs and develop, enhance and implement family-friendly workplace policies. The initiative was piloted with three local companies to develop the program components. The next phase of the project will make the program available to a limited number of additional Greater Kansas City employers in 2005.

### **Family Care Choices, The Family Conservancy ● 913/342-1110**

Family Care Choices, an enhanced resource and referral service, is available to employers as a part of an employee assistance program (EAP) through The Family Conservancy. Family Care Choices matches parents' child care needs with a database of providers and calls those providers to see what openings are available. This information, along with educational materials on choosing quality child care, is given to parents so they can make an informed decision. The Family Conservancy has provided this service for over 10 years and currently has 10 companies enrolled in the program.

### **ASAP Care, The Family Conservancy ● 913/342-1110**

ASAP Care is an EAP service offered to employers who choose to subsidize emergency or backup child care so their employees can be at work whenever possible. When school is canceled or a provider is sick, parents who don't have vacation time or must attend an important meeting can use this service to avoid missing work.