

INSIDE:

R2LP teams up with Hasbro Children's Hospital, p.3

Pilot program tightens home-school connection, p.4

New AmeriCorps team gets down to work, p.5

Meet an R2LP hero, p.6

R2LP's professional development initiative is off and running

This fall Ready to Learn Providence fully launched a professional development program that will ultimately train nearly 300 center-based and family-care educators in early literacy instruction. The program is funded with a three-year Early Childhood Educator Professional Development (ECEPD) grant that R2LP received from the U.S. Department of Education a year ago.

Ten sessions of *HeadsUp! Reading* got under way in September, four of them in Spanish. These sessions, offered at R2LP both day and night to accommodate different schedules, are filled to capacity with some 150 early-care providers and educators enrolled in the ECEPD program. It is the first of two college-level courses they will receive this year. The remaining participants will take the two courses in 2008-2009.

The second course, which focuses on curriculum and was developed by R2LP, will be offered in January. *Early Literacy Curriculum* provides hands-on experience for early childhood educators in implementing a structured early literacy curriculum.

Participants in the ECEPD program include Head Start teachers and teaching assistants, center-based educators, and family-care providers. While participants will receive the primary components of the program – the two courses – over a period of



Ten sessions of *HeadsUp! Reading* – six in English and four in Spanish – are being held this fall at R2LP.

one year, R2LP is offering many other professional development opportunities to cultivate meaningful professional associations over the long term.

Mentors, who meet with individual participants at their sites six or more times, play a central role in the program. Nineteen seasoned professionals are serving in this capacity on a part-time basis.

Fifteen Head Start educators participated in a pilot program of this professional development initiative last spring. Those participants say they are now incorporating much of what they learned into their settings.

"We are only five days [into the school year] and I actually have all 20 children asking for a second or third story at group time," wrote Judith Raponi of Cianci Head Start to Tania Quezada, who served as her mentor. "What an inspiration!!!"

A fellow Cianci teacher and pilot participant, Joyce Nelson, also gives the initiative high grades. "I thought it was very exciting and I totally enjoyed it," she says. "It was all very professional. The things we learned in the courses we could use immediately in our classrooms. The mentoring is important because it gives you a chance to work one-on-one with someone. I got a lot of support."

A rigorous external evaluation of some 1,000 children at participant sites will measure the effects of the intervention over time.

READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE

READY TO

LEARN

PROVIDENCE

Ready to Learn Providence
945 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
Tel: 401.490.9960
Fax: 401.490.9959
www.r2lp.org

R2LP is a program of
The Providence Plan



HeadsUp! Reading is the first of two college-level courses that ECEPD participants will take at R2LP.

From the Director

R2LP Strategic Advisory Team

John Farley
Chair

R2LP Staff

Denise Beltre
Administrative Assistant

Joyce Butler
Director

Bethany Carpenter
Early Literacy Coach

Christine Chiacu-Forsythe
Director of Early Reading First 2

Cynthia Ferguson
Coordinator of Communications

Leslie Gell
Director of Professional Development

Nazly Guzman-Singletary
Co-director of AmeriCorps

Rebecca Hurwitz
English Language Development Liaison

Jessica Johns
Assistant Coordinator of Data and Evaluation

Stan Kuziel
Director of Program Operations

Samantha McCormack
ERF Program Assistant

Jose Means
AmeriCorps Administrative Assistant

Desiree Manley
Early Literacy Coach

Katie Murray
Director of Data & Evaluation

Jane Myers
Early Literacy Coach

Magda Ortiz
Professional Development Assistant

Ellen Piangerelli
Data and Evaluation Specialist

Jeffrey Priest
Research and Development Specialist

Tania Quezada
Director of Community Learning

Gail Wing
Executive Assistant

Nancy Worthen
Co-director of AmeriCorps

Susan Zoll
Director of Early Reading First 1/ Early Literacy Coach

As you'll see in the story on Page 1, our professional development initiative is now in full swing. Seeing the enthusiasm of the early-care educators who fill our training rooms – day and night – has been both exciting and inspiring. Their devotion to the children they serve, coupled with their desire to provide them with the best possible education, is extraordinary. Sadly, we are also seeing the impact of the child-care subsidy cuts that were implemented this fall.

While staffing at centers is becoming unstable due to drops in enrollment, some family child-care providers are closing their businesses and, as a result, will no longer participate in our professional development programs. Others say they are holding on by a shoestring, hoping to rebuild businesses imperiled by the cuts.

The subsidy cuts are clearly affecting the health of our programs and the ultimate impact of what we're doing. The number of children able to benefit from our professional development work is shrinking daily. How unfortunate that the state has compromised this tremendous opportunity to help so many young children.

Despite numerous studies showing that investment in early care and education has the greatest potential to make

a significant difference in a child's life, this country spends far less on young children than on older children. In fact, the gap in this expenditure has never been wider.

The benefits of *high-quality* early childhood education persist well after kindergarten. Long-term studies show that these children are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to participate in criminal activity, less likely to be unemployed as adults, and less likely to become teenage parents. At R2LP we have made considerable investments in high-quality early-care education, but our work simply isn't as meaningful if fewer and fewer children have access to regulated child care.

Pediatricians in our target neighborhoods are equally concerned. Increasingly, they tell us, they are seeing young

children who spend their days doing little more than watching television while their parents work long hours and share care-giving responsibilities. We are now exploring ways to team up with these pediatricians in programs that will reach these families directly and help them prepare their youngsters for school.

These are indeed difficult times for us in early care and education, but all of us at R2LP continue to take strength from the remarkable participants in our professional development programs. We see firsthand how much they care for the children, and it's clear that they are willing to do whatever it takes to make a difference.

Joyce Butler, Director



John Farley, chair of R2LP's Strategic Advisory Team, makes a point at a meeting with the Boston task force.

Mayor Menino's task force visits R2LP

Members of Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino's School Readiness Action Planning Team (APT) visited Ready to Learn Providence in August to gather information on the development and implementation of successful school readiness initiatives. The APT, formed last spring, has been charged with developing specific strategies to prevent the achievement gap among the next generation of Boston students by promoting school readiness and ensuring the healthy development of the city's youngest residents.

Continued on Page 6

Pediatric residents get a fuller look at the community through the eyes of R2LP

A partnership between Ready to Learn Providence and Hasbro Children’s Hospital is giving pediatric residents a broader understanding of the community they serve. Residents also are learning how to work with the community to advocate for children’s health.

A new and required rotation in Hasbro’s pediatric residency program, called “Advocating for Child Health in the Community,” pairs residents with members of R2LP’s AmeriCorps program in libraries and child-care centers for a total of three to six days. Seeing children and families in the context of these settings – with trained AmeriCorps members as guides – gives residents a clearer sense of the community in which their patients live and some of the challenges these children face.

As part of the rotation, residents also attend training workshops and field trips aimed at further broadening their



Pediatric resident Juan Piantino and AmeriCorps member Alice Kellogg participate in a training session at R2LP.



Four pediatric residents who completed their rotation in August pose outside R2LP. L-r: Frances Orlando, Jessica Lanning, Juan Piantino and Nousheen Humayun.

perspective. For example, Amy Pettine of The Providence Plan (R2LP’s parent agency) and Kat Keenan of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provide a session in data and mapping, illustrating issues such as poverty, linguistic isolation and education levels in the different neighborhoods. Dr. Peter Simon, assistant medical director of RIDOH’s Department of Family Health, leads a bus tour in which he points out neighborhood resources and challenges.

“This rotation really gives you an idea of what the community is like,” notes Dr. Stewart Mackie, a resident who participated in the program in September. “In the hospital, it’s difficult to find time to talk about social issues, but they are often medically relevant.”

Dr. Patricia Flanagan, director of outpatient services at Hasbro, developed the program with staff from R2LP, ProvPlan and Hasbro. “I’m so grateful to R2LP for coming forward,” she notes. “They were the logical partner for this project.”

In terms of advocacy, Dr. Flanagan hopes residents discover how important it is to let the community determine and define its needs. “We as doctors need to hear their agenda rather than impose ours. We have to be in the community, and we need to listen and ask questions.”

As part of the rotation, residents are required to plan an advocacy project and draft a proposal. Although not required to submit the proposal, residents will learn

“In the hospital, it’s difficult to find time to talk about social issues, but they are often medically relevant.”

from this exercise how to work with community leaders and existing agencies to identify and address unmet needs.

The program got under way in August, a month in which new AmeriCorps members receive extensive training at R2LP before going out into the field. For that month, pediatric residents also participated in the training, which includes a data-driven analysis of early childhood well-being in the city’s neighborhoods.

R2LP pilot program tightens the home-school connection

In June, R2LP launched a pilot program at the eight Early Reading First (ERF) child-care centers to strengthen the connection between home and school. With some modifications, this nine-week summer program will serve as a model for a year-round initiative.

Nine AmeriCorps graduates – all of whom spent two years in the R2LP program – served as home-school liaisons in the program. To encourage family involvement and to reinforce literacy skills, the liaisons put together kits filled with games, books and activities that children could borrow and use at home. Prior to sending the kits home each week, liaisons met with the children and their parents to discuss the activity and the objective.

The 164 kits created over the course of the summer were based on each child's Personal Literacy Plan, the Building Language for Literacy curriculum, and the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards (RIELS). At the end of the program, each child received a kit to keep at home, which included books and the RIELS *Fun Family Activities*.

Through "Meet and Greets," home visits, phone calls and informal conversations, the liaisons had contact with parents 675 times over the course of the summer. Child contacts and observations totaled well over 5,000.

Parents expressed much appreciation for the kits and the direction they received, according to the liaisons. "This really worked," many would say when returning the materials. Parents also said they'd like to see the program extended year-round.

The pilot program was coordinated by Julie Le Pain, an ERF mentor, and Celia Megan, a graduate of R2LP's 2004-2005 AmeriCorps program. The home-school liaisons were: Julissa Garo, Yuberka Jimenez, Cheryl Johnson, Nina Neurell, Jessica O'Conner, Yinka Odunlami, Janette Perez, Alex Stewart and Chontell Washington.

"Working one-on-one with the children, and helping their parents reinforce



Top: Chontell Washington shows a child how to do an activity that is part of a kit he will take home to use. Above: Yuberka Jimenez meets with a parent to explain an activity she can do with her child to reinforce a literacy skill. At right: Cheryl Johnson prepares one of the 164 kits the liaisons created over the course of the summer.

those skills at home, we could see some real progress over the summer," says Nina. "Parents are busy people, so we tried to show them how to incorporate literacy activities in their daily routines."

On the road to literacy

Understanding that parents are often busy, liaisons in the home-school connection pilot program developed literacy activities that fit into a family's daily routine. Here's an activity they suggested for building a child's sight vocabulary – words he or she can recognize without sounding them out – while riding in the car.

Go through magazines and cut out pictures containing words you're likely to see along the road – a stop sign, for example, or the name of a restaurant or store. Paste them on individual index cards. When you're driving around doing errands, have your child see how many "matches" he can make. For younger children, matching logos is also a good skill.





R2LP's newest AmeriCorps team gets down to work

After a month of training, the 18 new AmeriCorps members and 11 second-year members are now hard at work at child-care centers, libraries and Ready to Learn Providence. With R2LP's Early Childhood Educator Professional Development (ECEPD) program now fully under way, many AmeriCorps members are playing a role in its implementation. Members placed in Head Start, libraries and child-care sites will visit every classroom and family child-care home participating in the ECEPD program. Four members are placed at Early Reading First sites, working directly with mentors and teachers to promote the early-literacy work of R2LP's ERF program.

This year's team

Arelis Almonte
 Jose Luis Benitez
 Kevonna Benton
 Ana Benzant
 Jessica Brotka
 Fresa Burgos
 Raisa Burgos
 Veronica Castañeda
 Jonathan Castillo
 Maira Cespedes
 Kristy Emmons
 Maria Fajardo
 Janelyn Florian
 Janice Jones
 Alice Kellogg
 Maria Lahoz
 Edita Mena
 Aura Nunez
 Dianiri Paulino
 Ana Pimentel
 Jarrod Pimentel
 Xiomarra Rodriguez
 Estela Santos
 Rose Spearman
 Vanessa Tordoya
 Ana Vargas
 Esther Vasquez
 Evelin Vasquez
 Carlos Weber

This year's AmeriCorps partners

Beautiful Beginnings
 Blackstone Valley Head Start
 Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center
 Bundles of Joy Family Resource Center/Federal Hill House
 Cianci Head Start
 Early Child Learning Center Federal Hill House
 Friendship Head Start
 Genesis Center
 InTown YMCA Kid's World
 John Hope Child Care Center
 McMichael Head Start
 Providence Public Library
 West End Child Care Center

(Above) Current AmeriCorps members pose for a group picture on the steps of City Hall. With them are several pediatric residents who participated in their training. (See story Page 3.)

**READY
TO
LEARN
PROVIDENCE**

READY TO
LEARN
PROVIDENCE

*The Providence Plan /
Ready to Learn Providence
945 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
Tel: 401.490.9960
Fax: 401.490.9959
www.r2lp.org*

*R2LP is a program of
The Providence Plan*

Funding for R2LP has been provided by:

- US Department of Education
- US Department of Health & Human Services, Child Care Bureau
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Corporation for National & Community Service/ Rhode Island Service Alliance
- Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation
- The Ocean State Job Lot Charitable Foundation
- United Way of RI
- Dexter Donation Fund
- IBM Corporation
- R.I. General Assembly

The contents of this newsletter are solely the responsibility of R2LP and do not represent the official views of our funders, nor does this publication in any way constitute an endorsement by the funding agencies.

A true hero

In August, Nazly Guzman-Singletary, co-director of Ready to Learn Providence's AmeriCorps program, became a "Community Hero," an honor bestowed by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and the American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter. Members of last year's AmeriCorps program nominated Nazly for the award, which recognizes everyday people whose service and selflessness make them truly heroic.

Nazly and this year's seven other "Heroes" were featured in a videotape that was the focal point of an October 18th breakfast in their honor. Nazly also appeared on WHJJ's Helen Glover Show to explain the work of R2LP and the role she plays there.



Boston task force *Continued from Page 2*

"We left feeling really inspired," said Katie Britton, Mayor Menino's senior assistant for 0-5 strategic planning.

During the meeting, R2LP Director Joyce Butler stressed the importance R2LP has always placed on working with partners and building a strong community committed to school readiness. "Doing this ensures that our work is sustainable," she noted.