

KENT COUNTY DAILY TIMES Weekend Edition

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2011

VOL. CXXIX NO. 7

WWW.KENTCOUNTYTIMES.COM

50 CENTS

Bright Stars Certification for Little Imaginations



Alexa Selby/Daily Times



Above: Elizabeth Fuller helps Zachari Rocchio, 2, choose a book. Little Imaginations, owned and operated by Fuller, has qualified for the Bright Stars Certification in only a year's time.

Far left: Claire Fuller, 3, sits on the couch observing all the activity.

Near left: Julia Capwell, 2, enjoys playing with a game at Little Imaginations Day Care.

JESSICA SELBY
jess@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Elizabeth Fuller has gone from a paralegal to a day care aficionado and has recently earned recognition for her work.

Fuller is currently the owner of "Little Imaginations," a home daycare center located in her home in Coventry, which has recently received Bright Stars quality rating.

Bright Stars is a quality rating and improvement system designed to rate the quality and level of child care programs across the state, according to information provided by the agency. Staff from the agency tour various facilities interested in obtaining Bright Stars quality ratings and identify areas for improvement, inform consumers about the levels of quality and target quality improvement resources needed at those facilities in order to obtain the quality rating.

The agency is managed by

the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children and is coordinated and supported by Rhode Island Kids Count.

Fuller originally applied for review by the agency back in 2009 and was certified. Again this year she was recognized for her efforts to maintain her ratings and has even pursued additional levels of education and experience to improve her rating.

According to Tammy Camillo, director of BrightStars, Fuller is one of the BrightStars prime examples of how and why the program is and can be so successful. Camillo said that Fuller has increased her star rating in only one year's time, which is done through increased education levels as well as increased standards and levels of quality child care.

In fact, Camillo said, Fuller has adhered to the exact goals of the BrightStars program. Fuller has enrolled in various early childhood care programs at the Community College of

Rhode Island, which is provided to her at no charge as a BrightStars program participant.

"Our goal is to encourage our child educators to take the steps to go above and beyond what is required of them through state licensing so that we as a state can improve the level of care and education that we are providing to our youth here in this state," Camillo said.

BrightStars is a completely voluntary program that any and all child care centers are invited to apply to. Currently there are approximately 1,600 licensed child care facilities and programs in the state of Rhode Island including centers and home day care facilities. Camillo said that roughly 300 of these are child care, head start or preschool type centers and the rest are home care facilities.

All of these facilities, she said, must be licensed by the state of Rhode Island in order to legally provide care, but those that also apply for Bright-

Stars quality rating are taking their rating and certifications to "the next level."

"It's a voluntary program," Camillo said. "Centers and program owners do not, by any means, have to apply to our program, but those that do, are obviously making an extra effort. It is not an easy task to earn quality rating," she said. "Even just for the center and program coordinators to understand our standards can be a task in and of itself."

Applicants have to detail their curriculum, go through several unannounced site visits where everything from their program to their level of interaction with the kids is assessed, have their credentials and education levels reviewed as well as all of the staff that work in the centers and home day care facilities.

Fuller said that although she was slightly intimidated by the process and extent of the requirements at first, she is now

Children learn and play at Little Imaginations Day Care

Continued from Page A-1

"thrilled" that she completed the task because, she said, she has received an infinite amount of support, assistance and guidance from the BrightStars agency.

"I think the program is awesome," Fuller said. "Being a part of the program opens up so many opportunities to you and for someone like myself that would ultimately like to expand on what I am doing here in my home whether it be to open a larger facility here in my home or a full fledged center, I just can't say enough about how wonderful BrightStars has been."

"I am currently enrolled in the early childhood education program at CCRI and I have not had to pay anything because it is offered through this program," she said. "I have received tips and guidance about everything from my curriculum to how I have my home set up and the toys and the other equipment stored from the staff at BrightStars and all of it, every bit of it, has helped me to improve what I do."

"I firmly believe that you need to be educated to educate these kids because once they leave you and go on to preschool or kindergarten they

need to be ready and I am now learning things in these classes that I am taking that I never even considered before like how a child's brain works and how to teach them things the proper way so that their brains can absorb it and I have to say that I can see almost immediately how effective these strategies are," she said. "I couldn't be happier that I have gone through the program and plan to stick with it even further."

Camillo said that since the BrightStars program was launched in 2009, more and more centers and facilities are applying to climb on board. The agency recently held a celebration event to recognize 58 new facilities that came on board this past year and at that event it was announced that as of last month there were a total of 77 programs including child care centers and home day care providers across the state that have earned quality ratings through BrightStars. In addition to Little Imaginations, Child Inc. and Creative Child, both centers in Coventry, as well as Just for Tots Home Childcare also in Coventry were also recognized at the event as BrightStars rating qualifiers.

According to Elizabeth Burke Bryant, the executive director

of Rhode Island Kids Count, experiences in early childhood have been proven to "establish the foundation for children's cognitive achievements, mastery of social skills, self confidence and respect for others." And as a result, she said, "children who participate in high-quality programs score higher on tests of skill and achievement and develop stronger cognitive, emotional and social skills and we feel that BrightStars helps programs to learn about the best practices so that they can create these high-quality learning environments for children."

Fuller said that since she earned her quality rating back in 2009 she has posted it on all of her brochures and explained it to parents who come to her home to learn about her program, but said that few are knowledgeable about what it really is and means. Camillo said that she is confident that as more and more centers get on board and the program gains notoriety among the general public, more and more families and others from the general public will begin to learn about the importance of BrightStars certification and give the centers and home care providers that have obtained it the credit that they deserve.

DAILY TIMES/RICENTRAL.COM

See CHILDREN, Page A-2