

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER OF NATRONA COUNTY

### Organization Profile

**Overview:** The Child Development Center of Natrona County (CDCNC) is one of fourteen child development programs across Wyoming that focus on early identification of, and intervention for, children with developmental disabilities, birth through five. Along with research establishing that 95% of brain development occurs during the first three critical years of life, national statistics have shown that one of every ten infants is born with a developmental disability. Such intervention improves quality of life for children and families and, at the same time, enhances preparation of children for school (K-12).

CDCNC is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization, providing special education and therapy services for children, birth through five, as well as preschool programs for children three through five. Families also receive parent education and coordination of family services.

**Children served:** The Center currently serves 375 children in its special needs and preschool programs. Children ages three through five are served on-site or in out-reach programs. Children birth to three are served by teachers and therapists in their homes. It should be noted that the total number of children served is greater than these numbers indicate, as children come and go from the programs throughout the year. In addition, CDCNC conducted over 200 hearing screenings and 500 developmental screenings and assessments during the past year.

**Services:** Special needs services are provided without cost to the families and in the least restrictive environment and include speech, occupational, and physical therapy, special education; transportation and transition to kindergarten services. Individualized family services or education plans are provided for every special needs child. For all children beyond age three, inclusion in regular classrooms is the preferred service model. Programs are family centered and provide a seamless system from birth through age five.

**Governance:** CDCNC is governed by a Board of Directors, representing health care, legal, and business segments of the community, as well as parents, educators, and legislators. It is licensed by the Department of Family Services, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and monitored by state and federal agencies, including Wyoming Department of Health/Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Wyoming Department of Education, and the Federal Office of Special Education Programming.

**Staffing:** An Executive Director manages the Center through an Assistant Executive Director, a Special Education Program Director and a Finance Director. CDCNC is staffed with highly qualified therapists, early childhood special educators, social workers, teachers, and support personnel. The program staff of approximately 52 includes nine early childhood and/or special education teachers, four occupational therapists, one full-time and one part-time physical therapist, two certified occupational therapy assistants, three and one-half speech/language therapists, one and one-half time contract speech therapists, one hearing specialist, one half-time physical therapy assistant, and three social workers. In total, 22 of these people are certified and 25 are degreed – eight at masters level.

**Funding:** CDCNC is funded through a combination of federal, state, and local grants, preschool program fees, foundation grants, United Way, and private contributions.

**Sources of Referrals:** Children and families are referred to CDCNC by physicians, public health personnel, and other agencies, as well as by family friends, relatives, and associates. However, most children enter the program as a result of the Child Find screenings conducted by CDCNC.

**Organizational Cooperation:** CDCNC supports the efforts of the Wyoming Developmental Preschool Directors' Association, comprising the directors of the fourteen developmental programs in Wyoming, and encourages cooperation and collaboration with the Wyoming Development Preschool Board Association, as well as with other agencies and nonprofit organizations serving young children in Wyoming.

**History:** Although founded primarily to provide childcare, almost from the outset the Casper Day Care Center served children with special needs. Established in 1967 to “protect children by providing part-time care, supervision, and guidance when their families are unable to meet their needs without some assistance from the community”, Casper Day Care served eight deaf and three mentally challenged children during its first 15 months of operation.

The Center, located in the education wing of the First Presbyterian Church, was open five days a week, from 7:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Fees were 25 cents per hour for the first child in a family, and 12 cents per hour for the second and subsequent children. For an additional 35 cents per day, a hot lunch and morning and afternoon snacks were provided.

Operating initially at a deficit, the organization applied and was accepted to the United Fund (now the United Way) in 1968. In 1969, the Center received childcare certification from the State, and entered into an agreement with the Department of Public Assistance and Social Service to serve children of mothers on the WIN training program.

In 1971, the State of Wyoming Mental Health Authority asked the Center to develop a more formalized program for children with disabilities. With a grant from the state, a teacher and aide were hired to work with these children in a classroom that included childcare children. In that same year, Beverly Creager, with several years' association with the Center, was hired as its Director. She remained in that position until 1998, overseeing much growth and development.

Additional money from the Developmental Disabilities Act, along with new funds from County Revenue Sharing and a grant from the Doc and Mary Robertson Trust for Handicapped Children, furthered development of special needs programs in 1975 and the transition of the organization to a tax-exempt, non-profit entity. In 1977, occupational and physical therapy services were added, as well as infant stimulation services through the Wyoming Infant Stimulation Project.

In 1979, the Center was moved to its current location, the Natrona Lodge building, an 8,600 square foot former nursing home. The Wyoming Legislature provided a funding formula for developmental preschools via the Reorganization Act for Health and Social Services of 1979.

Across the state, thirteen regions (with a fourteenth added in the mid-1980 to service the Wind River Indian Reservation) were formed to provide special education and therapy for children birth through five years of age. Casper Day Care became Region IX, serving all of Natrona County. The Division of Community Programs (now the Division of Developmental Disabilities) was designated as the lead agency for these programs.

Due to the increased number of children and the additional program offerings, a Special Education Director and a Childcare Director were hired in 1980. The following year, Casper Day Care changed its name to Casper Day Care Child Development Center (CDCDC) to better reflect the two programs it provided.

In 1982, the personnel policies were formalized and approved by the Board. A parent handbook was published for parents of children in both programs.

In 1983, CDCDC first offered before and after school care for first-grade children, and a summer program for children up to third grade. Augmentative communication programs began to be used for children unable to communicate verbally. In 1986, day care hours were expanded by opening at 6:30 a.m.

Again in 1994, the need for additional space was addressed via a One-Cent Sales Tax proposal. This addition of approximately 4,800 square feet was completed in 1995, providing additional space for occupational/physical therapy, two large classrooms, and a large multipurpose room.

In 1998, Beverly Creager resigned, and Deanna Frey was hired as Executive Director. With Linda Bechtel as Special Education Director and John Starnes as Childcare Director, she undertook development of the current strategic plan, costs of which have been underwritten by the Kinskey Family Foundation. In 1999 the Board authorized changing the name of the organization to the Child Development Center of Natrona County (CDCNC). As the earlier name change emphasized the two programs, this recent name change emphasizes a more modern focus on a unified approach to education.

In 1999, CDCNC secured a new 13-passenger wheelchair-accessible van through an internal capital expenditure and grants from Promotional activities for Retarded Citizens and the State Loan Investment Board. The following year, CDCNC upgraded and significantly added to its computer installation, with a grant from the Casper Area Community Foundation.

In 2003, Deanna Frey resigned and John Starnes was hired as Executive Director. With Lori Kapeles as Assistant Executive Director and Marnie Camp as the Special Education Director, he has undertaken the process of beginning a capital campaign in which to build a new facility. With the number of special needs children being identified for services increasing, the space in the current building has become inadequate to house both special needs programs and a daycare. The decision was made and approved by the Board to discontinue childcare at the end of the 2003 summer.

With development of the strategic plan, CDCNC is poised to: (1) move toward providing early identification and intervention services for *all* of Natrona County's developmentally disabled

children, ages birth through 5, in a year-round service setting, natural learning environments, and full inclusion classrooms, and (2) to address strategic issues in the areas of Public Relations, Funding, Customer Relations, Communication, and Technology that will enhance effective provision of those services.