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*AmeriCorps members (and one member's son and daughter) gather with staff for a group photo at Ready to Learn Providence. For a full listing of the AmeriCorps members and the sites where they are working, see page 5.*

## AmeriCorps members help spread the (printed) word in R2LP neighborhoods

They can be found in the city's libraries, hospital waiting rooms, various child-care settings or the living room of a triple-decker. They might be reading to children, talking with parents about school and library programs, setting up book displays or demonstrating an art project related to a story. But as varied as their days may be, their purpose – helping to prepare Providence's youngest children for school – is at the heart of everything they do.

They are Ready to Learn Providence's AmeriCorps team, the 29 men and women who were hired this summer to serve as R2LP's arms and legs in the community. The AmeriCorps members began their year of service August 1<sup>st</sup> and will work through June.

For the month of August the AmeriCorps

members, whose ages range from 19 to 63, participated in an intensive training program at R2LP. In those four and a half weeks, members learned about R2LP and its partners, the neighborhoods they'd be serving, and early literacy skills. They hiked through neighborhoods to familiarize themselves with libraries, community centers and other institutions. They talked with the mayor in City Hall. They learned how to read to children and generate enthusiasm for the printed word.

In the course of all this training, members also learned a great deal about one another, and about the wide range of talents within the group. The 22 women and seven men come from seven different countries. Twelve speak Spanish and others speak Chinese, Hindi, Tagalog, American Sign Lan-

*Continued on page 5*

**READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE**

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**PROVIDENCE**

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[www.r2lp.org](http://www.r2lp.org)

R2LP is a program of  
The Providence Plan

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## From the Director

### R2LP Governing Board

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### R2LP Staff

Joyce Butler  
*Director*  
Stephanie Enos  
*Coordinator of Professional Development*  
Cynthia Ferguson  
*Coordinator of Communications*  
Nazly Guzman-Singletary  
*Assistant Director of AmeriCorps*  
Carnell "Jackie" Jackson  
*Coordinator of Family Engagement*  
Stan Kuziel  
*Director of Program Operations*  
Desiree Manley  
*Early Literacy Coach*  
Margarita Martinez  
*Administrative Assistant*  
Christine Chiacu-Forsythe  
*Director of Early Reading First*  
Katie Murray  
*Coordinator of Data & Evaluation*  
Tania Quezada  
*Coordinator of Community Learning*  
Gail Wing  
*Executive Assistant*  
Nancy Worthen  
*Director of AmeriCorps*  
Susan Zoll  
*Early Literacy Coach*

*Years ago when I was the director of an early-care center in Providence, a young boy looked out the window and saw a police officer walk up to the school. Within seconds of seeing that uniform, the boy fainted and collapsed on the floor. We later learned that the previous evening a police officer had come to this boy's house in the middle of the night to arrest his father for domestic violence. This child was clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress.*

A decade later I ran into this boy and his mother. "You know what I remember most about that school?," the boy asked. I, of course, feared that his most vivid memory would be the time he fainted. Instead, he said it was the hut we had built, a two-month project directed by a student intern who had been raised in a small African village.

I came away from that conversation with a new appreciation of the very positive role that good early-care settings can play in the life of a child suffering from stress. Coupled with some therapy that this boy's mother had arranged for him, our center, with its safe, supportive environment, had given this child the tools he needed to cope with the stress in his life. His memories of those early years were now largely positive.

I tell this story because it is becoming increasingly clear to scientists and educators that the emotional and social development of a child is inextricably linked to his or her ability to learn. A child who has checked out emotionally typically checks out cognitively as well. Many of our programs at Ready to Learn Providence focus on literacy skills, certainly a critical need, but children suffering from severe stress almost always have

trouble attending to academic work, no matter how well it is presented.

I recently heard Jack Shonkoff, co-author of the book *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, speak at Brown University. In his lecture, Shonkoff described various levels of stress experienced by children. Some level of stress, he noted, is inevitable in any life and, if it's short in duration, it teaches us how to cope. The next level of stress, Shonkoff said, was what he called "tolerable" stress. This is the stress children experience with the loss of a parent or a natural disaster, for example. Its duration can be long, but at some point, especially with good support systems, people generally recover.

The third level is what Shonkoff calls "toxic" stress. This is a strong and prolonged exposure to stress – from extreme poverty, parental neglect or domestic violence, for example – in the absence of any support system. Children suffering stress at this level are usually in no state of mind to attend to academic work.

I was interested to see in a recent survey administered by R2LP that center-based providers in Providence listed "emotional and social development" as a top priority for training. We recently learned

that we have secured funding through the United Way to provide a training program titled *Mind in the Making*, which has been developed by the Families and Work Institute. This program brings together the best and most current science available to explain the emotional and social development of young children and the role that development plays in their learning. It gives parents and providers some of the tools they need to nurture a child's emotional and social development and to provide the support a young child, especially one under stress, is seeking.

We plan to begin offering this exciting program, which we will explain in far more depth in the next issue of this newsletter, this spring.

In many ways, kids are not so different from adults. Like us, they are driven by their social and emotional development to reach their goals. They need to be passionate about something to lead successful, rewarding lives. As educators and parents, we have to touch their heads, but we also have to touch their hearts.

–Joyce Butler, Director

# Calling all families

## Your voice is needed on R2LP committees

If you're a Providence parent or other family member, and you want to take a more active role in your child's readiness for school, consider joining one of Ready to Learn Providence's boards or committees.

Family support and involvement are central to achieving the R2LP vision – that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. The voices of family members are seen as critical on all R2LP boards and committees.

“Only with the input of families can we know that what we are doing is meeting the real needs of the community,” explains Jackie Jackson, coordinator of family engagement at R2LP.

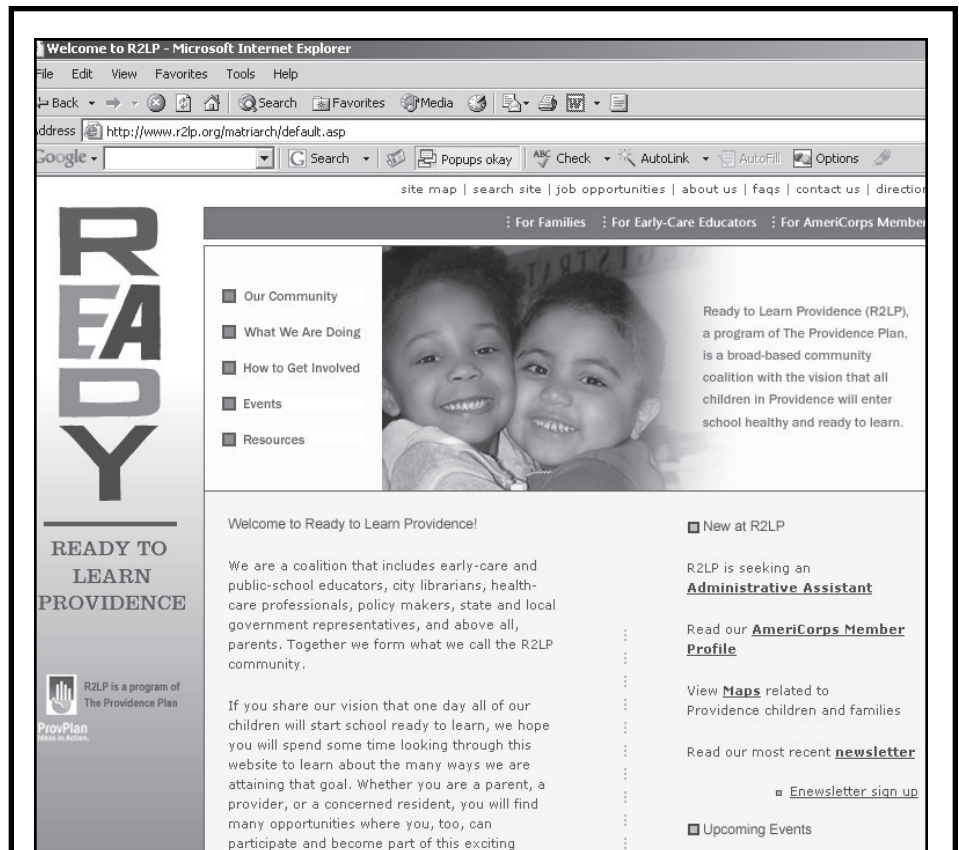
This fall the Family Engagement Committee has been holding events and distributing flyers in the community to recruit volunteers for these committees. On Dec. 5, the committee is sponsoring an orientation program for potential volunteers so that the R2LP committees and their work can be fully explained – in English and Spanish. The program will be held at R2LP and will get under way at 5 p.m.

Among the committees looking for greater parental representation is the Transition to Kindergarten Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from the Providence School Department, the early-care community, child-care agencies, advocacy groups, state agencies and the Providence Public Library.

The T2K Advisory Committee regularly assesses the challenges facing Providence youngsters as they enter kindergarten. Each year it sponsors or participates in events designed to make the transition easier for both parents and children.

Other R2LP boards and committees include:

- The Governing Board, which functions as R2LP's leadership body.
- The Evaluation Committee, which works with R2LP staff to reflect on the



## R2LP launches its website

Be sure to check out R2LP's new website at [www.r2lp.org](http://www.r2lp.org). Launched in September, the site is chock-full of information for parents, providers, educators, funders and everyone else in the community who shares R2LP's vision.

Links for parents, caregivers and educators will take them to activities and programs designed to enhance childhood literacy and other preschool skills. Descriptions of R2LP committees and boards give potential volunteers a chance to learn about some of the many ways members of the R2LP community are making a difference in the lives of the city's children.

The events section will keep you posted on upcoming classes and programs. Research conducted by R2LP, such as the extensive report titled *How Ready Is Providence?*, can be downloaded from the site.

Unique to the R2LP site are maps illustrating the location of providers, child-care centers, libraries and other services available in Providence neighborhoods. Other maps are based on indicators of early childhood well-being.

If you have any difficulty navigating the site, or if you believe some valuable information has been omitted, contact Katie Murray at (401) 490-9960 or by e-mail at [kmurray@provplan.org](mailto:kmurray@provplan.org).

approach that R2LP is taking toward evaluation and feedback from The Education Alliance at Brown University, R2LP's evaluator.

- The Family Engagement Committee, which seeks to increase family involvement in R2LP's objectives, programs and events.

*Continued on page 4*

## R2LP to offer training programs in assessment of social, academic skills

*Courses will fill needs identified in survey*

Nearly 60 percent of the respondents of an R2LP survey mailed to local child-care centers last spring indicated a strong desire for training in the assessment of social and emotional development. The assessment of literacy skills and the refinement of teacher observation techniques were two other areas that early-care educators cited as high priorities.

With these findings in hand, the R2LP Professional Development Committee, which administered the assessment survey, has developed a five-session course titled *411 on Assessment*. Scheduled to start in January, the 15-hour course will be led by Stephanie Enos, R2LP's coordinator of professional development, and Chris Amiraut, the executive director of the Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center and a Brown University faculty member.

*411 on Assessment* will be held at R2LP and is open to the city's center-based providers. R2LP, which is covering the cost of the program, is encouraging teams of providers from individual centers to participate so that staff members can support one another in the actual application

of their assessment skills.

Participants who complete the course will be awarded one college credit from the University of Rhode Island. Class size is limited so early registration is encouraged. For more information, check the R2LP web site ([www.r2lp.org](http://www.r2lp.org)) or call Stephanie at (401) 490-9960.

Meanwhile, R2LP recently secured funding to offer – in partnership with the Families and Work Institute – a program titled *Mind in the Making*. The 15-week training program for parents and early-care providers focuses on social and emotional development. R2LP will be the first in the state to offer this national program.

“It's good to see that our own strategic plan is in line with the needs of the community,” says Stephanie. “The assessment survey clearly showed us that social and emotional development is a high concern among educators and providers.”

*For more on R2LP's interest in social and emotional development, please see From the Director on page 2.*

## Still time to sign up for HeadsUp! Reading

R2LP still has spaces available for an English-speaking *HeadsUp! Reading* training program that gets under way January 11.

*HeadsUp! Reading* is a free 15-week course for family-care providers. With a focus on early-literacy skills, the weekly classes combine national experts – via satellite – with locally trained facilitators to make the information both useful and relevant.

Classes meet from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Ready to Learn Providence. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a \$100 stipend and \$50 in materials. Graduates who complete a report are awarded three college credits from the University of Rhode Island.

Find out for yourself why this has become such a popular program with child-care providers in Providence. Call Tania Quezada at (401) 490-9960 or e-mail her at [tquezada@provplan.org](mailto:tquezada@provplan.org).

## R2LP Clubs to start this winter

Graduates of R2LP's *HeadsUp! Reading* program often say they miss the camaraderie and exchange of ideas once the course is over. To sustain that professional support, R2LP is organizing R2LP Clubs, which will get under way this winter.

The clubs will feature informal workshops on social and emotional development, early-literacy skills, science, math and other preschool issues and activities. Workshops will be held in Spanish and English.

In January, R2LP will begin calling *HeadsUp! Reading* graduates to explain these clubs in further detail. Can't wait? Call Tania Quezada at (401) 490-9960 and join the Club!

## Volunteer opportunities for families

*Continued from page 3*

- The Policy Committee, which examines public policies affecting the care and education of young children in Providence.
- The Professional Development Committee, which works to strengthen the school readiness of Providence children by creating professional development opportunities for early-care and education providers.

*To learn more about these programs, join your neighbors and others in the R2LP community at the December 5<sup>th</sup> orientation program. For more information about this event or volunteer opportunities, call Jackie Jackson at (401) 490-9960.*

# AmeriCorps

*Continued from page 1*

guage and Nigerian. Two have worked in health care and some have a background in early-care education. They have studied everything from computer science to interior design and carpentry. Several have musical skills, including one member who teaches children the guitar.

For the remainder of the school year, they are literacy specialists in R2LP's target neighborhoods. Twelve work directly with young children, parents and teachers at center-based facilities and other early childhood programs. Several of the Spanish-speaking members at these centers focus on parent engagement, often serving as interpreters for parents and teachers, and encouraging parent involvement in the schools.

Ten members are at the city's library branches, assisting librarians with their early-literacy programs, such as Cradle to Crayons, and encouraging greater library use among families and providers in the neighborhoods. In the late afternoon, many of them help out with the library's after-school programs.

Two members, one who plans to



*AmeriCorps member Melissa Walsh, who is based at the Fox Point Library, stops by Federal Hill House to help out with a story hour activity.*

pursue a degree in nursing and the other a degree in elementary education, work in the pediatric clinics at Hasbro Children's Hospital. As youngsters and their parents wait for appointments, these members read to children, demonstrate related

art projects, and talk with parents about library programs.

Five members are based at R2LP serving various functions. One member works as a coach in R2LP's *HeadsUp! Reading* program, helping family-care providers enhance literacy instruction in their home settings. Another spends his days recruiting volunteers for R2LP's community partners. Two are involved with R2LP's family engagement initiatives, and one handles professional development and administrative tasks.

Fridays are reserved for meetings and continued training at R2LP, some of which is peer-led. Nancy Smith Worthen, director of AmeriCorps at R2LP, and Nazly Guzman-Singletary, assistant director, are thrilled to see the enthusiasm members exhibit for both the training and their work.

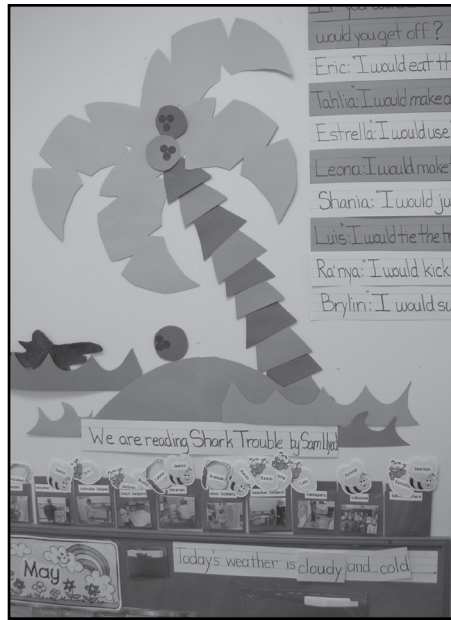
"I have found that there is no greater motivator than meeting and working with the children and families in Providence," says AmeriCorps member Melissa Walsh, who is based at the Fox Point Library. "They inspire me to put every fiber of my energy and being into the work I'm doing. I could not be happier."

## R2LP AmeriCorps Members and Placements

Verity Ament	Wanskuck Library Branch
Juan Arias	Laurel Hill Avenue School
Rosa Benzant	Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center
Douglas Brush	Ready to Learn Providence
Marisol Cabrera	Ocean State HIPPIY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)
Rosa Cabrera	Ready to Learn Providence
Theresa Christy	Washington Park Library Branch
Julissa Garo	Ocean State HIPPIY
Julissa Lugo	Knight Memorial Library Branch
Sarah Henry	Mt. Pleasant Library Branch
Yuberka Jimenez	Laurel Hill Avenue School
Jessica Johns	Early Child Learning Center-Federal Hill House
Cheryl Johnson	YMCA Childcare Center at DHS
Marcy King	Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center
Hoy Loper	Smith Hill Library Branch
Carmen Lopez	Hasbro Children's Hospital
Jose Means	Olneyville Library Branch
Alba Medina	Ready to Learn Providence
Celia Meegan	Genesis Center
Chontell Nelson	Washington Central Library Branch
Nina Neurell	Ready to Learn Providence
Kevin Novell	Ready to Learn Providence
Jessica O'Connor	Bundles of Joy Family Resource Center-Federal Hill House
Yinka Odunlami	Early Years Learning Center-Wanskuck Boys & Girls Club
Blossom Opadiran	InTown YMCA Kid's World
Janette Perez	Hasbro Children's Hospital
Alexander Stewart	Rochambeau Library Branch
James Taylor	South Providence Library Branch
Frances Valeika	YMCA Childcare Center at DHS (part-time volunteer)
Melissa Walsh	Fox Point Library Branch

## Classrooms explode with words, stories and books

As Early Reading First moves into its first full academic year, words, books and hand-written stories surround children in the classrooms of the four Centers of Educational Excellence. Working with ERF coaches and mentors, classroom teachers are setting up inviting reading corners, placing additional labels and printed directions throughout their rooms, and integrating literacy activities into existing centers. Shown above is a literacy-rich classroom at the Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center. Other centers participating in this exciting project are the Cianci Head Start Center, InTown YMCA Kid's World and the Providence School Department's Leviton Annex. R2LP was one of 32 grantees in the country to receive ERF funding in 2004 for this three-year project, which is designed to encourage and evaluate best practices in preschool literacy instruction.



## Welcome to R2LP

In the past few months, Ready to Learn Providence welcomed three new staff members.

**Christine Chiacu-Forsythe** recently joined R2LP as the director of Early Reading First.

Christine has been actively involved in the Rhode Island and Massachusetts early-care and education communities for more than 30 years. Most recently, she was an adjunct faculty member at Wheelock College in Boston, teaching early childhood curriculum, assessment and leadership courses, and supervising student teachers in the undergraduate early childhood program. She currently provides consultative services to the R.I. Department of Education's Early Learning Standards Project and the Department of Human Services' Comprehensive Child Care Program.

**Cynthia Ferguson**, coordinator of communications, has joined R2LP and The Providence Plan as a part-time employee. For the past two years, Cynthia has worked for R2LP as a freelancer, co-writing the report *How Ready Is Providence?*, and writing much of the recently launched website.

Cynthia has worked as a writer for the past 20 years, but was a reading specialist and an ESL teacher earlier in her career. She will be writing newsletters, press releases and other materials for both R2LP and TPP.

R2LP welcomes back **Carnell "Jackie" Jackson**, who returns to R2LP as the full-time coordinator of family engagement. In this position Jackie is overseeing R2LP's efforts to increase family involvement in its programs and work.

Jackie recently graduated from Simmons College in Boston with a master's degree in social work. Prior to earning that degree, she served for a year as R2LP's Parent Engagement consultant through a program managed by the Rhode Island Parent Information Network and funded by the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Jackie is the mother of a 13-year-old son who attends Feinstein High School.

## R2LP to open resource center for providers and families

In an expansion of its partnership with the Providence Public Library, R2LP is setting up a non-circulating collection of resources for early-care providers and families at R2LP.

These resources will include journals, books and other materials focusing on early learning, instruction and social development. Some of these publications give "how to" instructions for specific activities, while others feature current research of interest to parents and early-care educators.

R2LP's Professional Development Committee is responsible for the selection of books and materials housed in the

resource center. Although these books and journals cannot be checked out, duplicates of all publications will be available in the public library. In fact, a computer in the R2LP resource center will be able to access the library's entire collection and reserve circulating books.

R2LP staff or AmeriCorps members will staff the resource center, giving assistance and guidance when needed. The center is expected to be fully operational early in the new year. Look for details, such as hours of operation, on the R2LP website or the upcoming R2LP newsletter.

# Noticias de Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)

## Miembros de AmeriCorps inician su trabajo

Después de un mes de entrenamiento, los 29 miembros de AmeriCorps de Ready to Learn Providence, empezaron su trabajo en las bibliotecas de la ciudad, centros de cuidado infantil, el Hospital de Niños Hasbro, Ocean State HIPPIY, la escuela Laurel Hill, y en las oficinas de R2LP ubicadas en la calle Westminster.

Las 22 mujeres y 7 hombres, cuyas edades fluctúan entre los 19 y los 63 años, están trabajando con niños, bibliotecarios, educadores de educación temprana y padres de familia para mejorar las habilidades de alfabetización de los niños de la ciudad y prepararlos para la escuela. Doce de los miembros hablan español y en ocasiones ayudan como intérpretes para los padres de familia y educadores.

## ERF inicia su primer año académico

Primeras Lecturas (ERF por sus siglas en inglés), un proyecto de tres años diseñado para promover y evaluar mejores prácticas en la instrucción de alfabetización preescolar, inició su primer año este otoño. Los centros participantes en este excitante proyecto son el centro de cuidado infantil Beautiful Beginnings, centro Cianci Head Start, InTown YMCA Kid's World y del departamento de escuelas de Providence el Anexo Leviton. R2LP fue una de 32 organizaciones en el país que recibieron fondos para este proyecto en el año 2004.

Entrenadores y mentores que trabajan en ERF y los maestros en los centros participantes han instalado acogedores centros de lectura, colocado etiquetas e instrucciones en los salones y han integrado actividades de alfabetización dentro de las ya existentes áreas de aprendizaje y juegos.

## Unase a el Club de R2LP

Si usted es graduada(o) del programa de *HeadsUp! Reading* de R2LP, espere una llamada en enero preguntándole si desea unirse al Club de R2LP. Gradudas(os) de *HeadsUp! Reading* solicitaron estos clubes porque querían continuar con la amistad y

apoyo profesional que encontraron en estas clases. Los clubes consistirán en talleres informales que se llevarán a cabo en inglés y español. Para mayor información favor de contactar a Tania Quezada.

## Lanzamiento del website de R2LP

Asegúrese de ver el nuevo website de R2LP en la siguiente dirección electrónica [www.r2lp.org](http://www.r2lp.org). El sitio contiene una gran variedad de información para padres de familia, proveedoras(es), educadores, patrocinadores y todos aquellos que deseen que los niños de Providence estén saludables y listos para la escuela. Por el momento, toda la información en el website esta en inglés, pero esperamos pronto incluir mas traducciones al español en un futuro cercano.

## Apertura del centro de recursos de R2LP

R2LP esta trabajando con la biblioteca Pública de Providence para establecer un centro de recursos literarios para proveedoras(es) de cuidado infantil y familias de R2LP. Esta colección no-para-prestamo de revistas, libros y otras publicaciones contendrán instrucciones para actividades específicas, así como también investigaciones actuales de interés para padres y proveedoras(es) de cuidado infantil. Se esperá que este centro este operando a principios del 2006 y será atendido por personal de R2LP o por algún miembro de AmeriCorps. La siguiente emisión de este boletín de noticias incluire los días y horas de operación de este centro.

## R2LP ofrece programas de entrenamiento para llevar a cabo valoraciones

Usando la información de las encuestas que se enviaron en la primavera pasada a los centros de cuidado infantil en Providence, R2LP ha desarrollado un curso de cinco sesiones titulado *Información acerca de Valoraciones*. El curso esta diseñado para proporcionar a los proveedores de centros de cuidado infantil las habilidades para valorar el desarrollo social y académico

de los preescolares. El curso de 15 horas se llevará a cabo a principios de enero en las oficinas de R2LP y sera impartido por Chris Amirault y Stephanie Enos. Desafortunadamente el curso será impartido en inglés.

## R2LP esta buscando padres para trabajar en los comités y otras actividades voluntarias

El 5 de diciembre, en las oficinas R2LP se llevará a cabo una sesión informativa para padres que tengan interés en participar en la comunidad de R2LP. La gran variedad de oportunidades voluntarias serán ampliamente explicadas tanto en inglés como en español. La sesión dará inicio a las 5 p.m. en las oficinas de R2LP. Venga y enterese como puede participar en la comunidad de R2LP y a ayudar a preparar a los niños para la escuela. Llamar a Alba Medina al teléfono 490-9960 para mayor información.

*Para saber mas acerca de estas actividades, o si desea participar en ellas, por favor llamar a Ready to Learn Providence al teléfono (401) 490-9960.*



*David Cicilline, alcalde de la ciudad de Providence, lee un cuento de Halloween a un grupo de niños durante 'Calabazas en el Parque,' un evento patrocinado por Bundles of Joy-Federal Hill House.*

*Providence Mayor David Cicilline reacts to a reading of a Halloween tale at Pumpkins in the Park, sponsored by Bundles of Joy-Federal Hill House.*

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## The state's first lady pays a visit



**Suzanne Carcieri, wife of R.I. Governor Donald Carcieri, stopped by Ready to Learn Providence October 28 to learn more about R2LP and its AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps members told the first lady about the work they are doing to improve early literacy skills in Providence. Mrs. Carcieri, a former teacher, shared some of her own experiences as an educator. Standing with Mrs. Carcieri is AmeriCorps member Alex Stewart.**