

The Vindicator

Valley organization connects families to resources



Correspondent photo / Sean Barron Carter Hutch, 4, of Youngstown, looks through a stack of children's books that were on display at the Early Childhood Resource Center in Boardman, the site of a two-hour family-friendly event Saturday.

BOARDMAN — On a table sat an assortment of items for children's activities, including a small bottle of glue.

The glue, however, was more than merely an adhesive substance for making things stick: It also represented the core mission of the agency in which it sat.

"We are connected with the Trumbull Metropolitan Housing Authority and other trusted agencies," George Beatty, the Early Childhood Resource Center's parent

and youth ambassador, said.

The center, 6414 Market St., also was the site of a two-hour family day gathering Saturday morning that included a variety of activities such as reading, play and arts and crafts.

In the bigger picture, though, the family-oriented event was to promote the facility and the symbolic glue it has used to establish a wide network of connections to a host of local and regional community partners. The overarching goal is to provide the resources needed to assist children and families with a variety of needs.

“I work one on one with families to find the resources they may not be aware of,” Beatty said, adding that those may include warming centers during cold weather, along with food pantries for families who have seen cuts to their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

“We’re just here to make sure families thrive so that the kids thrive.”

Beatty added that the agency recently completed a five-part workshop related to family engagement and promoting early literacy.

Even though the ECRC does not directly find housing for families, for example, it will refer those with such needs to an agency such as TMHA, he said.

The resource center, established 25 years ago, also has offices in Canton and Akron, and it serves Mahoning and Trumbull as well as four other northeast Ohio counties. Its primary mission is to “promote the healthy development of young children by strengthening families, improving the quality of early learning experiences, increasing school and community readiness and informing public policy,” according to the agency’s website.

Beatty said he also conducts listening sessions with families. In addition, he helped create “parent cafes,” which are meetings of and for parents to help caregivers connect, share and learn from one another in a casual environment.

The ECRC’s parent and youth ambassadors respond via phone, email or in-person to answer families’ questions and assist them with finding support systems, referrals or benefits navigation, Beatty continued.

“Child care referrals are huge,” Jennifer Pasvanis, the ECRC’s family coordinator and an early childhood specialist, said.

Also, some of the facility's staff work to improve child care centers' quality of programs and conducts training sessions for early child care teachers in-house or offsite. In addition, agency volunteers have taken part in mission work and have, for example, visited secondhand retail stores to donate clothing to families in need, Pasvanis explained.

Saturday's family funfest was laden with a winter theme, as Tracy Harris, the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County's youth education specialist, read a 1989 book to several children, titled "The Jacket I Wear in the Snow," by Shirley Neitzel. Harris also conducted a puppet show, including with one of a groundhog that led to a discussion about Groundhog Day in early February.

Other services the ECRC provides are foster, adoptive and kinship family resources for those interested in adopting or fostering a child, child care business support for anyone interested in starting such a business, and early childhood professional development for people who seek to start or enhance a career working with children.

Also available at the Boardman location is a family space and community library open Monday through Friday. The enclave offers reading and other activities for children and their families while also giving them another place to connect with one another.

In addition, Saturday's gathering had a series of informational pamphlets that included the importance of immunizing children against COVID-19, influenza, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, hepatitis B and other diseases, along with the effects of spending too much time playing video games and on technological devices.

For further information about the Early Childhood Resource Center, call 877-691-8521 or visit www.ecresourcecenter.org.

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