

2 'incredible' women earn Child Development Associate degrees

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BRISTOL - "People tend to think home day care providers are just baby sitters and that is not the case," said Linda Rich, director of the Family Resource Centers for the Bristol schools.

Rich praised "two incredible" local home day care providers for putting in the extensive time and work to earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials recently, as a way of demonstrating their professionalism and furthering their careers.

Betsy Armitage and Collette Wolf have run day cares in their homes for years. They each began the process of earning the CDA years ago but had to put the process on hold due to financial and time constraints in caring for their own children.

Recently a grant from the Women & Girls Fund, given through the Main Street Community Foundation, enabled them to finish the degree after another two years of work, Rich explained. "This was a huge accomplishment. It involved study and preparation, compiling a portfolio, hours of home visits, and passing a test."

The Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are programs that foster a strong school-family-community partnership to promote the development of young children. They are located at South Side Elementary and Greene-Hills and West Bristol K-8 schools.

The FRCs have a training academy for licensed home day care providers, providing weekly Play and Learn groups for them and the children they care for, as well as regular training in educational best practices for early childhood as set by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Rich said.

Wolf is associated with the Greene-Hills FRC and Armitage with the South Side one. They are each licensed to care for six children.

"The state just requires a safe facility for a provider to get licensed, Rich noted. "But home day care providers know it is important to have educational goals for the children and age appropriate education learning materials. It's a very demanding job. They literally care for children from 6:30 in the morning till 6 at night in their homes."

"Collette and Betsy have been long-term members of our support program," she said. "These are really dedicated, professional, self-employed women, who provide a valuable resource to the community.



Submitted by Linda Rich From left, Betsy Armitage, Collette Wolf, and Carolyn Coughlin. Armitage and Wolf recently earned their Child Development Associate certificate, with support from Coughlin and the Family Resources Centers at South Side and Greene-Hills schools.

Generally their fees are less expensive than at large day care centers and they are more flexible because they are dealing with smaller groups of children.”

There are many home day care providers in Bristol, with about 21 of them affiliated with the FRCs. Of those, only two others already have their CDA, “so now we’re up to four out of the 21,” Rich said.

“The CDA is highly regarded. It’s the equivalent of an associate degree. All of the [day care] center-based programs in the community require it minimally, and they prefer a bachelor’s degree, even a master’s degree,” she said.

Earning the CDA “kind of solidified my confidence that what I was doing was correct, and with all the new ideas being shared it was well worth it,” Armitage said. “It was quite a bit more work than I actually thought. There was a lot of writing involved, and I haven’t written essays in a very long time.”

Armitage said she was able to finish the final exam in about half the two hours allotted. “I was done really quick so I was concerned, but I had time to go back and review everything. The person administering it said ‘wow you were quick,’ and then he added ‘well, you’ve been doing this for 25 years.’”

She got a lot of compliments from her parent clients saying “we knew all along you could do this,” she said. “And now if somebody is looking for child care they will see that I have the CDA. I have a new baby starting in August and her mother actually said she saw that I continued my education and that was a big plus for her.”

Going through the process with Wolf was also helpful, Armitage said. “We helped each other by asking ‘what did you think about this?’ or ‘where did you find that resource?’ We worked very well together and I’m glad I wasn’t the only one going through it.”

“I actually didn’t think it was going to be as difficult as it was,” Wolf agreed. “But I’ve been wanting to do this for a long time now. It has given me more insight in what I can do for the kids and I feel I will be able to reap the benefits later on,” she said.

Wolf is considering using her CDA to get an associate degree through Charter Oak College and then possibly getting further degrees in special education, with the goal of eventually going to work for a large day care center or the public school district. Being self-employed has certain drawbacks, she admitted, such as having to devote part of her house to the day care and having no retirement plan.

Both Wolf and Armitage credit Carolyn Coughlin with guiding them through the CDA process.

Coughlin runs Gentle Strength CT, a Plainville-based business that provides consulting on topics such as early care and education, parenting workshops, stress reduction activities, pediatric/infant massage, etc. She earned her own CDA years ago and said she loves being able to give back to help others.

“Linda Rich is very supportive of child care providers in Bristol. She has known Betsy and Collette for a long time and encouraged them to do this work. It’s quite a lot of work, much of it just kind of deciphering what’s needed and breaking it down into steps. It can be overwhelming,” Coughlin said.

It really shows a commitment to quality child care, she added.

Rich said the application fee for the CDA credential is \$425, and the grant also covered supporting costs and training for Armitage and Wolf as well as for two other women who did not attain the credential.

The Women & Girls Fund was established in 2001 by a group of community leaders to support programs that improve the conditions and opportunities for women and girls in Bristol, Burlington, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington, and Wolcott.

Jarre Betts, vice president of programs at the Main Street Community Foundation, said the grant was a way of supporting the FRCs and the home day care providers in providing a good learning environment for young children and getting them ready for kindergarten.

“It’s very exciting for these two women and we’re very excited to have been a part of it,” Betts added.

The Child Development Associate is issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. For more information, visit www.cdacouncil.org.

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