

Mobile Early Head Start: A Community Partnerships Program

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Gulf Regional Child Care Management Agency, Inc. (GRCMA ECD) has been awarded over \$3 million to create the Early Head Start Community Partnerships Program. The grant was made possible through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act Early Head Start Expansion. Local child care centers will provide the educational programs for 104 children in the two year project. The participating centers include three United Way Partner Agencies and two faith based child care centers. Additional local agencies will be collaborating in the project and/or providing support services for the families and children. They include: Mobile County Health Department, Altepoint, Mobile County Public Schools, Franklin Health Care Clinic, the Mosteller Clinic, and Mobile Community Action Head Start.

Child Care Centers to Provide Educational Services

Classrooms in five local child care centers will provide educational programs for the Early Head Start Project. The childcare centers are state licensed and will serve a large geographic area in Mobile County. Roger Williams Day Care Center operated by Child Day Care Association is located just north of downtown Mobile, while the Dearborn Community Center provides services to families in the MLK boulevard communities. Goodwill Easter Seals inclusive child care program is also located centrally for targeted populations. Two additional centers are located in underserved areas in the county. Lighthouse Academy provides child care and other community programs in the Irving / Grand Bay area in south Mobile County. Triumph Ministries Child Development Center is located in Citronelle in north Mobile County. Special groups served include families who are homeless, English Language Learners, foster care children, and children with disabilities.

About GRCMA Early Childhood Directions

GRCMA Early Childhood Directions is a United Way of Southwest Alabama Partner Agency. The agency provides child care resource and referral services for families and professional development programs for early childhood teachers. GRCMA ECD operates The Resource Place, a lending library and early childhood classroom resource center located on I-65 Service Road North. Current funders include the Alabama Department of Human Resources, the Mobile County Public School System (early Intervention Services and HIPPI), private foundations, local government, Children's Trust, and United Way of Southwest Alabama. Other initiatives developed and implemented by GRCMA Early Childhood Directions have included Early Reading First (\$2.9 million federal grant to enhance early literacy in five pre-k classrooms in Mobile County, 2004-2008); the Mobile County Pre-K Initiative (\$1.8 million contract(s) with Mobile County Public Schools to provide satellite pre-k classrooms in 10 child care centers (1998-2001); child care subsidy program administration in seven counties in south Alabama (funds totally over \$32 million (1992-2004). Additional funds are raised locally for two

purposes: 1) to implement Reading Is Fundamental, distributing books three times each year to 4000 children in the GRCMA ECD service area; and 2) to assist families experiencing severe crisis with temporary scholarships for their preschool children to attend child care programs. GRCMA ECD has a flawless record of sound fiscal management and grant administration. All project support the agency mission to support high quality early childhood programs that enrich the life of the children.

About Early Head Start

Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally funded community-based program for low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women. Its mission is simple:

- to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women,
- to enhance the development of very young children, and
- to promote healthy family functioning.

EHS evolved out of Head Start's long history of providing services to infants and toddlers through Parent Child Centers, Comprehensive Child Development Centers (CCDPs) and Migrant Head Start programs. Recent advances in the field of infant development make this an especially exciting time to have Head Start formally expand its family to include the provision of Early Head Start services.

The community-based Early Head Start programs are based on a foundation of nine principles:

1. **High Quality:** A commitment to high quality means that programs will develop policies and practices that are founded in the knowledge, skills, and professional ethics embraced by the fields of child development, family development, and community building. Of particular importance is an understanding of the unique nature of infant and toddler development. Program practices must spring from an awareness of both the opportunities for intervention and the fact that young children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of a negative caregiving environment. The commitment on the part of the Federal government to ensure program quality includes the training and technical assistance network, the program performance standards, and research and evaluation activities.
2. **Prevention and Promotion:** The proactive promotion of healthy child development and family functioning begins before conception, and continues prenatally, upon birth, and through the early years. With an emphasis on promoting healthy development, the prevention and detection of developmental concerns should occur at the earliest possible time. **Positive Relationships and Continuity:** Strong positive relationships that continue over time are key elements in a high quality program. These relationships include the child, family, and staff, and recognize the parent-child bond as the child's most significant relationship. Infant and toddler caregiving practices must support child attachment by minimizing the number of different caregivers and supporting long-term caregiving relationships. The relationship between staff and family is based on respect for the child and family's home culture.
3. **Parent Involvement:** The Early Head Start initiative supports the highest level of parent involvement and partnership. Programs will make a special effort to support the role of fathers in parenting activities. Programs will recognize the parents as the child's primary nurturers and advocates. Parents will also be active participants in policy and decision-making roles.

4. Inclusion: Programs will welcome and fully include children with disabilities. The individual needs of each child will be evaluated and responded to in a way that builds upon individual strengths. Programs will also support the child and family's full participation in community activities.
5. Culture: The home culture and language of each family will be supported as an important aspect of early identity formation. Programs will also explore the role of culture and language in child and family development, and community values and attitudes.
6. Comprehensiveness, Flexibility, Responsiveness, and Intensity: Program services are grounded in the belief that all families can identify their own needs and strengths, set their own goals, and are capable of growth. Thus, programs must maintain the flexibility to respond with varying levels of intensity based on families' needs and resources.
7. Transitions: Programs are responsible for facilitating a smooth transition from Early Head Start into Head Start or other high quality programs and support services. A smooth transition is important to ensure each child continues to receive enriching early child development services and each family continues to receive the support services necessary to healthy family development.
8. Collaboration: Collaboration with local community agencies and service providers will maximize the resources available to families with young children in a cost-efficient and comprehensive manner. Early Head Start programs, with the recognition that no one program can meet all of a child and family's needs, will seek to build strong alliances within the communities in which they operate.

In 1992, GRCMA Early Childhood Directions began an initiative to extend child care services to children whose families were working or who are in education or job training. Services were made available through contract with the state Department of Human Resources utilizing Child Development Block Grant funding and welfare reform program funds. GRCMA ECD initiated partnerships with existing childcare centers to provide comprehensive, quality services to children. At its peak in 2004, more than 9300 children were enrolled in child care centers, family child care homes, or provided care by relatives while the parents were working or attending school.

In the ensuing years GRC MA early childhood directions has continued to work with the child care community, providing training and technical assistance to help childcare staff grow professionally and to assist programs as they seek to improve the quality of the care and education provided to the children and access public programs to support those efforts. The strength of our relationships with the childcare community is foundational to this proposal to create an early head start program to serve 200 children and pregnant mothers in Mobile County.