

Parenting at heart of the matter for institute founder



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Laura Smith-Wynn, of Merrillville, educates and empowers parents for the sake of children at Indiana Parenting Institute in Merrillville.

Smith-Wynn is founder and executive director of the charitable nonprofit organization that provides evidence-based skill-building parent education programs and resources to assist in parenting.

"Our focus is to train parents so they in turn train their children to be successful," she said. Programs focus on children from birth to 18.

Joy Project combines parenting education, life skills and job readiness, especially for single parents in transition from domestic violence or substance abuse or those separated from their children and looking to reconnect. The institute works with at-risk families and homeless women.

"Whoever knocks on this door, we provide whatever service we can," she said. "For a lot of them, it's a last resort, a last place to get help. The thing we've learned is people are basically willing to do anything to reconnect with their children."

Workshops range from two hours to 12 weeks. A 10-week teen pregnancy program is designed for young girls having their first baby, parents of teenagers is an eight-week program and there are programs for parents of young children and toddlers.

"They help parents understand children's behavior and how to adjust behaviors in a 'from the heart' manner," she said. "Parenting is not easy and children, all children deserve the opportunity to have a good life. They deserve the opportunity to be children."

"A lot of parents drop their issues on children and a lot of children miss their childhood because they're so engrossed in their parents' problems. Parents dictate the household and if a parent is stressed out the child grows up in that environment and adopts this as normal behavior and so they go to school and do what they know.

"I'm trying to break the cycle to get people to understand how children get to be bad. They learn it from the adults in their environment."

April begins Parenting Awareness Month in Indiana. A kickoff breakfast is Friday at the Genesis Convention Center in Gary, a parenting and education fair, in partnership with the Gary SouthShore Railcats and Purdue University Calumet, is April 16 at the Gary ballpark and the annual banquet takes place at the Indiana Welcome Center in Hammond. For more information, visit indianaparentinginstitute.org

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