

Dollars and Sense



by Amy Carr

ParentJobNet provides vital career help to families—free of charge.

In the wake of September 11th, a lot of families struggled financially and many parents lost their jobs. Others seemed to be having an extraordinarily hard time finding jobs and establishing careers. In response a little over a year ago, Pat Craddick, a parent at P.S. 87 on the Upper West Side and a former Wall Street professional, used her management expertise to help remedy the situation by harnessing the resources of the school community and developing a job networking platform.

After a lot of hard work and careful strategizing, ParentJobNet, a grassroots organization created and staffed by local parents and volunteers, was born. ParentJobNet supports parents and caregivers of schoolchildren with finding jobs and developing their careers. Committed to helping families become economically stable, ParentJobNet has, in the short time it's been in operation, created and launched a Web site, applied for and been granted charitable 501(c)3 status and developed a full spectrum of onsite programs.

ParentJobNet's free programs establish a collaborative relationship with schools and parents/caregivers in District 3, as well as prepare the organization's constituency for the workplace, facilitate their job search and empower them to network in their communities. These services also help identify viable job opportunities and create valuable relationships and contacts.

From her experience as a professional and a mother striving to improve the community, Craddick, ParentJobNet's founder and president, knows the importance of families feeling economically secure and connected to others in difficult times.

"One critical aspect of raising children in an often uncertain environment is that economic hardships can arise and have an adverse impact on an emotionally stable family life," she says. "ParentJobNet was developed to assist with those needs by creating, among other programs, on-line and off-line networking forums to allow parents to connect with each other to find jobs and enhance their career opportunities. We believe that when parents are financially stable, they are more inclined to help their children in school."

Fortunately, no matter how bleak a family's financial future may seem, the family can continue to improve the situation with ParentJobNet's help, because everything the organization offers is free. That includes four programs, two of which are held in local public schools: AccessClassifieds (on the Web), AccessEnglish (English as a second language), AccessTraining (preparation for getting jobs and for life) and AccessNetworking (small group facilitated discussions focusing on a particular industry or profession, held in Starbucks).

Through the AccessClassifieds program on www.ParentJobNet.org, parents can post that they are looking for a job, note that they have a job to offer, tell others that they would like to share jobs, communicate that they have something to sell or give away, and learn about significant community events and resources. They can also find resources about and links to important information. Commenting on the organization's Web site, an Upper West Side parent who is a consultant in the non-profit arena says: "Wow. I am so impressed with the ParentJobNet Web site. It is so wise and wonderful to tap into the talents of the parents in our school community."

ParentJobNet's free ESL (English as a Second Language) program, AccessEnglish, is completely individualized and one-on-one. The personal program enables parents with many commitments, and perhaps a more urgent need to learn the language, to receive specialized services. "We provide personal instruction and ongoing evaluation," says Chelsea Roberts, director of ParentJobNet's AccessEnglish program. "The goal is to help our parent-students feel secure, confident and capable in their ability to speak English so that they can use their new skills to find jobs and to help their children in school."

Even the scheduling of AccessEnglish is tailored to meet the special needs of parents. "Unlike other programs which fit the students into a pre-determined schedule, we build our schedule around our students' needs," adds Roberts. "Classes are held at times convenient to most parents, such as right after school drop-off and before pick-up. For others, we try to arrange one-on-one sessions in the evening or on weekends."

While AccessEnglish works to assist individuals who are unemployed and wish to secure a job, it can be adapted to help parents achieve a working knowledge of the language in order to help their children in school. In addition, the program can be modified to assist those with a higher level of education and professional experience to attain the credentials and/or training necessary to return to a fulfilling form of employment. Roberts, who has taught ESL for 19 years, trains others to help teach and administer the pro-

Those who wish to learn more about ParentJobNet, either parents or caregivers who would like to take advantage of its services or wish to volunteer, or businesses seeking to explore sponsorship opportunities, may log on to www.ParentJobNet.org, e-mail info@parentjobnet.org or call the organization toll-free at (866)541-3994.

gram. Some of those she trains are employee volunteers from Starbucks, which sponsors a portion of the program.

Another one of ParentJobNet's programs is called AccessTraining, which was launched in January 2006. This program includes a series of job readiness workshops that bring human resources and career coaching professionals to a school setting. Parents can learn basic skills, such as crafting a resume, that are likely to open doors for them. They can also learn how to effectively present their strengths in an interview situation. Vera Baker, a 23-year-old nursing student and caregiver who attended an AccessTraining session, says, "I really enjoyed this event and came here to learn more interviewing skills and preparation for my resume." Subsequent workshops in ParentJobNet's AccessTraining job readiness series have focused on assessing skills and getting the most out of employment agencies and search firms.

ParentJobNet's AccessTraining program offers free workshops and seminars designed to prepare, educate and connect parents/caregivers with the resources and techniques to help them secure employment, enhance their careers and become financially knowledgeable. The organization's Financial Literacy series, launched in February 2006, is sponsored by Fidelity Investments, which also provides its employees as volunteer instructors. These seminars address parents' questions and concerns about money management, including investment strategies, college savings and retirement plans.

ParentJobNet's upcoming AccessTraining programs will include free computer training, free networking empowerment seminars that are both general and industry-specific, free GED classes and parent-focused job fairs. Plans are being made to develop a series of parenting workshops that will focus on stress management.

ParentJobNet is a truly giving organization because it genuinely and effectively helps the community. "I have seen and been approached by many so-called socially conscious groups," says Tony Meeker, ParentJobNet's vice president. "But all one has to do is look at the fine print to discover that many organizations have an angle or some axe to grind. Not so with ParentJobNet. That is the reason I was attracted to it in the first place—people at ParentJobNet really care and want to help."

ParentJobNet is there for you and free—use it!

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