

Child Find program: friend to parents

By Casey Hens
staff writer

Their baby is only a few months old. But the parents sense something might be wrong. He doesn't follow objects with his eyes, or laugh, or follow child development guidelines as determined by the experts. Perhaps the child is simply developing at his own pace — as child development professionals believe in many cases. Occasionally there is a problem

with the child's physical, emotional or mental development, which has become a major concern for these parents and the Farmington Public Schools' staff.

Because of Child Find — part of a national movement based locally at Fairview Early Education Center in Farmington Hills — parents do not have to worry and wonder alone. In the past year, 32 referrals were brought to the Farmington Child Find program — an all-time high, according to school officials.

THE PROGRAM offers a free educational testing program for students from birth to 25 years of age, who have trouble keeping up with others in their age group, and offers

them educational help. Some of these problems include walking, talking, hearing and speaking.

"Child Find is a program by which we are out in the community looking for children, interpreting problems and making recommendations," according to Richard Ruitter, supervisor of early education for Farmington schools.

"An early start is a better start," is the program's motto, reflecting the need for early intervention in most cases.

If detected early, child problems can be corrected and many students begin kindergarten or elementary school easily, the staff said. If parents wait, the problems surface after the child is in school and begins fail-

ing because he cannot keep up with his peers.

"It's a really difficult thing for parents," according to Ruitter. "Something's going on there — it's not a really fun time for the family."

RUITER AND Fairview staff members Katie Holleran, a school social worker; Georgene Kinsman, a speech pathologist; and Marjorie Poland, a nurse and coordinator for the Child Find project, gave a one-hour seminar last week for members of the Farmington-area health and teaching community.

Visitors heard about the Child Find program, and toured the Fairview facility to see the treatment being given to children there.

Most parents are relieved just to have their child's problem reviewed, he added. Initial contact with parents is usually made by telephone, either directly from parents or upon recommendation by public health officials, physicians or preschool teachers who spot a possible problem.

"It's a very scary thing for parents to be told they suspect a problem," Holleran said. "I know it's very threatening."

She believes the way health professionals approach the child and parent may influence how readily they accept help.

AFTER INITIAL telephone contact is made, the child is evaluated by school district professionals. Chil-

dren from birth to age two are visited in the home, and those from 3-6 are brought into the school for evaluation.

Then a staff team — including teacher, speech pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist, social worker, nurse and parent — makes recommendations about a program for the child's education and help.

Depending on the problem, some children are taken into the district's special education program — others are mainstreamed into traditional classrooms beginning in kindergarten. Those accepted into the special education programs must meet state guidelines, the experts said.

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In spotlight

Hills dedicating recreation facilities

Two youth baseball fields at the former Bond School and new lighting at Harrison High's two ball fields will be dedicated in ceremonies Saturday.

Farmington Hills' Department of Special Services is hosting the public dedication.

The improvements will enhance the city's seasonal baseball and softball programs, said Andrew Lang, recreation superintendent.

Use of the ballfields at the former Bond School was made possible through a cooperative effort of the Farmington Public Schools, Hughes Development Corp. and Farmington Hills, Lang said.

Hughes Development purchased the school and surrounding property from the school district. It refurbished the ballfields and donated the land to the city for recreational use. The former school building was renovated for office use.

The Bond field dedication begins at 10 a.m. at the northeast corner of Ardmore and 13 Mile. Representatives from the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission, Farmington Public Schools, Hughes Development and the city council will conduct the ceremony. A flag-raising and a ceremonial first pitch will precede remarks by Douglas Gaynor, Department of Special Services director.

THE RESULT of a cooperative effort between Farmington Hills and the Farmington Public Schools, the new field lighting at Harrison High School, 29995 12 Mile, allowed an increase of the recreation division's softball league program. Community youth baseball associations will also use the fields.

The Harrison High School lighting system dedication begins at 7 p.m. Following remarks by Gaynor, an exhibition softball game will be played by city softball league participants. Representatives from the Parks and Recreation Commission, the school district and the city council will take part in the ceremony.

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