

Child Care Council rocks at Rowdy

September 20, 2019



Rowdy Creek Park in Smith River was filled Aug. 14 with laughing children, live music, games and the chatter of friends.

The Del Norte County Child Care Council was hosting its fifth-annual “Rockin’ at Rowdy” fundraiser. “If you can offer an environment, an opportunity, for parents to relax and enjoy their children, you’re going to enhance that child’s life,” said Melodee Mitchell, the council’s executive director.

The Child Care Council now is celebrating its 40th year and touting more than a dozen in-house programs, plus the Wonder Bus and more grants than ever.

Its officials say the Child Care Council is thriving.

The nonprofit offers resources and funds for families and providers to provide children in Del Norte County with the best care possible.

“It is really a blessing to work in a place where you are always giving back and helping with the community,” said Sarah Campbell, the organization’s resource and referral director, who has worked for the council for 17 years.

In 1979, six women realized the need for child care in Del Norte County, what with more and more women joining the workforce. Gathered around a kitchen table in Gasque, they decided to apply for a California Department of Education grant to help working families afford child care.

“I had trouble finding child care and I had searched high and low,” said Peggy Niesen, one of the founding women. “So, what we were looking for was any way we could possibly find to connect people who needed child care to people who were doing child care.”

With a grant and its nonprofit status soon thereafter, the founders brought the Child Care Council to life. It holds that grant to this day, along with many others acquired over the years. The council’s grant budget just topped \$3 million. “We literally just got another grant last week. It is very, very exciting,” Mitchell said.

Their mission has not changed, she said, only grown. They still provide resources and education for working families who need child care, but throughout the years, the council has enhanced its vision.

Rather than solely a traditional babysitting model, the Child Car Council focuses on offering family child-care providers with resources for an experience much like preschool. Those resources encourage school readiness, nutrition, early literacy, and social and emotional preparedness.

That said, there’s still a priority on the nurturing atmosphere found in traditional babysitting.

Additionally, the group is offering resources such as parent education, a toy and resource lending library, child-abuse prevention, car-seat lending, a preschool, two after-school programs, and supervised child visitation.

“The Child Care Council is always growing and evolving,” said Mitchell. “If it fits within our mission, we’re gonna go for it. We’re gonna see what we can do to help bring it to our community through our agency.”

What’s on the table now? Mitchell said her primary goal since assuming a leadership position has been to build an outdoor play area in the council’s backyard for its child-visitation program