

calvary bilingual multicultural learning center

Washington, DC

Overview

The Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center began in 1986 in a church basement. Now, it occupies a 73,000-square-foot building, where it provides early care and education to more than 400 families from three urban neighborhoods: Columbia Heights, Mt. Pleasant, and Shaw. Its mission is to create a learning community for children, youth, families, and staff. The center emphasizes the arts, technology, and bilingualism and multiculturalism in order to nurture children's learning and development and engage parents.

The center provides pre-natal home visiting, childcare for infants and toddlers, preschool for young children, and school-age care and youth development activities up to age 18. Family support services are provided on-site and through home visits. All staff who work with families meet weekly to discuss any families that may need help and how they can work together to support them.

Staff at Calvary view childcare and early education as a way of opening the door to long-term, supportive relationships with families. On average, children are enrolled in Calvary programs for seven years. A number of the program's youth staff were enrolled in Calvary programs as children, and a number of classroom staff came into contact with the program when their children were enrolled. Long-term

Profile

Staffing

Family Institute staff includes:

- Americorps intern
- Coordinator
- Family educator
- Social worker
- Volunteers (2)

Total: 120

Children & Families Served

Infant Toddler Center: 36
Early Childhood Program: 80
School-Age Program: 120
Healthy Families home visiting: 44

Budget

\$3.1 million

Services Provided On-Site

- Developmental screenings
- ESL
- Family literacy
- Food pantry
- Home visiting
- Job skills workshops

attachment with families allows the center to work with families over time and build trusting relationships that bring them to the center in times of need.

How the Program Builds Protective Factors

Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center builds five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

Parental Resilience

- Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
- Childcare Licensing Project
- *Child Development Associate* Program
- *Family Institute*
- Family Resource Room
- Home Visits
- Male Involvement
- Parents' Association
- Resource Referral
- Staff from the Community

Social Connections

- Arts Activities
- Bulletin Boards
- *Family Institute*
- Family Resource Room
- Home Visits
- Parents' Association
- Social Activities
- Staff from the Community
- Youth Development Activities

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Arts Activities
- Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
- Bulletin Boards
- *Family Institute*
- Family Resource Room

- Life skills workshops
- Parenting education classes
- Referrals to social services
- Summer camp

Partners

- Columbia Heights Shaw Collaborative
- Georgetown University
- Healthy Families DC
- Council for Professional Recognition
- National Council of La Raza
- Suburban community-based programs
- University of the District of Columbia
- Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts

Ways of Identifying When Families Are at Risk

- Parent's request for support
- Observation of parent or parent-child interaction at pick-up or drop-off
- Observation of child in classroom
- Difficulty making payments
- Drop in attendance
- Often, administrative staff notice signs and connect families with support

Response Protocol

If staff suspect child abuse or neglect, the following occurs:

- Staff report concerns to supervisor
- Either teacher or coordinator follows up with family and:

- Home Visits
- Parent-Child Play Days

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
- *Child Development Associate* Program
- *Family Institute*
- Resource Referral
- Staff from the Community

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Arts Activities
- Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
- Childcare Licensing Project
- *Child Development Associate* Program
- Home Visits
- Infant-Toddler Center
- Preschool
- Professional Development Institute
- School-Age Care
- Youth Development Activities

Key Program Features

Arts Activities

Calvary employs two resident fine artists, who rotate through the childcare classrooms. The artists integrate classroom staff into the activities, building their capacity to develop children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development through art. Children’s art also provides staff with indication when children are troubled or stressed; staff then explore why and link families with needed supports.

Children’s artwork, professionally framed, hangs on many walls, and performances are frequent. Children’s feeling of self-worth is reinforced when parents come to see them perform or display, and parents are able to experience their children’s accomplishments and celebrate their development in a public way. Art is also

- ✚ Refers to *Family Institute* or home visiting staff
- ✚ Notifies parents that a report may be filed with child protective services

Key Elements

- Commitment to multiculturalism
- Links between Calvary programs
- Strong professional development
- Parent-staff-community interaction
- Arts program
- Male involvement
- Donated building

What People Say

“Teen parents that are alone with their babies transform themselves at Calvary. It helps them to create regular expectations about how you interact with your child—what kind of things they need.”
—Healthy Families worker

“When we said that we wanted to work with families, we had two board members quit.”
—Senior staff member

“Having a chance to look at parenting videos, to use the computer, or just to talk with other parents means a lot to me. I’m really glad we have this space at Calvary.”
—Parent

an opportunity to build parent-child bonds: every Tuesday, parents can participate with their children in the Infant-Toddler Center in movement and music activities, through a partnership with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts.

Calvary also partners with more than 15 artists and arts organizations to bring visual, performing, literary, and media arts to children, youths, staff, and parents.

Bilingualism and Multiculturalism

Central to the work of Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center is a focus on working with immigrant populations. Through its emphasis on bilingualism, the program promotes participation among parents and children with limited English skills. English- and Spanish-speaking teachers are paired in each classroom, and all preschool programs are bilingual; all children learn in both languages.

Through the program's emphasis on multiculturalism, it values and honors the cultures and backgrounds of immigrant parents and helps them cope with the challenges of parenting under the stresses of immigration. The *Family Institute* pays special attention to helping families adapt to American culture without losing their home culture and access to community organizations and resources.

The center has attracted a diverse, highly qualified staff. The *Family Institute* is headed by a Peruvian man with a psychology degree from his home country; similarly, a number of staff were licensed childcare providers in their home countries but started as teacher's aides here because of language barriers. The presence of highly experienced staff sends a message of respect to the community.

Childcare Licensing Project

Calvary co-manages this project to build a network of trained and licensed home-based childcare providers. The project takes a multicultural approach to improving the social and emotional competence of

Washington, D.C., children by increasing access to high-quality licensed care. Those enrolled participate in workshops on all aspects of childcare, including operating a small business, and have access to computers and the Internet through Calvary's Networked Learning Center. Once they obtain their licenses, they are able to provide childcare in their homes or other settings. In addition to becoming licensed, participants obtain a *Child Development Associate* credential.

Child Development Associate Program

Calvary offers one of the only bilingual (English-Spanish and monolingual Spanish) *Child Development Associate* (CDA) programs in the country. The comprehensive training prepares staff to receive the CDA credential from the national Council for Professional Recognition. It involves formal instruction, mentoring, field placement, evening childcare, and advisement in building the required portfolio.

Calvary provides the CDA training in order to:

- Build childcare capacity in the community
- Draw families to its services (any family with an enrolled member may use the services of the *Family Institute*; many also enroll in Calvary's childcare)
- Provide professional training for families needing financial stability
- Provide training for its staff members

Parents often seek to improve their parenting skills and obtain employment in the field of early education by participating in the CDA program. There are currently 350 people on the waiting list. The program is the cornerstone of a model-building project on which the center is collaborating with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). Calvary is working to develop a toolkit that captures the essential elements of its bilingual, multicultural model which, when completed, will be presented at diverse NCLR affiliates nationwide.

Facility Reflects Values

The Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center occupies a 73,000-square-foot building that was donated by Bell Atlantic and redesigned for Calvary. It has a rooftop playground, a sprung wood dance floor, an art room with a professional kiln, a fully equipped darkroom, and a networked learning center with 15 multimedia stations.

The center is loft-like and open, designed to maximize the growth and development of the children. Glass walls throughout help create a sense of continuity and enable parents to learn more about their children's growth and development by observing, without disrupting class.

Classrooms and the program's offices are near each other and separated only by glass walls. The fact that all staff are visible and accessible to each other increases accountability and sends the message that every staff member is accountable for children.

The Family Institute

Located on-site at the Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center, the *Family Institute* provides a full menu of family support services, including workshops on parenting, life skills, and job skills. Workshops are provided to families at least twice a month, but more often based on needs and interests. The institute also provides social services referrals; facilitation of the school-family relationship; health and developmental screenings; continuing education opportunities; and facilitation of Calvary's Parents' Association. Institute staff, including a family educator, also meet with families individually.

Regular workshops are offered on child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and other family violence issues. As mandated reporters, all *Family Institute* staff are trained to identify and report incidents of child abuse to their supervisors.

Most of the families whose children are enrolled in childcare and activities at Calvary participate in the *Family Institute*, and childcare workers regularly refer families to the *Family Institute*. A number of staff members also use *Family Institute* services.

Collaboration between *Family Institute* staff and home visiting and classroom staff is crucial to identifying families facing dire challenges and responding to them. All staff who work with children and/or families meet weekly to discuss any families that may need help and how they can work together to support them.

Family Resource Room

A new Family Resource Room is in the works. The room will provide a centralized space for parents to access information and resources in a self-directed manner on issues including child development, life skills, and community resources. Like the current Family Literacy Room, which it augments, it will be for parents, run by parents, and designed by parents and will give parents opportunities to spend time together informally. Having a Family Resource Room sends the message to parents that Calvary is a space not only for their children, but for them.

Home Visits

Calvary is one of three sites for Healthy Families DC, the statewide branch of a national home-visiting program that promotes well-being among families who may be at risk of abuse and neglect. The visits develop positive parent-child relationships by enhancing parents' parenting skills and understanding of child development.

Visitors make contact with families during pregnancy or within the first month after birth, and families are eligible from pregnancy until the child turns five. Each participating family receives two visits per month from a paraprofessional who provides information on parenting and child development, engages the family in and observes child development activities, helps the family access needed services, and provides a listening ear and emotional support. Healthy Families

staff also perform developmental screenings with children and their families to track language, communication, and motor skills development.

Families in Calvary's Healthy Families program are guaranteed slots in its childcare programs. Healthy Families home visitors and classroom staff work together to support each family, sharing information and reinforcing each other's work. Healthy Families staff use *Family Institute* services and resources to support the families they work with. Collaboration with family support and classroom staff is crucial to identifying families facing dire challenges and responding to them. All staff who work with children and/or families meet weekly to discuss any families that may need help and how they can work together to support them.

Inter-Community Collaboration

Calvary has a strong commitment to supporting recent immigrants. In the Washington, D.C., area, these families have moved from the inner city to suburban communities, where there is little infrastructure to support them. Calvary is exploring the possibility of partnering with organizations in these suburban communities to build their capacity to provide bilingual and multicultural childcare.

Male Involvement

Calvary has ten male classroom staff; more than half of the early childhood classrooms have male staff members. These men provide role models for young fathers, teens, and children in the program. That high number demonstrates a commitment to creating a space that welcomes men and encourages male models of nurturing and caring. Initially, staff and parents resisted the idea of male classroom staff, but the director provided them with critical information about the importance of male involvement in children's development. The results can be seen at the end of the day, when a surprisingly large number of young fathers come to pick up their children.

The greatest number of male staff members work in Calvary's youth programs. This includes Boys to Men, which provides young men with male role models with whom they can raise issues, concerns, and problems.

Parents' Association

All parents of children enrolled in programs at Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center automatically become members of its Parents' Association. The principal tasks of the association are to (1) assist in program improvement, (2) involve parents in the work of the center in order to improve the educational experiences of the children and youths, and (3) allow parents to get to know each other and provide mutual support. Parents also participate on the education, spring bazaar, and holiday potluck dinner committees.

Professional Development Institute

The Professional Development Institute fulfills an important part of Calvary's mission of providing a learning community for children, youths, families, and staff. The institute oversees the organizational professional development plan for staff and ensures that there are regular learning opportunities that bring together staff, parents, and the larger community.

The institute provides a series of monthly workshops and other learning opportunities at which one-third of the seats are reserved for staff, parents, and community members, respectively. These workshops cover a variety of topics, including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and other family violence issues. As mandated reporters, all staff are trained to identify and report incidents of child abuse to their supervisors.

Staff development is strength-based, reflecting Calvary's philosophy that a highly qualified staff is one of the strongest predictors of quality in a program serving children and youths. Opportunities include conferences, mentoring, distance learning, and other training events that support continuous personal and

professional growth. Training for staff in all positions encourages them to proactively reach out to families if they are concerned about them and connect them with the various supports available within the program. Staff expect and are expected to be in school and working on professional development. Compensation is tied to both education and years of experience, and schedules are flexible to allow staff to take advantage of continuing education opportunities. Most early childhood classroom staff are working toward a bachelor of arts degree in early childhood. Four classes per year are offered to staff through a relationship with Georgetown University, and—with three other entities—Calvary is developing an Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at the University of the District of Columbia.

The Professional Development Institute also coordinates the *Child Development Associate Program*.

Resource Referral

Calvary has strong partnerships with a number of community-based service providers, including the Columbia Heights Shaw Collaborative, a social service organization that provides counseling, referrals, and home visiting and is co-located in the building.

Staff from the Community

Calvary has a strong commitment to hiring staff from the community. This commitment is due to the desire to (1) encourage families to feel comfortable coming to staff when they are facing challenges and (2) develop childcare capacity within the community.

At Calvary, the lines between who is staff, who is a parent, and who is a community member are blurred. Many staff members are community members who were hired. They've received training through the *Child Development Associate* training program and, like all staff, can place their children in Calvary's childcare for free.

Staff's tenure with the program is lengthened by the fact that they live in the community (many have been on staff as long as 14 years). These staff regularly see and interact with families at the grocery store, at the park, etc., and want to sustain the relationships they have built. This informal contact also helps to ensure that families needing support don't fall through the cracks.

Hiring from the community also increases accountability: Classroom staff are more accountable because they know that the children's parents are, in many cases, their colleagues. And the program is accountable to community members because those community members are its staff.

Youth Development Activities

Calvary operates a number of programs that provide children and youths with alternatives to gangs through positive group activities, early job internships with stipends, mentoring, college preparation, and opportunities for community service and leadership.

Challenges

- **Confidentiality:** Blurring the lines between staff, community members, and parents is one of the program's strengths, but it can make confidentiality challenging. Staff are working on more rigorous protocols, particularly to cover the sharing of information between home visitors and classroom staff.
- **Gentrification:** The economic impact of gentrification is driving low-income immigrant families out of the communities served by the center and into suburban areas where bilingual, multicultural childcare is not available. (See "Inter-Community Collaboration".)