

# CONNECTIONS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2009

VOLUME III, ISSUE 4

## ...here comes the sun...

by Jennifer Ohlsen, Connections Newsletter Senior Editor

The sun is truly shining on Florida's early learning system. This spring we faced many challenges together. It is wonderful to raise our faces and feel the warm promise of sunny days ahead.

Before us now is a rare opportunity to continue working together to move our system forward in ways that will have lasting impact on Florida's children, families, and providers. Comprehensive developments to our unique system will set the stage as Florida emerges as a leader in early learning.

We look forward to the hard work ahead as we undertake the new opportunities that have come to us. We will have to work diligently to see things through. Success depends on our ability to come together and to reflect on the past using the lessons learned to guide us as we look ahead.

This issue is dedicated to setting the stage for the next season of our work. The Agency is inspired by the possibilities ahead!

As always, we welcome your contributions to CONNECTIONS. If you would like to submit an article or post an event contact [Jennifer Ohlsen, Senior Editor](#) by e-mail or at 850.921.3469. For your convenience, the PDF version of CONNECTIONS is available for download. You may need to install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader 9.0](#) to use this printable version of the newsletter.



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## honoring child care champions...

by Jennifer Ohlsen, Connections Newsletter Senior Editor

We're happy to acknowledge the heroes who have served the children of Florida and set the bar high for the rest of us as child care professionals. We have three individuals we'd like to recognize this quarter:

The Association of Early Learning Coalitions awarded **Florida Senator Nan Rich** their first ever "Early Learning Champion Award."

**CEO Vicky Stark**, of the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia, was named the 2009 Professional Advocate of the Year by the Committee for Positive Parenting of Flagler and Volusia at the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Luncheon.

**Jim Greenman**, age 59, died April 4 after a long battle with cancer. His work as a researcher, consultant, and author touched many early learning professionals and had an enormous impact on the early childhood education field.

If you have a child care champion you'd like to see recognized in the CONNECTIONS newsletter, please write or call **Jennifer Ohlsen, Senior Editor**, telephone 850.921.3469.



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## honoring senator nan rich...

*Press Release, The Florida Association of Early Learning Coalitions*

The Association of Early Learning Coalitions awarded Florida Senator, Nan Rich, their first ever "Early Learning Champion Award."

Senator Rich, whose district covers parts of Broward and Miami-Dade Counties, has a long history of advocating for children, families and early learning issues. She has worked tirelessly this past Legislative Session to ensure more children would have access to health care, by passing a bill to improve "Florida Kid Care," the state's Children's Health Insurance Act.

Senator Rich is passionate about the importance of providing high quality early learning to all children. Additionally, Senator Rich supports the ongoing professional development of early learning teachers through scholarship opportunities to enable child care teachers to earn higher credentials and educational degrees. She is also an outspoken advocate for Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten program and works tirelessly to ensure that a high quality program is available for all 4-year-olds.

"Senator Rich's reputation is one to be admired," says Susan Main, Chair of the Association of Early Learning Coalitions and Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Duval. "By striving to fulfill her commitment to Florida's children, especially in troubling economic times, Senator Rich has proven herself as someone to be admired and emulated. The 'Early Learning Champion Award' recognizes all the hard work Senator Rich has done over the years for families and children of this state."

The Association of Early Learning Coalitions is a non-profit organization comprised of leadership from the state's 31 separate early learning coalitions that cover Florida's 67 counties. The Association aims to bring the coalitions and the state together to achieve an integrated, comprehensive system of early care and education across Florida by promoting services of the highest quality, advocating for all of Florida's children and their families, and supporting one another's professional growth.

For more information, write or call [Chad Burns, Community Outreach](#), 904.866.2525 or 904.208.2040 X225.



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## 2009 professional child advocate...

*by Marie Allard (ELC of Flagler Volusia) and Matt Moore, Consumer Affairs*

Vicky Stark, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia, was named the 2009 Professional Advocate of the Year by the Committee for Positive Parenting of Flagler and Volusia at the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Luncheon. The Committee recognizes those who go above and beyond their daily job to make a difference for children in the community.

Vicky was praised for being a true visionary in the field, with her unique programs such as the local PBS program, "Child Flight" (underwritten with donations from community partners), and "Fresh Start" for incarcerated and soon-to-be-released moms to receive parent classes and training. Vicky constantly challenges staff to "think outside the box" and inspires everyone with her energy, drive, and determination to "make something happen."

Congratulations, Vicky, on a well deserved award!



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## in memoriam— jim greenman...

*A Memorial, from Bright Horizons*



Jim Greenman, age 59, died April 4 after a long battle with cancer. His work as a researcher, consultant, and author touched many early learning professionals and had an enormous impact on the early childhood education field. He is most well known for his passion for creating delightful, thoughtful, and inspiring learning environments for young children. Jim's most recent passion was designing and

implementing Bright Spaces®—warm, enriching places in homeless shelters that give children in crisis a place to play and learn.

Jim Greenman also served as senior VP of Education and Programs for Bright Horizons Family Solutions. In noting his passing, Bright Horizons leaders Dave Lissy and Mary Ann Tocio observed, "Jim was a legend not only within Bright Horizons, but in the entire field of early education. And while his passing leaves a major void in our hearts and in the early childhood profession, his legacy leaves an everlasting gift to children and to educators that will sustain for generations to come. Jim brought respect to early educators by insisting on respect for young children. He knew the purpose in their play and unveiled it for the world to see messy little scientists, emerging builders, acrobats, and artisans. He ensured we don't ask, 'How smart is this child?' but rather, 'How is this child smart?'"

Jim is survived and will be deeply missed by his family, extended family, friends, and colleagues all over the world. His family has asked that contributions in his memory be made to the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, to carry out his vision of ensuring children living in crisis situations have access to books, toys, games and music so they can enjoy the magic of childhood. For more information, visit the Jim Greenman Memorial website, [Memories of Jim](#).



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## florida child care programs go green...

by Gerie Nasche, Contributing Editor, Program

Florida now has more than 170 Eco-Healthy Child Care (EHCC) providers serving more than 8,000 children! Eco-Healthy Child Care Centers, which create environments for children that are safe and eco-healthy, are now available in more than 1,000 locations across the US and Canada!

A 2009 EHCC survey of national providers that are Eco-Healthy certified demonstrates that these providers have healthier children and staff, improved marketing, and the ability to educate parents on the benefits of a healthier environment, both in the child care setting and in the child's home environment.

The Early Learning Coalition of Orange County hosted an Eco-Healthy Train-the-Trainer event at Community Coordinated Care for Children, in Orlando. This event was attended by more than 50 coalition staff and other participants, who will share this information by conducting training on becoming an Eco-Healthy child care provider with programs and providers in their local communities.

Eco-Healthy providers commit to reducing children's exposure to toxins and other environmental health hazards. An early learning coalition can support child care facilities interested in becoming "Eco-Healthy" by distributing flyers and posting a link to Eco-Healthy Child Care on the coalition's website. Providers begin the process by completing a checklist that highlights 25 simple steps that ensure a safe place for children. A facility that qualifies for certification receives an endorsement certificate and a poster that lets parents and others know of the facility's efforts, and commitment to being Eco-Healthy.

Take a look at the [Eco-Healthy Child Care website](#) for tips on how to go Eco-Healthy, [signing up to request a checklist](#), guides to safer plastics and green cleaning recipes, and a map of eco-healthy child care providers in Florida.



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## looking forward: comprehensive system development...

Florida's early learning system is undergoing vast changes. Spring is always a time of change, and this past spring was no different. A challenging legislative session tested our strength, but ultimately presented us with several new opportunities. This summer will be an exciting time for Florida's early learning system and all of the partners who help to make it successful.

The Agency is proud to join with early learning coalitions and other stakeholders to implement several new projects that will have far-reaching positive impacts on our system. To read about each of these initiatives, click the links below. As always, we welcome your thoughts and input as we move forward.

The [Early Learning Information System \(ELIS\)](#) transforms the system through technology.

The [American Recovery & Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\)](#) invests in families and infrastructure.

The [Quality Initiative](#) supports continuous improvements for children, families, providers, and coalitions.



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## elis development: time to shine...

*By Michele Watson, Contributing Editor, System Development*

During the 2009 legislative session, the Agency secured the funding necessary to begin the development of the Early Learning Information System (ELIS). This funding represents an amazing opportunity to implement a centralized data system for providing critical information to early learning parents, partners, and providers. These early learning stakeholders include 300,000 families whose children attend Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness programs, 31 early learning coalitions, more than 15,000 child care providers and several state agencies. The Agency will use the ELIS system to administer a \$1.1 billion early learning budget and save \$28 million each year, a recurring savings that could fund 7,000 more children in the School Readiness program every year.

During the next 24 months, the Agency, with continued assistance from early learning stakeholders, will manage the development and implementation phases of the ELIS. The completed ELIS will streamline processes, realize efficiencies, and better serve Florida's children and families.

For additional information on the ELIS project, contact [Michele Watson](#), System Development Manager at 850.921.3195.



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## new leadership for florida's quality initiative...

by Jennifer Ohlsen, Senior Editor, Consumer Affairs

The Agency's multi-project statewide Quality Initiative comes in-house beginning July 1, 2009. In the past, partner agencies including the Children's Forum and Western Kentucky University (WKU) have delivered Quality Initiative activities on behalf of the Office of Early Learning. The Agency is ready to begin leading the initiative, having gathered a well-skilled cadre of child development and early learning experts who are experienced with program administration based upon evidence-based practices.

Prioritizing the projects for this initiative, the Agency has focused on developing strategies that will empower and support our partners. Each project's central goal is to ensure early learning coalitions have the tools necessary to continue supporting the local governance of our early learning system. Our commitment is to provide quality support services to coalitions and the early learning field, ensuring the continued improvement of our statewide early learning system.

The Quality Initiative has a brilliant history in Florida. For five years, projects within this initiative have supported providers and coalitions in improving the quality of our early learning system. The Office of Early Learning is eager to continue this good work and looks forward to increased partnership with coalitions in these efforts.

For more information about the Quality Initiative, please e-mail [Jennifer Ohlsen](mailto:Jennifer.Ohlsen@flaawi.com), Technical Assistance Supervisor or call at 850.921.3469.



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## arra invests in families and infrastructure...

by Lisette Levy, Contributing Editor, Consumer Affairs

President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (the Recovery Act, the Act) into law on February 17, 2009. It is an unprecedented effort to jumpstart the nation's economy, create or save millions of jobs, and begin addressing challenges so our country can thrive in the 21st century. The Act is a response to a crisis unlike any since the Great Depression, and includes measures to modernize our nation's infrastructure, enhance energy independence, expand educational opportunities, preserve and improve affordable health care, provide tax relief, and protect Americans in greatest need.

The Agency for Workforce Innovation will implement activities funded through the Recovery Act through the Office of Workforce Services, Office of Unemployment Compensation, and Office of Early Learning. In addition to the [Florida Office of Economic Recovery website](#), the Agency has developed an [ARRA website](#) to maintain transparency, accountability, and public access to current information.

NOTE: You may need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader 9.1](#) to view or print some of the following:

Read [Explaining the Navigation of our ARRA Website](#) together with a short brief on the [Child Care and Development Fund Allocations](#) overseen by the Office of Early Learning.

Read [Fiscal Resources for ARRA Applications and Questions](#) to learn about how we maintain and expand services to children and families facing difficult economic circumstances, or details of how we stay accountable while using ARRA Funds.

Read [ARRA Funds and Services for Families](#) to learn how coalitions use the stimulus funds to serve families and track ARRA clients in EFS.



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## fiscal resources answer arra questions...

*by Bill Ammons, Contributing Editor, Financial Administration and Budget Services*

On April 17, 2009, Governor Charlie Crist announced that Florida received \$105 million in federal economic stimulus funds to support the early learning system. In response to the Governor's announcement, the Agency distributed revised School Readiness (SR) notices of award to the early learning coalitions and amended the contract with the Redlands Christian Migrant Association, making \$30 million of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funds available to local communities for use in fiscal year (FY) 2008-09.

To assist each coalition in reporting the use of the ARRA dollars, the Agency provided an SR ARRA invoicing workbook for FY 2008-09 for invoice processing. Similar to the regular SR invoicing workbook, the coalition can use this workbook to invoice any SR ARRA expenditures. The workbook also contains a spending plan tool that a coalition can use for tracking their ARRA allocation, budget, associated expenditures, and projections. Each coalition must submit SR ARRA invoices separately from the other SR invoices for reporting purposes. The Office of Early Learning (OEL) financial administration analysts and [Marlin Seay, Financial Administration Supervisor](#), are available to assist with any invoicing questions.

For fiscal year 2009-10 the Agency will allocate an additional \$50 million in ARRA funds to the coalitions and Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA). If you have any questions about the allocation of these funds, please e-mail [Bill Ammons, Financial Administration and Budget Services Manager](#), at the Office of Early Learning, or call 850.921.3131.

As an additional resource, the Agency website has a page that provides up to date information on [the Agency's ARRA implementation](#). The [OEL Questions and Answers](#) page provides helpful information on the distribution and use of these funds. Write to [OEL ARRA Answers](#) to submit questions to OEL about ARRA. Visit the Governor's Press Office link: [Florida's Early Learning Program to Receive \\$105 Million in Stimulus Funds](#) to read the press release from Governor Crist.



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## arra funds and services for families...

by Katherine Dresser, Contributing Editor, Program Data Quality

As part of the federal economic stimulus package, Public Law 111-5, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) appropriates an additional \$2 billion in Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) discretionary funds. The ARRA makes this funding available to state, territory, and tribal lead agencies for fiscal year (FY) 2009.

The ARRA helps the Agency and early learning coalitions by providing funds for maintaining and expanding services to children and families facing difficult economic circumstances. The ARRA requires agencies to use these funds for child care assistance to low-income families. ARRA funds may not replace state spending for child care programs. The ARRA funds serve two major client groups:

- Existing income-eligible (Billing Group 8, or BG8) or newly income-eligible families when 97P00 School Readiness funds are not available
- Unemployment compensation clients

The Agency has released an instruction providing coalition staff the information they need to set up the new billing group in the Enhanced Field System (EFS) and begin processing ARRA-funded clients. You may need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat 9.1 Reader](#) to view and print the [Data Quality Technical Instruction DQ09.02 ARRA](#). For more information or help with the instruction, e-mail [Katherine Dresser, Data Quality Analyst](#) or call 850.921.3429.



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## a brief history of florida's early learning system...

*by Ginger Tate and Lisette Levy, Contributing Editors*

Florida's early learning system is governed by collaborative state and local partnerships. But, how did the system evolve? How did we get to where we are now?

Prior to 1999, the early education and child care system in Florida consisted of multiple programs and agencies that were created at different times for different purposes. Each of these programs was independently designed and established to address the specific needs of families and children. At that time the Department of Education (DOE), Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the federal Head Start program were guiding the path for serving the needs of Florida's families.

In 1999, the Legislature wanted to create a cohesive, efficient, and integrated School Readiness system for increasing children's chances of achieving future educational success. The Legislature created the Partnership for School Readiness and housed the Partnership under the Executive Office of the Governor (EOG). The Partnership for School Readiness, in collaboration with 67 community-based early learning coalitions, focused on providing developmentally appropriate educational services for prekindergarten children at risk of future academic failure.

In 2001, Florida's early education and child care system went through another transformation when Florida's Legislature transferred the Partnership from the EOG to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (the Agency) who assumed direct responsibility for certain administrative aspects, such as budget development and allocation. The next year, Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment creating a Voluntary Prekindergarten program for all 4-year-old children. In 2005, the Partnership and its governing board became the Office of Early Learning and the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC).

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## a brief history of florida's early learning system...

by *Ginger Tate and Lisette Levy, Contributing Editors*

(continued from previous page)

Today, all parts of the early learning system are equally important for the cohesive functioning of Florida's model. The Agency, DCF, and DOE split responsibilities for the early learning system. Alignment of the activities with the mission of each agency creates a stable and logical structure for governing early learning programs. DCF serves as the state's regulatory agency to ensure that child care programs and family child care homes meet health and safety standards. DOE's Office of Early Learning is responsible for the education standards and student outcomes of the VPK-20 system, as well as the instructional standards and accountability of the VPK program. The Agency is responsible for providing support services to children and families to ensure that Florida has a prepared and ready workforce now and in the future. Coalitions represent the unique makeup of their communities and are able to provide quality services that fit the needs of their community.

The early learning system's primary mission ensures children have quality care to promote their development as learners. Success in education supports success in the workforce. The Agency is dedicated to ensuring the accessibility, affordability, and quality of early learning services for Florida's children and families. The Agency works hand-in-hand with the 31 early learning coalitions and partner agencies to administer state and federal early education programs and to comply with high standards for child safety and program content.

Our children are our future workers! As more information on child development and early learning is available, the public has learned how critical it is to nurture and protect our children. Florida's current early education and child care structure has grown through the years to fulfill the needs of Florida's families and to prepare children for success in school and in life.

For more information about this article, please e-mail or call: [Renee Liss](#), 850.921.3448; or [Ginger Tate](#), 850.921.3463.

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## florida's early learning system: coalition success stories...

*submitted by the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County*

We're proud to present a new feature for CONNECTIONS, dedicated to celebrating the positive impact our programs have on the lives of Florida's children and families. Each month, an early learning coalition will share a success story that underscores our mission: *Children ready to learn, Floridians ready to earn.*

Lieu Rhodes, a single parent of four, changed the lives of her family forever by searching for and finding quality education for her children. After completing high school and starting her college courses, Lieu put her education on hold to join the United States Army. As an active duty member of the military, Lieu was accustomed to having her children attend NAEYC accredited child care centers at the military base where she was stationed in Kansas. "Because I had them in quality child care, I didn't have to worry where they were," said Lieu.

When she moved to Florida as an Army Reservist, however, as a non-active duty single parent she wasn't able to send Eryn, her 3-year-old, to a child care center at the military base. In her search for educational child care, she had to enroll Eryn in an unaccredited child care program. This did not provide Lieu the flexibility to finish college, nor provide the education she wanted for her daughter.

After seeing a flyer about child care assistance, Lieu called the CCR&R department of the Early Learning Coalition of Duval. The coalition staff enrolled her daughter in *Success by 6*, a program the coalition operates together with the United Way of Northeast Florida. *Success by 6* allowed Lieu to send her daughter to a quality child care center of her choice until she reached kindergarten. Because the coalition developed a system known as the *Guiding Stars of Duval* to help day care programs transition into early learning child care centers, Lieu had help choosing a center where Eryn would not only be supervised, but also prepared to learn.

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## florida's early learning system: coalition success stories...

*submitted by the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County*

(continued from previous page)

Securing her children's education allowed Lieu to go to school and receive her license as a nail and facial specialist. She looks forward to finishing her college degree and eventually becoming a lawyer and a politician. In March, Lieu was asked by the Florida CCR&R State Network to represent Florida at the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies 2009 National Policy Symposium in Washington, D.C. Lieu was among 44 parents who spoke with members of Congress about their experiences finding quality child care for their children.

"My purpose on this earth is to be an advocate," stated Lieu. "I was excited to share my story with these politicians." It has now been two years since Eryn entered the Success by 6 program. As a result of receiving an early education, Lieu's daughter answered every question correctly on her final prekindergarten assessment and looks forward to starting kindergarten in the fall.

For information about this and other coalition success stories from Duval, e-mail [Chad Burns](mailto:Chad.Burns@CommunityOutreach.org), [Community Outreach](mailto:CommunityOutreach@EarlyLearningCoalition.org), the [Early Learning Coalition of Duval County](http://www.earlylearningcoalition.org), 904.866.2525 or 904.208.2040, X225.

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## connecting services with families...

*by Amanda Moore, Contributing Editor, Program*

Children with disabilities require services from a variety of organizations. Early learning coalitions across the state employ inclusion specialists, who plan collaboratively with the staff of agencies serving children with special needs and their families. Effective service delivery depends on the willingness and ability of all agencies to consistently communicate, develop interagency procedures and agreements, and even travel to various locations to meet families' needs. The stories below illustrate the impact of Florida's inclusion specialists making these connections and improving the delivery of services to children and families.

### Jordan's Story

On the first day of kindergarten at Celebration Elementary School in Osceola County, children greeted their new teacher and classmates as Jordan, a child with cerebral palsy, rolled into the room in his power chair, wearing a big smile. Jordan's peers were initially unsure of him, having many questions: How does he talk? Can he walk? Why does he drive that chair? Through education and peer modeling, the students quickly lost interest in things that Jordan could not do and began focusing on the many things he could do. They are helping friends who now celebrate his achievements.

Before Jordan entered school, United Cerebral Palsy of Central Florida and the public schools, with the help of the inclusion specialist from the Early Learning Coalition of Osceola County, implemented a plan to facilitate a smooth transition from Jordan's previous early learning environment to an inclusive kindergarten, using a team approach to ensure Jordan's success. Inclusion Specialist Danielle Pyke continues working in Jordan's classroom, modeling adaptations when necessary. This success story results from collaboration, teamwork, communication, and shared goals among the School District of Osceola County, the Early Learning Coalition of Osceola County, and United Cerebral Palsy of Central Florida.

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## connecting services with families...

by Amanda Moore, Contributing Editor, Program

(continued from previous page)

### Juan's Story

In Pinellas County, Director of Inclusion Services Bonnie Touchton conducted a community screening at Morton Plant Meese Hospital, where she was approached by a mother whose child had been in a bicycle accident. The family did not take "Juan" to a doctor because of socioeconomic and language barriers. Bonnie spoke to the parent about the pain in Juan's foot and hips, and worked with Child Find, the Head Start Disabilities Coordinator, and Morton Plant Meese Hospital staff to identify funding for three free physical therapy sessions for the child. Early in therapy, Juan displayed evidence of Gower's sign, described as a person using their hands and arms to "walk" up their body to stand from a squatting position. This is caused by poor muscle strength in the hips and thighs. A Morton Plant pediatrician identified the symptoms as consistent with muscular dystrophy.

The therapist contacted Head Start, who referred the family to Shriners Hospital for Children in Tampa. The Shriners neurologist conducted a muscle biopsy to positively diagnose muscular dystrophy and provided the family with a wheelchair. Bonnie contacted the Deputy Director of Head Start to help communicate the seriousness of this disease to the family. Child Find offered home bound services if needed. The connections between the hospital, Head Start, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS), and early learning coalition staff demonstrate the importance of coordinated service delivery and working together to provide assistance to our neediest families.

For more information about the impact of collaborative inclusion services, resources for working with children with disabilities, and the Statewide Inclusion Network, please e-mail [Amanda Moore, Statewide Inclusion Network Coordinator](mailto:Amanda.Moore@StatewideInclusionNetwork.org), or call at 904.733.2376.

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## the other "r" in ccr&r...

*by Audia Bradwell and Gerie Nasche, Contributing Editors, Program*

In the course of one day a CCR&R specialist assists dozens of families with different challenges and needs. Often during a CCR&R interview, a specialist learns that a family's needs go outside the realm of child care, and could be addressed by additional family support or community resources. This is when the specialist provides the other "R" in CCR&R—"Resource."

How does a specialist know if a client needs services in addition to child care assistance? A specialist identifies these needs with good listening skills, empathy for the consumer, and preparedness to share community resources. A specialist must understand that offering community resources also serves as an important adjunct to providing options to families that either do not qualify for School Readiness services, or have to be placed on a waiting list for child care assistance programs. Listed below are some factors for specialists to consider in referring families to the appropriate community resources in their area.

- **Cash assistance/Food related needs**— Department of Children and Family Services is a good resource that provides cash assistance for eligible families, assists families in purchasing food, and administers the Relative Care Giver program.
- **Housing**—Know which local organizations can aid families who express a need for housing assistance.
- **Social Services**—Identify which organizations offer support groups, bereavement services, local charities, and abuse support services to assist individuals going through a crisis.
- **Special Needs Family Resources**—Refer to Florida Central Directory at 1-800-654-4440, for parents of children with disabilities or special health care needs.
- **Employment Resources**—Identify which services will help individuals locate job training and employment opportunities in their community.
- **Natural/Other Disasters**—Know which federal and local resources are available to help families affected by a natural disaster or other crisis.
- **Healthcare**—Refer families who are in need of health insurance for their children to Florida KidCare at 1-888-540-5437.

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## the other "r" in ccr&r...

by Audia Bradwell and Gerie Nasche, Contributing Editors, Program

(continued from the previous page)

- **Florida Abuse Hotline**—Refer individuals who suspect or have witnessed child abuse to the Florida Abuse Hotline 1-800-96-ABUSE (22873).
- **Other Resources**—Offer any other resources specific to a family's needs and refer families to 2-1-1 for additional assistance.

CCR&R specialists receive many types of inquiries. Recently, a CCR&R specialist received a call from a woman trying to find care for her dog. Rather than turn the client away, the specialist graciously shared the name of an animal service that could assist her. This request serves as a humorous reminder that there is without a doubt another "R" in CCR&R. The services we provide are primarily for children, families, and providers, but the sensitive specialist attempts to support any concerned client by providing resources to help the client find the answers to their questions.

For more information on the importance of Child Care Resource and Referral and on the Statewide CCR&R Network, e-mail [Audia Bradwell](#), or call 850.921.3161; or e-mail [Gerie Nasche](#), or call 850.921.3199.

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## connecting with your agency partners...

*by Doreen Moskowitz and Matt Moore, Contributing Editors, Consumer Affairs*

Do you have a question about your work, but don't know who you should ask? In an effort to provide better service to the early learning coalitions, the Agency has developed a contact list of its various business units. This list provides coalition staff with a tool at their fingertips to contact our office with questions or requests for additional information about a particular subject. The contact list has a description of the responsibilities of each of the units, along with a listing of the staff members and their areas of expertise.

The partnership between the coalitions and the Agency is a valuable relationship that helps to make Florida's unique early learning system more effective. The Agency continually responds to requests from coalitions to provide training and technical assistance. The various business units within the Office of Early Learning have a broad array of staff with a wide variety of expertise, all of whom are eager to support our partners. Underscoring our collaborative relationship, this tool will support a more efficient and effective means for coalitions to tap into the Agency's supportive role.

To view or print the [Agency Business Unit Contact](#) list, you may need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat 9.1 Reader](#). For more information e-mail [Jennifer Ohlsen, Technical Assistance Supervisor](#), at 850.921.3469.



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## coordinated monitoring summer '09...

*by Renee Liss and Ginger Tate, Contributing Editors, Accountability*

The Agency is committed to collaborating with partners to identify new and innovative ways of doing business. An opportunity to do this arose when the Accountability Unit began to work with coalitions to streamline the Coalition Performance Review process. In response to feedback from coalitions, each of which undergoes several monitoring visits throughout the year, the Accountability Unit decided to combine review trips by the Coalition Performance Review (CPR) Unit and the Eligibility Support and Fraud Prevention (ESFP) Unit.

To cut back on the number of onsite reviews, the two units coordinated trips so that the review teams arrive at each coalition at the same time and conduct reviews simultaneously. This is not possible to do for every coalition, but the teams make an effort to do so as often as possible. In addition to being less intrusive for the coalitions, this system allows the teams to assist each other where necessary while onsite.

In the coming year, 2009-2010, coalitions that work with contracted service providers to deliver some or all services will use School Readiness and Voluntary PreKindergarten Standard Eligibility Review Programs to monitor contracted service providers. The coalitions will submit the results of this monitoring for review to the Accountability Unit, along with selected documentation supporting the review. Coalitions that retain services in-house will continue to have a full review, with the review team completing most of the work via desk review.

Approval is pending for the Eligibility Review Programs for School Readiness and Voluntary PreKindergarten. During the process of revising these review documents, OEL received input from coalition executive directors and staff, child care providers, and other stakeholders. OEL will release the final documents in July 2009.

For more information about the coalition performance review process e-mail [Renee Liss](#) or call at 850.921.3448; or e-mail [Ginger Tate](#) or call at 850.921.3463.



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## working together to improve services...

*by Renee Liss, Contributing Editor, Accountability*

As the Coalition Performance Review team ends the triennial monitoring cycle, we have compiled the most commonly seen compliance trends across coalitions. Each quarter in CONNECTIONS, the team will highlight two trends to help coalitions avoid similar findings in their review.

One common issue encountered in educational service delivery is difficulty in ensuring child care providers use developmentally appropriate curricula and character development programs. Section 411.01(5)(c)2a and b, F.S., requires early learning coalitions to implement a comprehensive program of School Readiness services that enhance the cognitive, social, and physical development of children. These programs must contain curricula designed to enhance the age-appropriate progress of children in attaining performance standards and a character development program to develop basic skills.

Each coalition identifies in its plan how it will ensure School Readiness child care providers select and use curricula and programs. The most important tool the Agency review teams use to evaluate coalition performance for this standard is the coalition plan. Common findings in this area are:

- Need to create or implement a developmentally appropriate curricula list as stated in the coalition plan.
- Need to enforce the signed provider agreement requiring the implementation of the developmentally appropriate curriculum and character development program.
- Need to monitor child care providers or limit monitoring to just a few, such as those participating in a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) program.

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## working together to improve services...

by Renee Liss, Contributing Editor, Accountability

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In order to avoid findings in this area, coalitions should clearly communicate requirements to providers and monitor a sample of providers quarterly to ensure they are using the curricula stated in their provider agreements. Monitoring applies to all providers, regardless of their participation in the QRIS program or need for technical assistance.

In the area of coalition governance, review analysts often find non-compliance with board membership based on the requirements of section 411.01(5)(a)4-8, F.S. The statute requires boards to be composed of at least 18 members and no more than 35 members, with more than one-third of the members being private sector business members.

- Those boards that have board rosters of only 18 members have problems when members resign or terms end, putting the board below the minimum required by statute.
- When requesting governor appointed positions, coalitions often submit only one application. Without two applications on file, the governor's office will not fill the positions.

In order to ensure compliance, coalition boards should increase recruitment efforts, make certain that private sector board membership is more than 33% of the board, and place two applications on file in the governor's office for each open governor appointee position. Boards that have only the required 18 members might also consider increasing the size of the board to avoid falling below the minimum when a member resigns.

For more information about the coalition performance review process and trends, e-mail or call Renee Liss, Accountability, telephone 850.921.3448.

For more information about the coalition performance review process e-mail [Rene Liss](#) or call at 850.921.3448; or e-mail [Ginger Tate](#) or call at 850.921.3463.

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## coalition plans: living documents...

by Katerina Koikos, Contributing Editor, System Development

Florida's early learning system is administered by the Agency for Workforce Innovation through collaboration with the 31 local early learning coalitions. Due to this unique governance structure, each coalition operates under a plan approved by the Office of Early Learning. Each plan is designed to address the needs of the local community, making the plan a "living document" that grows and changes with the coalition and its community. The plan details how each individual coalition will provide a comprehensive program of School Readiness services to the local community in order to enhance the cognitive, social, and physical development of children, preparing them for success in school and in life.

The Agency and early learning coalitions are responsible for implementing the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education, School Readiness (SR), and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) programs serving families in all 67 counties in Florida. Early learning coalitions are able to assess the needs of their communities and provide training, technical assistance, and resources to support providers and improve the quality of early childhood programs. These activities are detailed in the coalition plan.

The coalition plan is also a very important part of the Agency's process for ensuring the effective use of federal, state, local, and private resources to achieve the highest possible level of school readiness for the state's children. The Agency utilizes coalition plans in many ways, such as assessing policy and process decisions, conducting statewide analysis of trends, and tracking initiatives across the state.

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## coalition plans: living documents...

by *Katerina Koikos, Contributing Editor, System Development*

(continued from the previous page)

To reflect current the needs of the coalition and its providers, plan amendments are submitted to and approved by the Agency. The plan amendment process allows coalitions to update their plan as activities and procedures evolve. These plan amendments keep the Agency up to date with each coalition's current practices and ensures that the coalition remains in compliance with all federal and state laws and rules.

Florida's unique early learning system ensures that children have quality care to promote their development as learners and to ensure that parents are able to work by having quality care for their children. The Agency and all 31 early learning coalitions contribute to the strength and development of our state through the administration of quality early learning programs. The coalition plan is an ongoing process that is integral to the success of the system.

For information about the coalition plan, please e-mail [Katerina Koikos](#) or [Harriet Moore](#) or call 850.921.3213/921.3192.

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## coalition annual reports: all that data and where it goes...

by Katherine Dresser, Contributing Editor, Program

Each year, the 31 early learning coalitions across the state submit an annual report and fiscal statement to the Agency. This report details much of the business and programming activities of the previous year, and is a very detailed history of how each serves its local community. But why does the Agency ask for so much information in the annual report? Below is a brief explanation that may shed some light on why the process exists and why certain elements are required.

Section 411.01, Florida Statutes, requires that each early learning coalition provide the Agency with an annual report and fiscal statement. We synthesize each coalition's report on its effort to meet early learning program goals and include it in the Agency's annual report to the Florida Legislature. Most of the report details program information for the families and children served through early learning programs.

In the past, each coalition reported the information it identified as important. This meant that each coalition could define the data differently. To simplify and standardize this report, we worked with coalition staff to develop an ad hoc report (CC075) that can be run locally in the Enhanced Field System (EFS) to produce the program information required for the annual report.

Benefits of the CC075 report:

- The report facilitates and standardizes program reporting.
- The report decreases staff time dedicated to building the annual report.

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## coalition annual reports: all that data and where it goes...

by Katherine Dresser, Contributing Editor, Program

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- The report uses the same methodology as the Early Learning Fact Book.
- The report's funding categories mirror the Agency's internal reporting for the AWI budget office and external reporting to the legislature.

The CC075 report includes

- The unduplicated number of School Readiness children and families.
- The percent of School Readiness funds spent by care level (child age).
- The percent of School Readiness funds spent by funding category.
- The unduplicated count of VPK children and families.
- The percent of VPK funds spent on school-year VPK and summer VPK.

Staff can download the CC075 report from the SharePoint site [Coalitions Zone>Data Quality>Ad Hoc Report Scripts](#). The Agency has also distributed the report to the members of the weekly OEL IT conference call. To learn how to access the report on SharePoint, or to receive a copy by e-mail, write [Katherine Dresser](#), or call 850.921.3429.

Read [OEL Policy OEL-PI-0032005](#) for guidance on the content and format of the coalition's annual report. You may need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat 9.1 Reader](#) to view and print this document.

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## charting the progress 2009: early learning data online...

by Laura Kate Barrett, Senior Technical Editor, Program

A new web-based resource being developed by the Data Quality team at the Agency's Office of Early Learning places demographic and early learning facts and figures in the hands of early learning professionals. Called Charting the Progress 2009, this presentation of data for both counties and coalition service areas creates a powerful and flexible resource.

The initial web site should be available by early July, with an expanded update in late fall, and a printed resource early in 2010. Data from direct service providers (Enhanced Field System or EFS), the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, and the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates (2005-2007 American Community Surveys) make up easy-to-use tables that can be selected for information by county, coalition, type of population (urban or rural), or aggregated for the entire state.

Demographic information for coalition service areas might reveal the need for new facilities or staff training. Financial and service data could assist in grant writing efforts by demonstrating areas of need and applied resources. Aggregated data at the state level can help identify priorities from a statewide perspective. Exploring neighboring counties and examining their profiles might reveal similarities and unique differences that can help guide decision making and present opportunities for collaboration to maximize limited resources. Both advocates and policy makers can use the information to promote improvements in Florida's system of child care and early education.

We invite you to look at [a list of the data to be presented in the initial Charting the Progress 2009 website](#). You may need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat 9.1 Reader](#) to view and print this document. Contact [Brian Savon](#), by e-mail or at 850-921-3391, or [Laura Kate Barrett](#), by e-mail or at 850-921-3436, with your questions concerning the status of this exciting new resource for early learning professionals.



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## oeI accepts coalition petitions to benefit families...

by David Jacobsen, Contributing Editor, Program

The Agency is working with coalitions who are requesting variances from rules for serving Florida's families in the current economic climate. These rules govern eligibility when a working family has a break in employment or a reduction in working hours. Many coalitions across the state are taking advantage of these special circumstances to tailor their services to meet the needs of the families they serve.

The variance process typically averages 30-60 days for a decision. Coalitions may petition for the following:

- A variance from [Rule 60BB-4.210\(1\), F.A.C.](#), allowing working families who have a break in employment to remain eligible for school readiness services, provided employment is re-established within the period of time requested by the coalition. Coalitions have petitioned for a 60- or 90-day employment break time frame as compared with the rule's 30-day time frame
- A variance from [Rule 60BB-4.100\(22\), F.A.C.](#), allowing a working family, experiencing a reduction in employment hours due to circumstances beyond the family's control, to continue to receive school readiness services as long as the average hours worked per week do not drop below 15.

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## OEL accepts coalition petitions to benefit families...

*by David Jacobsen, Contributing Editor, Program*

(continued from the previous page)

These variances greatly benefit Florida's School Readiness program because they ensure continuity of care for children while families seek re-employment or while experiencing a reduction in their working hours.

Coalitions may also petition for a waiver of [Rule 60BB-8.201\(4\)\(a\), F.A.C.](#), allowing individual VPK providers, instead of a coalition, to conduct a face-to-face parent orientation or exhibit a parent-orientation video for a parent or group of parents registering their children for the VPK program. This waiver benefits families, providers, and coalitions. It enables parents to register their children and attend orientation where their children will attend VPK without having to drive to the coalition's office. It allows providers to continue serving the families with whom they have had contact over the years, and it permits coalitions to offer family-friendly, cost effective services in their communities.

The waiver process also typically averages 30-60 days for a decision. For more information about the variance and waiver processes, including a list of the coalitions seeking a waiver of or a variance from rule, visit the [OEL web site](#) or call OEL Questions at 850-921-3194.

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## 60BB-4.210

### **Maintaining Eligibility for Financial Assistance; Breaks in Employment.**

A family shall maintain eligibility for financially assisted school readiness services:

(1) During a break in employment, provided employment is re-established within thirty (30) calendar days. During this time, school readiness services will be reimbursed.

## 60BB-4.100 Definitions

### **(22) Working family.**

"Working family" means:

(a) A single parent family in which the parent with whom the child resides is employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.

(b) A two parent family in which both parents with whom the child resides are each employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.

(c) A two parent family in which one parent with whom the child resides is employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.

(d) A family in which the parents are exempt from work requirements due to age or disability as determined and documented by a physician licensed under Chapter 458 or 459, F.S.

## 60BB-8.201

### **Child Registration Procedures; Application; Parent-Orientation Session.**

(4) Parent-Orientation Session or Video Exhibition.

(a) A coalition shall conduct a face-to-face parent-orientation session or exhibit a parent-orientation video for a parent or group of parents registering their children for the VPK program. During a parent-orientation session or video exhibition, a coalition shall:

1. Give the parent an overview of the VPK program;
2. Describe the parental rights and responsibilities listed in Form AWI-VPK 06 (Voluntary Prekindergarten Parent Handbook), dated August 15, 2006, which is hereby incorporated by reference and may be obtained as described in Rule 60BB-8.900, F.A.C., and provide the parent with a copy of the handbook;
3. Describe a parent's choice between a school-year program and summer program and the differences between the programs, including the required number of instructional hours, minimum and maximum class sizes, and instructor credentials;
4. Describe a parent's choices among VPK providers;
5. Inform the parent about the coalition's child care resource and referral program, the availability of a customized referral list of VPK providers in the VPK program, and the contact information for the child care resource and referral program;
6. Inform the parent of the uniform resource locator for the coalition's Internet website, if the coalition posts profiles of VPK providers in the VPK program on the website. A coalition shall also inform a parent that the profiles may be obtained at the Internet website: <http://www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider>;
7. Inform the parent about the profiles of VPK providers on the VPK web portal of the Child Care Information System administered by the Department of Children and Family Services at the Internet website: <http://199.250.30.131/childcare/provider/providersearch.aspx>. A coalition shall keep the profiles of VPK providers in the coalition's geographic region current on the system;
8. Provide the parent with Form AWI-RR 63 (A Family Guide for Selecting Quality Early Learning Programs), dated June 30, 2006, which is hereby incorporated by reference and may be obtained as described in Rule 60BB-8.900, F.A.C.; and
9. Provide the parent with Form AWI-RR 64 (A Quality Checklist for Evaluating Early Learning Programs), dated June 30, 2006, which is hereby incorporated by reference and may be obtained as described in Rule 60BB-8.900, F.A.C.