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Parental Assistance Significant Resources at Our Fingertips

by Namee

There is no way to around it—being a parent is just plain hard. When times are especially trying, any parent can feel overwhelmed and can benefit from some structured outside support. And that support can make all the difference in the world.

Founded in 1984, the local non-profit Commonwealth Parenting offers a wide variety of moderately priced classes taught by knowledgeable parent educators during the day, at night, and on the weekends, at various locations around Richmond. Some classes even include both parent and child. The organization also provides speaking arrangements, private consultations, and referrals. Serving approximately 2,400 families per year—40,000 people total—its goal is to help parents in the area with the many challenges of raising happy, healthy kids all the way from birth through adolescence.

After four years of experience with Commonwealth Parenting through speakers at her mothers' group at Trinity Methodist Church, local mom Mary Neary raved, "The speakers talk to you as experts and as mothers themselves. It is a great organization with terrific resources. They offer it all, and it's reasonably priced."

Although Commonwealth Parenting charges for its services, a family doesn't need to have deep pockets in order to learn from these experts. In fact, over one-third of their participating families receive financial assistance. "We never ever turned anyone away," emphasizes Leslie Davis Blackwell, board member and marketing chair for Commonwealth Parenting. "We want parents to progress regardless of economic status, so we use a sliding scale." They also offer a free parenting tip line at 804-545-1928, with messages returned within 24 hours.

This year the local nonprofit Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now) has launched an innovative program, FAM (FAMRichmond.org), to help families find the resources

they need. FAM provides a central clearinghouse for local parenting information, upcoming educational opportunities, and links to other helpful Web sites. The site serves as "parenting central" for fathers and mothers, friends and mentors, and everyday families.

"Our goal is to make existing services more accessible to parents so they have the tools to raise happy and healthy children. Through this campaign we hope to normalize the process for all parents looking for help and reduce any stigma associated with it," announces SCAN's Executive Director Jeanine Harper.

A vital part of the FAM initiative includes a help line, 1-800-CHILDREN, and an e-mail address, 1-800-children@pcav.org. Provided by Prevent Child Abuse Virginia (PCAV), the line will be open 24 hours a day with experts fielding calls. Johanna Schuchert, Executive Director of PCAV, explains, "Parenting is hard, but asking for help should be easy. We want to reach out to those parents thinking, 'I wish I had someone to call right now.'" She chuckles as she recounts, "The father of a three-week-old baby recently grumbled to me, 'You get more directions when you buy a car!' And you know what? He's right! We want to help with that."

As another vital facet of FAM, SCAN offers a parenting support group called Circle of Parents. This weekly program is geared to low-risk families to cultivate a free exchange of ideas, information and resources. Led by the actual parents and caregivers, Circle of Parents strives to provide a welcoming environment for an open discussion about the challenges of raising children.

For more information on Commonwealth Parenting, visit commonwealthparenting.org. To request a parenting presentation for your group, call 804-545-1272. For further information on FAM, contact SCAN at grscan.com or 804-257-7226. **V**

V Libby Carty McNamee is a local freelance writer and parent, already looking forward to taking classes at Commonwealth Parenting.

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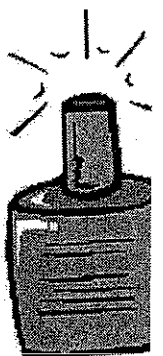
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