

The Impact of Quality

Stories from Programs

THE NAEYC VISION IS CLEAR: Every child should have access to safe, high-quality early childhood education. This vision comes alive through all of you who work on behalf of young children and families. You make a difference in their lives every day by choosing NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children. As educators, your work and the quality of the program environment have a huge impact on each child in reaching his or her potential.

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children, we invited accredited programs to share stories about the influence high-quality education has had on the children and families they serve. NAEYC compiled stories from programs and families in a booklet called *The Impact of Quality: Stories from Programs and Families*. We are pleased to feature a selection of these stories in this article. The complete collection is available online at www.naeyc.org/academy/anniversary.

We hope these stories will inspire you and your colleagues as you strive to achieve and maintain the gold standard for excellence in early childhood education.

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Celebrating 25 Years of NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children

Accredited for 25 years

As a young teacher in December 1985, I was first introduced to NAEYC's new accreditation program. Our director passed around booklets filled with questions about our policies and practices. We did classroom observations and made some improvements to our environment. When we found that we had answered "fully met" to all but a few of the criteria, the program description was submitted and we figured we wouldn't see a validator until the new year. We were shocked when only a few days later we learned that **two validators were coming in two days!** We were crazy with excitement and fear of the unknown. What had we gotten ourselves into?

The visit went smoothly, the exit interview was positive, and we were told we'd be notified when a decision had been reached. That February, I became the director, and even with the demands of my new responsibilities I often found myself wondering when we'd hear about accreditation! In April, a letter arrived stating that Rutgers-Livingston Day Care Center (R-LDCC) was part of **the very first group of early childhood programs to achieve**

NAEYC Accreditation in the nation! We were excited, proud, and relieved!

Since then, R-LDCC has maintained accreditation, strengthening and improving service to children and families with each subsequent self-study. Although we are planning to celebrate our 25th anniversary as an NAEYC-Accredited program, it was only a few weeks ago—at a meeting of program directors charged with looking at health and safety practices and making recommendations for changes to New

Jersey's state licensing requirements—that I realized the extent to which accreditation has influenced our policies and procedures. I was not surprised to find that our day-to-day practices were closely aligned with those identified as best practices. But I was astounded to hear directors arguing for lower quality! **It was then I understood the enormous impact NAEYC's Accreditation process has made** on my program and the quality of the experiences offered to our children and their families!

—Cheryl Devine,
Rutgers-Livingston Day Care Center,
Piscataway, New Jersey





“We already know that!”

Upon receiving the letter that announced our reaccreditation, I began making large banner-like signs to notify our families and others about the great news! As I painted one of the signs, Chris, one of our 5-year-olds, asked me what the sign said. I replied, “It says, ‘Congratulations, the Child Study Center has been reaccredited!’” Chris asked, “What does *reaccredited* mean?” “It means some friends came to our center to visit and decided that **the Child Study Center is a N-E-E-A-A-T-T place for kids to be.**” Satisfied with the answers, Chris continued getting ready for lunch.

About that same time, Brock and some of Chris’s other classmates came by. “Ms. Beverly,” Brock asked, “what does your sign say?” Again, I read what the sign said. Then I said, “Chris, tell Brock what *reaccredited* means.” Just as I had explained it to him, Chris told Brock, “It means that some friends came to visit and decided the Child Study Center is a N-E-E-A-A-T-T place for kids to be.” And as nonchalant and unsolicited as it could be, Brock replied, “**Well, we already know that!**” Another teacher in our program had been in her classroom the whole time and had overheard this conversation. She giggled upon hearing Brock’s response!

Our entire staff works so very hard to indeed make our classrooms “neat” places for kids. How very satisfying and fulfilling for us to hear that the children we serve each and every day feel the same way!

—Beverly C. Wiginton, East Tennessee State University Child Study Center, Johnson City, Tennessee

Each little step counts

Going through the process this time around definitely had a different feel than our last two rounds did, particularly in the self-study process. Establishing our program portfolio regarding community outreach was motivating. As we collected evidence, we could clearly see the cumulative efforts of centerwide projects and individual strides coming to fruition. Looking back at snapshots of our Alex’s Lemonade Stand, reviewing the flyers and brochures we share with families to help them locate services for their children, and thinking about all the ways our individual teachers support nonprofit organizations has helped us to see that **each little step counts.**

A list of projects and community outreach efforts surfaced as we reflected on recent months: a Halloween costume drive for underprivileged children, a prom dress drive for teens living at a residential school, food drives for a local pantry, and clothing drives for victims of the Haiti earthquake or to help teens in low income situations get ready to go back to school—to name a few.

I think what has been **even more inspiring has been sharing outreach experiences with the children in our program.** Over the past few years, we have gradually involved our children in more and more projects. Two annual projects come easily to mind. Our traditional spring Alex’s Lemonade Stand is

planned, advertised, and run by our kindergarten class. In addition, every December, our center hosts a giving tree, decorated with tags from local shelters. These tags contain some necessities, like pajamas, and some wishes for toys from children who are not able to be with their family or may live with their family in a shelter.

Our kindergartners raise funds by doing chores, then research gift ideas, and finally go shopping to purchase the gifts. Special notes handwritten by the children accompany the gifts upon delivery to the shelters. Through these two projects, **our faculty is able to delicately expose the children to aspects of diversity among people that may often be overlooked.** The children gain sensitivity toward others and an appreciation of their own physical health, emotional well-being, and stable, secure home life.



NAEYC encourages us to participate in community outreach efforts and to involve children when possible. After witnessing firsthand the far-reaching benefits for both the recipients and the participants, I cannot imagine our daily life at the center without this component, and for that I am grateful to NAEYC.

—Carol Yaroch,
West Point Child Learning Center,
Lansdale, Pennsylvania



Breaking stereotypes

Breaking stereotypes about families who are homeless or have low incomes is a challenge. As a nonprofit, Wesley is grateful for every contribution, whether in the form of money or a donation of classroom supplies. However, over the 61 years of our existence, we occasionally received donations that were unsuitable for the classroom—torn children’s books with pages missing, puzzles with pieces missing, used and stained children’s clothes, empty paint and glue bottles, and more. It was obvious that **some people felt that the children we serve were only worthy of their own children’s leftovers.** We wondered why. Was it because some of the children we serve live in shelters and rely on Wesley for meals and a safe place to nap? Or because some of their parents lack education or struggle to find work? Maybe the old adage, “Beggars can’t be choosers,” comes into play.

Gaining NAEYC Accreditation would help break this mentality because it is the ultimate display of quality. Since we were already operating a quality center, recognized as a Center of Distinction through Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Learning and Care, we knew we had what it takes to achieve this prestigious mark of quality. We decided to use the process of NAEYC Accreditation as a catalyst for change in the perceptions of the families we serve. We encouraged people from all walks of life to join us in our process to become NAEYC-Accredited. The process became an opportunity to link those we serve with those who support us.

During the self-study phase we engaged *everyone*—the children, volunteers, donors, parents, clients from other services we provide,



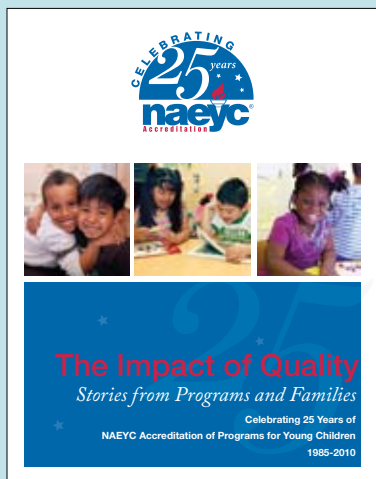
and our neighbors. **When our letter of acceptance arrived in 2007, you could practically hear the whole community cheer.** Not only did we get accredited but we successfully accomplished accreditation under NAEYC’s new, more rigorous standards.

This sense of unity remains. During a recent unannounced visit from NAEYC staff, our parents were so excited. They were smiling to each other and whispering, “NAEYC is here.” We have noticed an increase in the quality of donations coming in and a decrease in donations that are unsuitable. **To Wesley, NAEYC Accreditation is more than recognition; it is a bridge that fills the gap between those we serve and those who provide support.** All children deserve quality care, and now more people know it!

— Sarah Norris,
Wesley Community Centers of Savannah, Inc.,
Savannah, Georgia



The Impact of Quality: Stories from Programs and Families, a booklet featuring the complete collection of inspiring NAEYC Accreditation stories, is available online at www.naeyc.org/academy/anniversary.



Doing whatever it takes to make it happen

A few years ago, we won the Dynamic Staff Award through our local child care council, for our staff preparing for, maintaining, and constantly making changes to adhere to NAEYC Accreditation criteria. In the beginning, we all thought that being accredited was a great opportunity to meet quality standards and were very motivated. But soon our director and staff were more than a bit discouraged by all the work that went into the process. **Being professionals, we all went to work—fixing, rearranging, and trying to forget some of the old teaching ways to make room for the new,** which as most teachers know, is not easy. After our first site visit, we were all excited but somewhat nervous about the outcome. Everyone worked so hard to accomplish a tremendous amount of change. At the end of that process, to our disappointment, we did not meet enough criteria. There were still changes to be made, and we did not have the high level of motivation we had in the beginning.

But **once again we did whatever we had to do to make it happen. And happen it did.** In early 2006 we became NAEYC-Accredited. What a wonderful day that was when we received the news. Our entire staff deserved the acknowledgement of a job well done and job that has and will continue for our program’s lifetime. We all strive to offer a quality program to the community we serve, and because of this team we have accomplished just that. Accreditation is very important to our families because it represents a high standard of care offered in the community. We are now embarking on an important journey through the reaccreditation process and are committed to providing high-quality services to the children and families we serve.

— Robin C. Tavano, Nature’s Nursery School, Brewster, New York

NAEYC Accreditation and cooperative preschool—A rare mix

Annandale Cooperative Preschool is an outstanding, award-winning cooperative preschool, and the heart of our program is NAEYC Accreditation. **We have been accredited since 1987—that is 23 years!**

Annandale Co-op's mission is to educate children based on the philosophy of learning through play while meeting their emotional, social, physical, and intellectual

needs. Annandale Co-op was created over 60 years ago by concerned parents who wanted to participate in their children's education on a fundamental level. Parents assist teachers in the classroom and manage the preschool. Our school has earned the distinction of being the only cooperative preschool in Northern Virginia to receive NAEYC Accreditation since new, stricter standards were implemented in September 2006. Two factors that make our school exceptional:

Quality. All of our teachers have college degrees, and half of the teachers have advanced degrees. Instruction in science, movement, and music is offered in addition to the regular curriculum. Our NAEYC Accreditation confirms the quality of our program.

Community. Because parents manage the school and assist

the teacher in the classroom, their involvement and presence at the school is notable. We also strive to strengthen and empower our diverse community across all ages and cultural perspectives through parent education opportunities, social activities, and meal assistance for families with new babies or illnesses.

Our NAEYC Accreditation helps prospective parents be assured that we meet high standards for early childhood care and education. Several parents have noted to our staff that when they searched for a preschool, their criteria included NAEYC Accreditation and a cooperative preschool. This mix is rare in our area and helps to set our school apart.

—Anne Foster,
Annandale Cooperative Preschool,
Annandale, Virginia



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