
Close To 1,000 Play, Learn In Ansonia

BY **Tina Ugas** | APR 19, 2010 8:42 AM

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A little girl checks a doll's heart with a stethoscope. A few feet away another little girl bravely strokes a large snake wrapped around a ranger's neck.

It's all good. They're playing and learning.

Close to 1,000 children came to Warsaw Park Saturday afternoon at the Fourth Annual Play & Learn Fair.

They painted pictures, fished from fake pools, made arts and crafts, planted flowers, bounced in balls and ran around laughing and playing, touching and feeling things and most importantly, learning.

The event was sponsored by the Valley Directors Network, which is a collaboration of childcare, pre-school

and other agencies that help children in the Valley.

Sharon Kelley, director of Julia Day Nursery and Kindergarten, coordinated the event with the Valley Directors Network.

However, Kelley says the children were not the only focus for the fair.

"We actually did it for the parents to see the importance of early childhood education," Kelley said.

Stefanie Reyher, ranger for the Ansonia Nature Center, coaxed children to check out a boa constrictor while ranger Martin Wigglesworth handed out a survey for parents to see if they are interested in having the center re-open a pre-school.

Wigglesworth was able to get 105 parents to fill out the survey at the fair.

"We are doing this to get an idea to see if it is feasible to continue the preschool," Wigglesworth said. "We are setting a foundation to get it done and we have approached the city already."

Shelly Taylor, childbirth education coordinator for Griffin Hospital Birthing Center, was busy at another booth setting a foundation for proper parenting. She taught children to diaper a newborn, using dolls. Any child who completed the task received a cartoon bandage and also a chance to listen to their heart with the stethoscope.

She even provided emergency care by bandaging the finger of a reporter's finger after a paper cut, complete with a Toy Story Band-Aid.

Learning centers, day cares and pre-school teachers were at the fair to greet and meet children.

Shelly Sbardellati and AnnMarie Checkley, teachers at KinderCare in Ansonia, provided parents with an overview of the center and the extra activities available. They said they enjoyed meeting the children and parents but also the other providers.

"It's nice to mingle with other schools and to see what they have to offer," Checkley said. "It's like the community came together. Basically, we are here for one thing — and that is for the sake of the children."