West Haven Community House Head Start receives a new five-year grant award

WEST HAVEN (August 3, 2015) – The primary purpose of the Community House, the cornerstone social service agency in West Haven for almost 75 years, has always been “services for children and families.” In 1941, the Community House opened a nursery school in its new building, the former “Tolles” homestead, utilizing the main floor dining room and parlor to serve neighborhood preschoolers.

Today, one of the agency’s most successful programs is Head Start, a comprehensive school readiness program for children ages 3 and 4. In 2015 the Community House’s Head Start program marks its 38th year, located at the agency’s main campus at 227 Elm St.

According to Executive Director Patty Stevens, the program was recently awarded a new, five-year grant to continue as West Haven’s Head Start program provider.

In all, more than 4,000 West Haven youngsters have attended the Community House Head Start school readiness program since its inception in the city in 1978, according to Head Start Director Abel Padro. In that first year, 11 children were served in the school year program.

Today, Padro said, there are part-day, full-day, full school year and 12-month-a-year school readiness classrooms at the agency’s main campus, which features eight classrooms, three playgrounds and other facilities. Of the 175 West Haven Community House employees, 45 staff members work in the Head Start program.

Stevens noted that West Haven Community House Head Start program is licensed by the state of Connecticut and that today’s Head Start program very much exemplifies the spirit and intention of the Community House’s founders in the 1940s.Unlike nursery school programs of the past, Head Start provides a high quality, early learning environment to prepare pre-school children for success in school and in life.

From its beginning with 11 children in 1978, the program grew rapidly. By 1980, there were 40 children in two classrooms. Enrollment rose to 60 in 1984 and then to 100 pre-school aged enrollees in 1986.
In 1989, the Community House Head Start program received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and in 1992 the program began offering full day, full year services to working parents. By 1999, the program had grown to 120 children in six classrooms and by the year 2004 there were 163 children in seven classrooms.

Padro added, “The 2015-2016 school year will begin on August 27 with a total of 144 children in eight classrooms. The new five year grant focuses more on stringent accountability in the areas of governance, evidence based curriculums, collection and use of data for planning, increased parental engagement, and the articulation of school readiness goals and alignment with the Lead Educational Agency, the West Haven Board of Education.”

Padro and Stevens both also praised the Head Start program’s local partners that include the City of West Haven, the West Haven Board of Education, the West Haven public library, the West Haven Family Resource Center, WHEAT, the state Department of Children & Families (DCF), Beacon on the Hill, and a host of other supporters.

“It is important for us to recognize our partnerships and supporters throughout our 38 years offering Head Start in West Haven,” Stevens said. “We look forward to continuing these partnerships and broadening community awareness and support as we embark on this new chapter of the program in the next five years.”

To be eligible for West Haven Community House’s Head Start program, a family must live in West Haven and have a child or children who will be 3- or 4-years-old by January 1 of the coming year and must meet federal income eligibility guidelines or must have a child of the required age with special needs. To request an intake appointment, call (203) 934-5221, ext. 135 or email your request to headstart@whcommunityhouse.net

If you have a Head Start memory or picture that you would like to share as part of the 75th anniversary celebration next year, please contact Kathy Hart-Jones at (203) 934-5221, ext. 131, or by email at khartjones@whcommunityhouse.net