Betsy Tucker -Family Resource Center at Charter Oak Academy

West Hartford

Good Evening Members of the Committee,

My name is Betsy Tucker and I live in West Hartford. Thank you for this opportunity to talk about my experiences at the Family Resource Center in West Hartford.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. I believe this is true. The problem is that we no longer live in villages. So many of us these days are living hundreds of miles from grandparents and extended families. Gone are the days where I knew everyone in my neighborhood and children were able to roam freely outside until mom called them in for dinner. When I became a mother in my late thirties, my life changed in ways that I never could have anticipated. What I found the most surprising about having children was how isolating and lonely it could be, especially for women like me who choose to stay at home with their kids. I felt cut off from the rest of the world and didn't know how to get reconnected with my community.

When I walked through the door of the West Hartford Family Resource Center, I knew that I had found my village. Welcoming is how I best describe the FRC. "Good morning Betsy... the coffee's on" are the most comforting words this stressed-out, tired mom can hear. Because in those simple

words the message is, "come in, you are not alone, you are among friends"....friends who do not judge you as a mother and are traveling on the same unpredictable, scary journey we call parenthood.

Unfortunately, children do not come with instruction manuals and for me like most parents; it's difficult to know if your children are developing on track. If they aren't on track, it is critical to catch it early to help that child overcome any difficulties they may have. One of the most helpful services offered by the Family Resource Center is the Parent as Teachers personal visit. This is where my daughter and I meet with a parent educator one on one to discuss her development. Children deserve a strong start in life and it's important that parents know how they can best foster their child's growth in all areas.

Using the Ages and Stages Developmental Checklist, we are able to monitor and track her physical, cognitive and social development. This tool breaks down into easy-to-understand terms what she should be doing at her age. It asks me to reflect on her development and really engages me in paying attention to where she is. This is also a wonderful opportunity to discuss any concerns or problems I am having. We talk about various strategies for challenges that we are facing as well as receiving practical information that is helpful in the daily

life of a rambunctious toddler. The best part is that these visits teach me what to look out for and what to expect next and give me the confidence to be my child's first teacher.

My family has participated in many of the FRC's wonderful programs. My husband took part in "Raising Readers"; a program which teaches parents the importance of reading to children from the day they are born. I am currently participating in the People Empowering People program where ordinary parents, grandparents and caregivers just like me are learning that we can make a difference by advocating for our children and raising awareness about issues in our town.

For me, the playgroup facilitated by the parent educators is the heart of the program. The word "playgroup" sounds so simple...a bunch of moms getting together to chat while their kids play. But what goes on in this group is so much bigger than that. This is where I develop friendships with other parents who are wondering and worrying about the same things I am. This is where my daughter is taking her first steps away from me in a safe, nurturing, fun environment engaging in wonderful activities. This is where we learn that we are not alone. I have come to rely on the parent educators at the FRC like I would a family member or close friend. Their knowledge, experience and wisdom have helped me and my family in innumerable ways.

Family Resource Centers are an invaluable asset to our community. FRC's don't just support the child; they support the whole family by empowering parents to be the best that they can be. On behalf of my family, I thank you for your generous support of Family Resource Centers in Connecticut.

Thank you.