

# **First Fridays Club**

## **January 2, 2009**

### **Children and Families**

- **Alison Huppert - La Crosse Area YMCA**
  - The YMCA is celebrating its 125 year anniversary
  - It is an agency that has programs for all ages focusing on health and wellness
  - In the La Crosse area there are 17,000 members and 30,000 children have had involvement in some YMCA program
  - The YMCA is the largest provider of swim lessons and childcare (offering onsite care for 0-4 years in Onalaska and surround care at various sites for 5-12 year olds.)
  - The Strong Kids Campaign ensures that no person or family is turned away and offered \$300,000 in financial assistance in 2008
  - The YMCA hosts a variety of programs
    - Activate America helps fight obesity
    - Healthy Family Home supports:
      - Play everyday
      - Eat well
      - Family time
    - America on the Move Week
      - Encourages 10,000 steps per day
      - Food and Fun program
    - Pioneering Healthier Communities
      - Community garden that older adults and youth worked on
      - Pilot program offering free swim lessons for Franklin 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students
        - Students received 6 weeks of lessons, a swim suit (most did not have one), and a family membership to the YMCA
        - 60% of these students had never been in a pool, most did not know how to swim, and the majority were around water with other activities (boating, fishing, etc.) The Strong Kids Campaign assisted with this as well.
  - The YMCA is an international organization
    - There are YMCAs in 120 countries
    - The US focuses on physical health and wellness
    - Columbia focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention
    - Bethlehem focuses on psychosocial counseling for children of war
    - Last year, youth from the local YMCAs attended a teen event in Prague to learn about teens from all over the world.

- Question – do membership fees support Strong Kids and programs?
  - Membership supports facility operations.

- **Ruthanne Schultz – CASA for Kids YWCA**

- CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocate
- Started in the 1970s by a Seattle judge whose job was to decide if children needed protective services as well as determine after a time whether children could go home or need parental rights terminated. He decided he did not have enough information from the guardians and social service workers.
- CASA was started to train regular volunteers to help youth.
- CASA was started in La Crosse and Vernon Counties and is celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.
- CASA recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers
- Their clients are children and judges and all work is governed by statutory guidelines.
- There is a 30 hour training that covers:
  - Information on child abuse and neglect
  - Family systems – reasons families enter the court system
    - Domestic violence, alcohol, addictions, mental health
  - Court processes
  - County Protective Services
  - Confidentiality
  - Report Writing
- Volunteers are sworn in as officers of the court and reports to the judge and social service agencies about the child(ren) and family they are volunteering with.
  
- Children go through many changes if they enter the system for child abuse
  - Living arrangements
  - School environment
  - Friends/teachers/routines/foods/smells/etc.
- CASA volunteers visit with the child(ren) regularly once per week to gather information from the child/parents/and other service providers and report to the court and service providers
- The cornerstone of CASA is that everything is done from a strength based perspective and looks at the strengths of the families
- Law says that children should live in their own home as long as possible which CASA agrees with.
  
- The soul of the CASA program is the volunteers
- Question – what do volunteers do with the children?
  - Look at homework, play, read, talk, things that are developmentally appropriate. There are no gifts and no transporting.

- **Deb Cowan - Family Resources**

- Family Resources offers programming that includes:
  - Birth to 3 service coordination
  - Child care certification
  - Child care resource and referral
  - Mentoring programs for parents
  - One to one parent education
  - Parent groups
  - Parenting classes
  - Play groups
  - Quarterly newsletter
  - Resource library
  - Toy lending library
  - Workshops
- Mainly provide parent education and support
- See parents not having familial support nearby and model positive parenting, let parents know what is developmentally normal
- There is good collaboration among agencies in the area for programs
- Family Resources started because of a grant from the La Crosse Community Foundation that happened after a 1989 survey on needs
- Service is expanding
  - 2 playgroups have started at the Boys and Girls Club on Clinton Street and a playgroup has started at the Hmong Cultural Center
- There are satellite programs in Sparta and Tomah
- Play groups in Bangor, Onalaska/Holmen
- Primary focus is prevention but there are a few intervention type programs
- Family Resources is a voluntary program to connect to resources

## **Other Children and Family Agencies**

### **Big Brothers - Big Sisters of the Coulee Region**

Big Brothers Big Sisters matches children with caring mentors to share time, experiences, friendship, and fun that help children become caring, confident, competent adults.

### **Boy Scouts of America - Gateway Area Council**

Provides educational, character development, leadership training, experiences in outdoor living, physical fitness, and citizenship activities.

### **Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse, Inc.**

Provides guidance, leadership, and companionship in well-organized programs for boys and girls; "The Positive Place for Kids.

### **Children's Miracle Network - Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation**

The mission of Children's Miracle Network is to provide support to families with children with healthcare needs, fund specialized equipment and programs that benefit children, and to broaden awareness of the specialty care available for children at Gundersen Lutheran.

### **Children's Museum**

Provides 3 floors of hands-on, interactive exhibits for children; a family place where children can explore, create, experiment, learn and exercise imaginations.

### **Community Teen Center - La Crosse Area YMCA**

To provide a safe haven for high school students.

### **Coulee Children's Center**

Offers Early Intervention, Therapy and Childcare Services provided by pediatric specialists. We give children and their families the opportunity to gain self-confidence by encouraging the child's cognitive, physical and social development.

### **Crossfire**

Provides a well monitored youth center providing socialization opportunities that are a "party" alternative and outreach to confined youth at group homes, juvenile detention centers and youth leadership training centers.

### **Family & Children's Center - La Crosse**

Family counseling and youth services agency providing a continuum of preventive and therapeutic services to children, adolescents, families, and individuals.

### **Girl Scouts Of The USA - Riverland Girl Scout Council**

To inspire girls, ages 5 through 17, with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism, and service.