

Eastminster Child Care Center

Consultant, Sindya Narayanaswamy

Community Partner, Kathy Martinez

PART I Consulting Context

Organization, Program and Community Partner

Eastminster Child Care Center is a private, state licensed, Christian childcare center providing tender care and educational programs to children from the age of six weeks through the age of five. The children are placed in classrooms that provide unique and appropriate environments for each child:

The classrooms are divided as such:

- Infant Room
- One Year Old Room
- Two Year Old Room
- Three Year Old Room
- Pre-School Room

Eastminster Child Care Center is located on 250 North Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15202. Their mission statement is:

" As a Christian organization concerned with the development of whole persons, our mission is to provide full week-day child care licensed for ages six weeks through five years for families of every circumstance.

We believe that early skill mastery builds security and independence and sets the pattern for future learning. Therefore, we are committed to fostering an environment for intellectual, moral, and physical development of all children, being guided by Christian principles and using established standards of Early Childhood Education.

We believe that parents need support as an integral part of the healthy development of their children. Especially because of the difficulties of raising a child in the nineties, we are committed to being an information resource for parents. We will provide support through love, prayer, counseling, and seminars.

We are also dedicated to maintaining an environment where staff are able to apply their God-given gifts to the nurturing of each child, and we encourage the professional development of each staff member."

The personnel at Eastminster Child Care Center are trained to meet the needs of the individual child through education and experience. The director, Ms. Martinez, and some of the teachers have college degrees. The entire staff participates in training sessions held annually as required by the Department of Public Welfare, the licensing agent.

After the previous director quit three years ago, the center was in danger of being shut down. Ms. Martinez, not wanting to see this happen, took the position of director. The center has one teacher per ten children. Currently, Ms. Martinez is having problems maintaining a full staff. She is constantly in the hiring process because people tend to join, and then very quickly quit. Within the past week, she

employed three new teachers. Ms. Martinez's main duties are administrative, however she also serves as a substitute teacher when there is a shortage. She is very keen to learn more about computers, though her experience is minimal.

Ms. Martinez has one Pentium computer with Windows 98. The computer is a Pentium II 266Mhz computer with 64MB RAM. It has MS Office Suite, and a daycare facility management system called, ProCare, installed on it. The computer is connected to the Internet through a dial-up modem. However, Ms. Martinez used her computer rarely, for the occasional e-mail. The ProCare software was untouched for over a year.

PART II Consulting Partnership Results

The consulting work done over the last few months focused on applying the database management system, ProCare, to the administrative tasks of the Eastminster Child Care Center. All records, tuition, roll, employee payments had been maintained manually. Keeping records manually was a tedious and time-consuming task that left room for many errors. Converting the manual systems into a computerized system using the ProCare software required learning how to use the system and transferring records into a computer database.

The underlying target of the consulting partnership was to help Ms. Martinez reduce her fear of technology so she could realize its great benefits. In addition, a key goal was for her to realize that with motivation and determination, using technology was well within her means.

Outcomes

Upon beginning the project, Ms. Martinez learnt how to use the ProCare database management system. She transferred the manually maintained information into the computerized database on her own. This allowed her to expand her technical skills and learn the ProCare software.

- As she completed these tasks, she came to realize the benefits of using technology and was motivated and confident to explore new software.
- The process of having to transfer data into the computer was the greatest learning tool for Ms. Martinez. In doing this, she increased her familiarity with the computer.
- The database is now in use- though manual records are being kept as well for the next few months.

During this semester, Ms. Martinez's confidence with computers increased and her apprehension towards them decreased.

- On her own, she was able to enter information about child immunizations into the database.
- She taught her assistant the basics of entering and updating data in the ProCare System. The fact that she was able to teach someone else is strong evidence that she is retaining and understanding what she is learning.
- She can print out records using ProCare, including bills, invoices, roll call and tuition.
- Ms. Martinez knows how to back-up database information and look for software updates on ProCare's web site.

There is potential to use ProCare to an even greater extent. For example, currently the database is only used to maintain information about students, family and tuition. It can also be used for payroll and food programs. Ms. Martinez has demonstrated interest, motivation and knowledge to be able to learn and use ProCare for her work at the center.

Recommendations

In order to expand on what she knows, Ms. Martinez should experiment and explore with ProCare. She should experiment and look through different menus, and keep the manual by her side for reference as she does this. In addition, she should back-up all her data, at the end of each working day. This will prevent information loss in case her computer has a problem. If possible, she should maintain a copy of data in an alternate location (like her home). In case of a fire, or some other hazard, the data will still be secure in another location.

The suggestions will not only increase her technical capacity, but also, in doing so, save her time. As time goes by, Ms. Martinez's proficiency with ProCare will grow, allowing her to integrate more advanced features of ProCare into her work.

Resources:

- *www.ProCaresoft.com* - The official homepage of the software, which contains a multitude of links to helpful resources. For example, from here there are links to access:
 - Services and Support- Contacts to use in case of a problem or concern with the software.
 - Tech Tips- Simple tips to keep in mind when using ProCare.
 - The ProCare Gazette – An online newsletter full of the newest updates about ProCare.
- *www.PTCTraining.com* - A web site specializing in the delivery of instructor led training of ProCare. On a precautionary note, expense is an issue that should be considered with these tutorials. Most of them are rather costly. On a more positive note though, they provide thorough training of ProCare.
- http://www.bellaonline.com/education/activities_for_kids/preschool/subjects/sub970529951409.htm - The web site is devoted to educators of children. There are some helpful links here to enhance education with technology.

III. Additional Recommendations

A. Setting up a small computer cluster for the 4 and 5 year-olds in Eastminster.

Computers are the wave of the future. It is never too early to start using computers. Familiarity with computers from a young age will be helpful to children when they grow older, for virtually every occupations requires the use of computers. In addition, educational computer games are helpful for children learning basics like reading and counting. Some suggestions as to how to approach this idea are:

1. Speak to directors at other local childcare centers regarding technology and education.
2. Research childcare center web sites online.
3. Search online for computers that are advisable for young children to use.
4. Visit local community centers that use donated computer equipment.
5. Find out the benefits and disadvantages to using donated computers.

6. Search for donors in the Pittsburgh area who might give their computers to Eastminster for children to use.

Resources:

There are resources on the web that offer advice about educational games and software for children.

Web sites of bookstores have recommendations and descriptions of top-selling software. Also, web sites intended for teachers are an excellent resource. They often offer input and suggestions from other teaching professionals from around the nation.

- a. http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/229548/ref=sw_h_l_b_5/107-1572057-8678111 - Amazon has a good listing of top selling computer software for children that are both Mac and PC compatible.
- b. <http://www.i-55.com/lynnfleming/bm.htm> - This site, set up by Lynn Fleming, is a really good site set up as a web community for teachers and students. It offers daily updates relevant to technology and education, as well as some links to possible educational software for children.
- c. www.sitesforteachers.com - An extensive site, full of resources for teachers including creative lesson plans, exciting and new software for children, and sample lesson plans for children of all ages.

B. Continuously Expanding Technical Skills

Technology changes, grows and expands by the day. It is important never to terminate the growth of personal technical knowledge. It is advisable that Ms. Martinez always aim to improve her technical competency and never stop learning. The following resources are good starting points. They incorporate improving her skills Internet and her familiarity with Microsoft Office, both of which Eastminster Child Care has provided Ms. Martinez with already.

Being familiar with the Internet is a very useful skill. Below are some resources for new users of the Internet who are unfamiliar with how to navigate around the web. They provide wonderful advice, tips, links and instructions.

Resources:

- o <http://www.elfden.freeseve.co.uk/> - Elfin Productions created this resource, which provides some basic information regarding the Internet.
- o <http://library.albany.edu/internet/> - This site is maintained by the University of New York at Albany. It is an excellent source with simple explanations for beginners about how to use the Internet.
- o <http://members.aol.com/bikerchris/main.htm> - A site set up by Chris Edwards. It is very well set up for novices. All technical terms can be highlighted, and a definition will pop up. It goes over basic concepts like Internet, Search Engine, keyword and web site.

Below are some resources with helpful information about Microsoft Products.

Resources:

Web Sites:

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/tutorial/default.asp>

This is the official Microsoft site that gives you access to tutorials for all the Microsoft products. They provide a fully detailed, easy to learn, excellent platform to learn all the features of any of their applications.

<http://www.baycongroup.com/word.htm>

Great tutorial for Microsoft Word. It walks the reader through the basics and addresses all the details also, allowing the user to become an expert at their own pace.

<http://www.baycongroup.com/excel.htm> - Good tutorial for Microsoft Excel.

Books:

<http://www.thefreewaresite.com/Books/> - This site contains reviews of many computer books for beginners.

(Note: The following books are of great use to beginners (though the titles are a bit strange)

- [Word 2000 For Windows® For Dummies](#) by Dan Gookin
- [PowerPoint® 2000 For Windows® For Dummies](#) by Doug Lowe, Grace Jasmine (Editor)
- [Microsoft® Office 2000 For Windows® For Dummies](#) by Wally Wang, et al

Courses:

Taking courses is an excellent way to increase one's technical capacity. Although expensive, they are sometimes well worth the money.

- The Computer Learning Center at the University of Pittsburgh offers classes about different software and how they work, as well as Internet tutorials. The location of the Computer Learning Center is: Kossman Building, Suite 1105, 100 Forbes Avenue. The phone number is 412-281-7488. They also have a web site at www.clc.pitt.edu.

IV. Conclusion

The detailed report presented is a discussion of the work done between the student consultant, Sindya Narayanaswamy, and the community partner, Ms. Kathy Martinez. It entails a discussion of what was accomplished over the course of a few months. Essentially, Ms. Martinez was able to create and begin using a database to manage her data. The sections above offer suggestions and recommendations about future advances for Ms. Martinez and Eastminster technologically. Most importantly, the philosophy that both this report and the consulting partnership advocate is,

"It is not so important to learn how to solve a problem or learn a method of problem solving but rather it is important to learn the way of thinking that enables us to solve any problem."

Above all else, Ms. Martinez learned this new way of thinking that will empower her in all that she does.