



the LINK

This edition of The LINK provides perspective from a Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) on the west side of the state, serving children and families for a number of years and a parent of a toddler receiving early intervention services on the east side of the state. It is helpful to take time to think about the roles and perspective of others working in the field. It help us be more understanding as we work in our own roles with others. And it also warms your heart as the days get cooler.



If you are interested in getting involved with The LINK or plans to build connections across the state, please contact:

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Take some time after you read these stories to think about your own story. We all have one. Why did you get involved in early intervention? Why do you continue working in early intervention? What advice do you have for families, FRCs, and service providers?

If you have a good story and are willing to share please contact me. We hope to include new stories from FRCs, families and service providers in our next issue of The LINK.

The LINK is also intended to provide an ongoing, familiar resource to the field on a quarterly basis. With this short newsletter we want to remind you that the ESIT program is still focused on finding ways to connect and provide resources. We are looking forward to providing a list of upcoming learning opportunities in our next issue. In spite of lots of changes at ESIT, The LINK will continue!

FRC Highlight

Sharon Bell

Toddler Learning Center
Oak Harbor, WA



Intro and background....

How long have you been an FRC?

I have been working for Toddler Learning Center (TLC) for over 27 years. I started in a position very similar to FRC, then became an FRC when the position was created and funded by the state. I have also worked as an Infant/ Toddler Educator at TLC all that time.

Why did you decide to become an FRC?

When I first started teaching, I was in a preschool program that transported children, and there was minimal contact with the families. I soon realized that connection with parents is much more effective for working with young children. I became interested in parent education and working with families. The first early intervention program I worked in, in the early 1980's, was home based and focused on supporting the family. When the FRC position was created, I was drawn to the opportunity to be the first contact with families to support them in navigating the early intervention process.

What experiences have helped you become a successful FRC?

My experiences as a parent, and having experienced special education first-hand have helped me to be more empathetic. I remember

how emotional it is to think there may be a concern with your child, even the smallest thing. We are vulnerable as parents, and the emotional reaction may be surprising to us. My Special Education and Early Childhood Education background help me in providing screenings, in helping to determine whether evaluation is needed and being informative to families. Various trainings and experiences have helped with my ability to listen and respond in a supportive way to the concerns of families. It also helps that I enjoy people from all walks of life and have an open approach to the diverse styles of parenting that are encountered as an FRC.

What makes your job enjoyable for you?

I enjoy all the opportunities to connect with others, families as well as community connections. I love young children and being able to play. Working with a great team of people at TLC is such a gift. I enjoy knowing families at such a tender time in their lives, and being able to help them in a meaningful way.

My Community....

How do you provide outreach for families?

I try to maintain connections with the service providers in our area, and to keep them updated on our services. In a small community, the personal connections are often what facilitates referrals for services.

"I enjoy people from all walks of life and have an open approach to the diverse styles of parenting that are encountered as an FRC"

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FRC Highlight cont'd

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We try to participate in community events, such as Children's Day, that are attended by families to be sure they know about our services. We provide newborn hearing screening in the home for babies born at home or in birthing centers, which is great outreach. We are creating new printed materials and an online presence to reach out to more families.

How are services provided in your area?

The FRC goes to the home to provide screening and intake. We are using the ASQ for screening, and are incorporating the ASQ-SE as well. If the child needs an evaluation, we go to the home in teams of two to complete the DAYC and AEPS. Other assessments that may be completed include the DECA, STAT screening, Sensory Profile, PLS and/or the Peabody. The team meets in the home to develop the IFSP. Services are primarily home based, with the parent participating in the visits and focusing on incorporating interventions into daily routines.

We are available to the family as needed if they need to talk or if a new concern arises that needs to be addressed. We provide intervention and support wherever the child is-working with the child care provider, extended family, etc. as needed. Some children are served in inclusive community options such as Playscape (a drop in place to play and learn), collaborative classes with Early Head Start and classes with community children at TLC. Children on Camano are served through Snohomish County services. We have three School Districts on Whidbey, and work with them to coordinate transition at age three. Team members participate in the transition process as much as possible, along with the parents and FRC.

What are some challenges/gaps in services in your community?

There are some gaps in the availability of preschool at age three, particularly if a specialized setting, transportation or tuition assistance are needed. We are constantly looking at expanding preschool options and availability. We have a strong early childhood coalition in our community that works on this, as well as the school districts.

Our program identified a need to better serve children with social emotional concerns, as these concerns are often not identified through ASQ screening. Social emotional concerns have also been identified as a priority at the community level, through our Interagency Coordinating Council and Partners for Young Children. We are addressing this gap through various training opportunities, adjusting our practices and community outreach activities.

What factors have contributed to your program's success?

Toddler Learning Center was created with strong community support, and many of the community members and organizations that were involved 30 years ago are still involved today. We have been able to maintain a highly qualified and professional staff. We have a reputation for welcoming each family with warmth and respect. We are flexible to meet individual needs. We have strong traditions that everyone looks forward to.

Food for thought...

If you could give one piece of advice to a first-year FRC what would it be?

Take the time to get to know each family and listen to their individual story. Ease into paperwork as much as you can, you represent a bureaucracy but try to not let it feel like a bureaucracy.

Madison



Many children are referred to the early intervention programs between the ages of 18 and 24 months due to concerns with communication, mainly expressive communication. Parents just want their kids to talk! This is how Madison's parents felt.

Madison was referred to the Walla Walla County early intervention program by her physician. She was just turning 20 months and was not using gestures to communicate. Madison's parents, Jessica and Ryan, were referred to the early intervention program by their pediatrician. Jessica said they knew she should be talking more but they weren't sure how much she should be doing. Madison's older sister, Lexi is now 10 years old, so it had been awhile. The pediatrician didn't explain much about the early intervention program so they were not sure what to expect and felt nervous for the first visit. But Ryan said the FRC explained the program and answered all of their questions.

The FRC completed the Ages and Stages Questionnaire with both of them and the scores for communication were well-below the cutoff. They both said it was nice to see the results because it confirmed that they should move forward with getting help. They described the evaluation process as "a very good experience because we were able to learn about her development in all areas and the service providers gave us a lot of ideas". Since the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Madison has been receiving weekly home visits from a primary service provider. But her older sister has turned out to be one of the best interventionists around!

This summer the primary service provider gave Lexi a notebook to take "data" on Madison's communication every day. She kept a journal and took the strategies very seriously. This was great because one of Madison's favorite things to do is play with Lexi! This is the beauty of early intervention, helping the family help their child. When asked what advice Jessica would give to other parents just referred to the early intervention program she said she felt like being able to talk to the providers about what they had been doing and what they needed to understand was really helpful.