

December 11, 2006

Mr. Romulus Perez
Program Coordinator for VAMP and Rising Stars Mentoring Programs
Community Service Office
Trinity College
300 Summit Street
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Romulus Perez,

We are Psychology majors at Trinity College who have been working on a public policy project for our Child Development class taught by Professor Dina Anselmi. Over the past few months we have conducted research on the effects of maternal employment for children and families within the Hartford area. Based on our research and conversations with community members we have come to believe that working mothers' absence from their homes has negative effects on their children, such as behavioral or academic problems. Mothers are often eager to help their children do well in school but are forced to manage a full-time job and raise their children, therefore they have less time to help their children with school work and monitor their behavior in school. For this reason, we have developed a program that will provide mothers with effective strategies for interacting with their children and assisting their children in school related areas. We hope this program will alleviate the negative effects that are often generated for children by maternal employment.

We have chosen to contact you because we developed a proposal for a component that could be added to the VAMP and Rising Stars programs. We understand that the VAMP and Rising Stars Mentoring Program are after school programs that give children the opportunity to get help with their homework and participate in enrichment activities that are both fun and educational. Although we believe that these programs have been beneficial for children in the Hartford Magnet Middle School in terms of providing support for these children and encouraging them to do well in school, we believe an additional component would make the program complete. Therefore we have developed an additional section of the program which will give mothers the opportunity to participate in workshops that will give them the confidence and ability to take a more active role in their child's education.

Our proposed program addition has two objectives: 1) to provide mothers with a support network that will strengthen their parenting skills and 2) help mothers communicate with their children about school related and other important issues. The proposed program addition will last for three months and include two components. The first component will take place bi-weekly on Wednesdays and encourage mothers to network and learn from other mothers and professionals. Each month the mothers will focus on a different topic, including parenting styles, time management, and public speaking. Children will be invited to the bi-weekly workshops and be allowed to play games or work on arts and crafts. The second component will take place once a month on

Saturdays and will include fun activities like a family barbeque as well as educational activities like a field trip to a local museum.

We believe that with these additions to the program will increase the time mothers spend with their children and help mothers enhance their child's performance in school by being an active parent. We realize that it may be difficult for mothers to attend all the workshops, but the activities we have proposed for the children might help them persuade their mothers to participate. We hope that you take our suggestions into consideration.

If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns, please feel free to contact us. Thank you very much for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Working Mothers and Children Component for VAMP and Rising Stars Programs

This three month program will be added to the VAMP and Rising Stars mentoring program to provide mothers with a support network to strengthen parenting skills as they face the difficulties of raising children while working full-time. The program will also foster communication between mothers and children about school-related and other issues. The program will be split into two parts:

1) A networking program on Wednesday nights will give mothers an opportunity to:

- discuss parenting with other mothers
- learn specific parenting techniques taught by a professional.

During these sessions mothers will be encouraged to bring their children, as there will be a variety of activities planned for the children in separate rooms.

2) A Saturday family activity will

- enable parents and children to interact in a relaxed and fun environment where mothers can apply the skills they have learned in the networking program to interactions with their children.

I. Networking Program

This program will be separated into three different workshops emphasizing different aspects of effective parenting which will include a parenting skills workshop, a balancing career and family obligations workshop, and an encouraging children in school workshop. Each workshop will take place over the course of a month and consists of two different Wednesday night sessions. For every month, the first Wednesday night meeting will consist of a mother discussion session and the second Wednesday night meeting will consist of a professional information session.

Components of each Workshop

1. Mother Discussion Session- 1st Wednesday meeting of every month

Purpose: This session allows mothers to interact and discuss personal successes regarding their children. Mothers can seek help from peers and find solace in the fact that they are not alone because many other mothers are experiencing the similar situations with their children. Mothers may also inspire each other in these sessions as they speak of real like occurrences.

- Leader will introduce topic of specific workshop and suggest ideas to be discussed in groups
- Mothers will be placed in groups of five to discuss specific focus topics pertaining to each workshop

- At the end of the session each group will generate a question to be posed to the professional in the next component of the program
 - The groups will be rearranged every month so mothers will hear of different experiences and perspectives
2. Professional Session- 2nd Wednesday meeting of every month
- Purpose: Provide mothers with a viable source of information regarding mother-child interaction by giving suggestions and creating activities that support each workshop topic. Mothers may also pose questions to the professional about any relevant topic.
- Professional will address topic of workshop and present group with skills and techniques to help mothers understand and apply each topic.
 - Professional will address all questions generated previously at the mother discussion session
 - Professional will create special activity to coincide with each topic

1st Workshop: Parenting Skills (Month 1)

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to teach mothers parenting skills that will make their lives easier and enable them to have positive and effective interactions with their children.

- Mother discussion session topics
 - Giving children responsibility
 - ❖ Chores ex: cleaning bedroom, sweeping floor, washing dishes
 - ❖ Completing homework on time
 - ❖ Watching over younger siblings
 - Setting rules
 - ❖ amount of TV/video games a night, ex: limit to one half hour
 - ❖ curfew, ex: must be home before 11 on weekends
 - ❖ respect parents, no talking back
 - Discipline
 - ❖ Punishments ex: grounding, no TV/video games
- Professional session suggestions
 - Giving Children Responsibility
 - ❖ give chores, teach them to complete homework, watch younger siblings
 - ❖ helpful tip: give children specific task for everyday to generate sense of importance, ex: making sure all the lights are off before going to bed
 - Setting Rules
 - ❖ set rules that are easy to remember, talk about them with child
 - Discipline
 - ❖ Make sure punishment fits the crime
 - ❖ Be assertive when giving children direction
 - ❖ Make sure child fully understands what he or she has done wrong

- Activity: role-play. Mothers will engage in role play, where one mother acts like a child who is acting out and the other mother attempts to discipline her with newly learned discipline techniques.

2nd Workshop: Balancing Career and Family Obligations (Month 2)

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help mothers maximize their time, so that they can set aside time to be with their children to facilitate a strong relationship. This should also help the mothers be more relaxed and therefore ease their interactions with children.

- Mother discussion session
 - Mothers are provided with a sheet of paper to list all the things they do on a typical day.
 - Mothers will talk to each other about techniques for best managing time
 - Mothers will talk about favorite past time activities with their children
- Professional session suggestions
 - Give mothers suggestions about how to best manage time i.e.
 - Weekly Activity- Have mothers create a time period of one hour during the week where they will participate in some activity with their children, i.e. family board game night on Sundays after dinner
 - Activity: create schedule for themselves that maximizes time, allows time for interacting with children, allows time for weekly activity with children

3rd Workshop: Encouraging Children in School (Month 3)

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help mothers aid their children in school. Many times children with working mothers do poorly in school because their mothers do not have time to monitor their school work and constantly provide encouragement. This workshop will give mothers positive ways to encourage children in school and hopefully mitigate any of these negative effects.

- Mother discussion session- Mothers will discuss their own strategies for helping children do well in school
 - Helping child complete homework
 - Monitor grades through progress reports and report cards
 - Giving incentives and rewards for good grades, i.e. an ice cream trip or extra time for video games when the child receives an A on a report card
- Professional session suggestions
 - Keep track of child's homework and projects by monitoring agenda
 - Give effective incentives that children will covet
 - Display good grades or awards in the home i.e. hang a good test grade or picture on the refrigerator
 - Offer positive encouragement all the time inspiring children to do their best

- Keep in mind that children learn differently and plan to help them with their work accordingly i.e. some children are visual learners while others learn best through memorization
- Activity: public speaking techniques
 - ❖ Professional will give women tips for public speaking i.e. speaking slowly and clearly, avoiding the use of 'umm', making eye contact with listener
 - ❖ Mothers will speak in front of group about any chosen topic for 3 minutes. Hopefully, this will make mothers feel more capable of addressing teachers and administration and therefore they will become more involved in their children's school.

Wednesday Night Activity for Children

Goal: Our goal is to have mothers bring their children to these sessions so that the children are not left home alone. The activities will be fun, so the children are eager to come and participate. The activities will also be open to younger siblings of the VAMP and Rising Stars mentees, so that mothers do not have to worry about getting a babysitter.

- Games: The gym will be available for children who want to play basketball, foursquare, or jump rope. There will be activities geared toward the older children (i.e. basketball) as well as activities for the younger children (i.e. tag).
- Music, Arts and Crafts, & Board Games: There will be a classroom set up near the gym with music, arts and crafts, and board games. Arts and crafts activities will include simple coloring activities as well as planned activities like popsicle-stick-picture-frame making. Board games like Monopoly and Chutes and Ladders will be available for the kids that want to play them.

II. Saturday Family Activity

Goal: Allow parents and children to interact in a fun environment to foster bonding between the parents and children. The activities will be both fun and educational, enabling the children to learn and have new experiences. By having the children and parents work together as a team for the competitions we hope to provide a basis for teamwork and inspire better communication skills.

1st Saturday Activity: Trip to Children's Museum (Month 1)

Parents and children will travel together by school bus to go to the Children's Museum in West Hartford for the day. The children will have the opportunity to explore as they like, while experiencing the hands-on learning the museum has to offer (i.e. building tall towers with index cards by using critical thinking and problem solving skills). Parents and children will enjoy lunch together in the museum café.

2nd Saturday Activity: Family Quiz-Game Competition (Month 2)

Parents and Children will compete in a family-style quiz game against other families. Different questions will be made for parents and children of different ages. The family that wins that game will receive a small gift certificate.

3rd Saturday Activity: Field Day and Barbeque (Month 3)

Parents and children will attend a barbeque on the Trinity College lower athletic fields. The day will also include a series of competitions for the families to compete in together, such as three-legged races, water balloon tosses, and “cross the river” teamwork games (teams must use blocks of wood to cross an area without touching the ground). The family that wins the competition will receive a small gift certificate.