



The 8th Annual
Caring for Babies Forum
Learning Through Play



In collaboration with many community partners, the Child Care Resource Center, Inc. (CCRC) produced the 8th Annual Caring for Babies Forum on March 14, 2009. A day-long training and networking event for Cambridge and Somerville parents, family members, and professional caregivers of children ages 0 to 3, the Forum was held at the Peabody School in North Cambridge and attracted 205 participants; a more than 25% increase over 2008.

The goal of the Caring for Babies Forum is to give parents and professional early childhood caregivers the information and training they need to provide the best care for children ages 0 to 3. Research shows that the attention and stimulation a child receives in the first three years of life are critical to brain development and future learning. The Caring for Babies Forum aims to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers by providing training on a wide variety of topics. This year parents and caregivers gave the event overwhelmingly positive ratings; 99% rated the event good to excellent on evaluations.

Learning Through Play was this year's theme and participants learned about creating opportunities for infants, toddlers, and older children to enjoy free, imaginative play to nurture their emotional and intellectual development. Cambridge Mayor E. Denise Simmons welcomed the participants and Marcia Farris, Executive Director of the Mass Association for the Education of Young Children, set the tone with a keynote talk about how children, from infancy, need to play in order to build their brains and begin to understand the world. The presentation was well received, with 94% of respondents saying that the information was useful, well presented, and easily understood.

Caring for Babies in Numbers

- ◆ **205 participants** received 615 hours of training.
- ◆ More than **22 staff and volunteers** from over **10 community agencies**.
- ◆ Participants spoke **21 languages** including English, Haitian Creole, Spanish, Bangla, Urdu, Chinese, Pashto, Amharic, and Portuguese.
- ◆ A **majority** of those who provided data were **low income** (56%).
- ◆ Participants included **49 family child care providers, 43 early childhood teachers**, and over **95 parents and grandparents**.



Proud parents spend a moment with their child between workshops.

The Forum featured 22 workshops on issues related to young children's health, literacy, behavior, and cognitive development, including several workshops in Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. Parents and caregivers learned about using sign language with babies; caring for picky eaters and tantrum-throwing toddlers; practicing stress-reduction exercises; using arts and crafts projects that appeal to little ones and support their social and physical growth; and how talking and looking at books, in any language, is an important key to children's later success in school. Overall, 87% said their knowledge of children age 0-3 increased and 95% said the Forum would help them improve the quality of care they provide.

The Caring for Babies Forum is free for all Cambridge and Somerville residents and child care providers through the support of agency partners and corporate donors. Financial support for this year's event was provided by the Agenda for Children, Cambridge Community Foundation, Cambridge Dept. of Human Service Programs, Cambridge Police Department, Cambridge Trust Company, Child Care Resource Center, Harvard University, Network Health, and Wheelock College.



A young participant helps out in the extremely interactive *Sign to Me, Sing to Me* workshop!



Young participants enjoy the child care room while their parents attend workshops.

What 2009 attendees said about Caring for Babies:

- ◆ “The forum addresses so many day to day issues that each parent faces; it is extremely helpful and increases one’s knowledge.”
- ◆ “The presenter really knew her stuff. She had excellent ideas.”
- ◆ “The whole experience was positive!”
- ◆ “I enjoyed the guest speaker and the workshops. They helped me to bring back more information to my center.”
- ◆ “The whole forum was very interesting – I enjoyed coming to this forum.”



Parents and providers participate in a Make-It and Take-It workshop.

Caring for Babies Co-Sponsors:

Organizing Committee:

- ◆ Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative
- ◆ Cambridge Housing Authority
- ◆ Cambridge Public Library
- ◆ Center for Families
- ◆ Child Care Resource Center
- ◆ Somerville Early Childhood Support Programs

Funding and In-kind Support from:

- ◆ Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative
- ◆ Cambridge Community Foundation
- ◆ Cambridge Dept. of Human Service Programs
- ◆ Cambridge Police Department
- ◆ Cambridge Public Schools
- ◆ Cambridge Trust Company
- ◆ Child Care Resource Center
- ◆ Harvard University
- ◆ Massachusetts Children’s Trust Fund
- ◆ Multilingual Action Council
- ◆ Network Health
- ◆ Wheelock College