

## Coffee in the Lobby: A Long-Standing Tradition for All Families

Dee Dee Parker Wright is the executive director of Jubilee JumpStart, a child development program in the diverse Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington, DC, which serves young children ages 6 weeks to preschool. Forty-eight children are enrolled in five classes. To acknowledge children's cultural and linguistic strengths, each class is taught by one English- and one Spanish-speaking teacher. This dual language approach is a bridge for the many immigrant families whose children attend the program, and it helps honor and support the child's home language and culture.

### CHALLENGE

In the first 18 months of operation, Jubilee JumpStart had three directors. When I became the director seven years ago, families were already concerned, confused, and feeling disconnected about the program. Although the program was designed to welcome and nurture families, this goal was not being addressed, much less achieved.

### STRATEGY

I bought a coffee maker and table and implemented a new weekly event: Parent Coffee Hour. Every Friday morning for the first two hours of operation, we kept the coffee pot full and provided donuts or pastries in the lobby. After dropping off their children, family members could stop to chat with staff or each other or sit down for longer conversations, as appropriate.

### RESULTS

Parent Coffee Hour is ingrained as a vital part of our program. It takes place every Friday, unless we are closed, in which case it is rescheduled for Thursday. Family members use the time to build supportive relationships with each other and to offer feedback, both positive and not so positive, to staff. Coaches and teachers attend as their schedules permit, and specific concerns raised by individual family members are shared with the relevant teachers. It has been vital to creating a robust community within our center.

### UPDATE

While the coffee event continues as originally designed, there have been three key additions. First, we created the JumpStarter Council, a group including family members, teachers, and administrators. They meet monthly. The suggestion for establishing this group came from a coffee hour participant. Second, we periodically invite guests, often representatives from community resource organizations. These are called Espresso Shots and allow families to connect with needed services. The third addition is a more formal monthly meeting for interested families. We adjourn to a meeting room to discuss topics of interest to the families. We also use the Parent Coffee Hour to present or review written communications and also to solicit quick feedback, such as which movie to watch on Family Movie Night or voting on parent leadership.