

Family Resources – True to its Name

This amazing organization meets an impressive number of needs for parents.

by Kim Seidel

From the time you learn you're pregnant through your baby's first steps and beyond, Family Resources offers support through workshops, one-on-one visits, playgroups, and much more. "We love our role in the community," says Jodi Widuch, executive director of Family Resources, based in La Crosse. "We support parents and caregivers in the most important job in the world—to raise a child."

Annually, Family Resources serves more than 2,200 individual parents and caregivers during each of their numerous visits (nearly 20,000 visits each year). In 2010, the organization celebrates its 20th anniversary. "We're here for everybody," Widuch says. "Children are way too important to limit our programming to only certain groups of parents."

Today, it's not as common to have extended family nearby to help parents. Family Resources fills that gap to offer camaraderie and assistance from other parents and staff members. "Parents tell us they feel safe coming here to meet other parents," Widuch says.

Located at 1500 Green Bay St., Family Resources is set in a homey atmosphere. A spacious, bright playroom filled with toys connects to a cozy kitchen area. The facility's numerous family-friendly features include a library of books and toys to check out. The organization also has Monroe County centers in Sparta and Tomah.



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To welcome your new addition, a **Baby Shower** is held several times a year. While enjoying refreshments, you can tour the center and learn about the variety of services. If your baby needs day care, Widuch recommends that you immediately call the **Child Care Resource and Referral Service** because most child care businesses have waiting lists for infant care. The service offers parents custom referrals to child care centers, family child providers, and pre-schools, based on ages of children, work schedule, location, and other preferences. The service is free or low cost.

In turn, the center offers **Child Care Certification** and ongoing encouragement and education for providers. It's an ideal career for those who decide to stay at home and must contribute to the budget, Widuch says. There's a great need for certified child care providers in this area, she says.

Family Resources provides many outstanding educational opportunities for new parents. Check out "**The**

Happiest Baby on the Block" course, even before your baby arrives. Learn effective soothing techniques for crying and colicky babies. Copies of the book and DVD are available for checkout.

Make sure your baby's car seat is properly installed through the **Car Seat Safety Check Program**. A certified child passenger safety technician ensures the seat is appropriate and shows you how to use it. "Our technicians find adjustments to make nearly 100 percent of the time," Widuch says. "Call for an appointment so your baby can have a safe ride home from the hospital."

Other excellent programs for new parents are **Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention** and **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)**. Held monthly, these classes are required to earn county child care provider certification. By offering information to parents and caregivers, the incidences of these syndromes can be prevented, Widuch says.

A new, popular class is **Infant Massage**, which helps promote attachment

and bonding between parents and their babies. It's a good tool to use for fussy babies and to help them during transitions, Widuch says. "It's a wonderful way to involve fathers in baby's care," she says. "Babies thrive with the power of touch."

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home visiting program offered before baby is born and up to 3 years old. PAT emphasizes that you're baby's first and most influential teacher, encouraging you to maximize everyday teachable moments. "The program promotes activities like playing games and reading to your baby and young child," Widuch says. "It's also not silly to talk to your baby a lot during the day."

The Partners in Parenting Program welcomes you to the world of parenting with a free book, filled with information about babies and community resources. A parent educator can visit your home and address any of your concerns. **Parent Friend** is another program

that can be brought to your home. It's comforting to know that when you're in need of ideas or encouragement, an educator can spend time with you.

The Warm Line is another service that champions the issues of parents. Simply by dialing a telephone number, you can speak with a warm and compassionate parent educator. They can help you brainstorm about issues ranging from baby care to sibling rivalry. **Parent Coaching** offers this service in person as well.

Birth to 3 is for families who have a baby with developmental delays, or who think their baby may have disabilities. Again, a provider comes to your home for an evaluation and any follow ups.

As your baby grows older, a natural step is to start taking them to playgroups. Once a baby is mobile, it's wonderful for parents to take them out to meet other children, Widuch says. **Play Shoppes** are offered at Family Resources, as well as Erickson Boys and Girls Club in

La Crosse. Other Play Shoppes are held in Bangor and Onalaska to serve families in those areas. It's more than an hour of play, art activities, circle and story time, and a snack.

Parent Connection may be the next step for parents and caregivers. Connect during coffee and conversation while toddlers and preschoolers play in the adjoining, supervised playroom. "It's a great, safe place to separate from the child for a while," she says. "We want this to be a positive experience for the child—and parent."

Throughout a child's ages and stages, **weekly workshops** are held on topics from "green" babies to potty training and power struggles to positive discipline. No matter what you need, Family Resources offers valuable services on your journey as a parent. Discover Family Resources online at laxfamilyresources.org. **CPC**

Kim Seidel is a writer and mother of two young daughters who resides in Onalaska.

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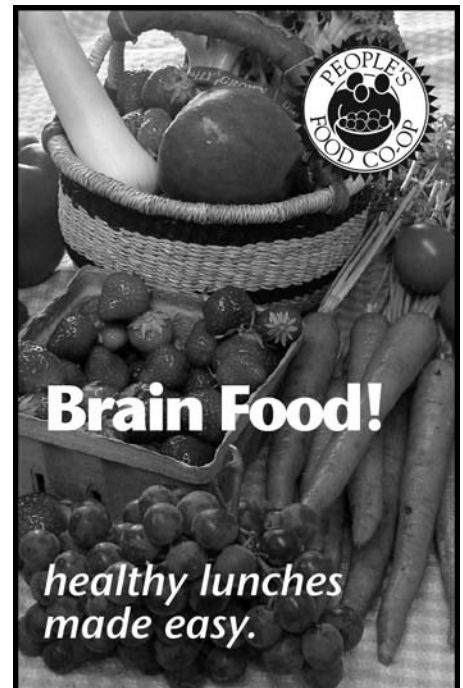
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