

READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE

Spring / Summer 2005

Creating Centers of Educational Excellence

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What do Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, Cianci Head Start Center, Intown YMCA Kid's World, and Providence School Department's Leviton Annex have in common? They are on their way to becoming Centers of Educational Excellence through Early Reading First! Ready to Learn Providence is one of 32 grantees in the United States to receive Early Reading First (ERF) funding from the US Department of Education.

The 3-year, \$2.9 million grant will provide language and pre-reading development work, professional development around literacy and assessment, and cultural diversity training for staff and parents. Funding will also provide quality books and literacy materials for 12 preschool classrooms (3 classes at each site).

Nationally, ERF is in its third year and is designed to grow existing early education programs into centers of excellence. It supports the education of young children so they enter kindergarten with the necessary language and early reading skills for learning success.

R2LP has gathered a strong team to ensure project success. Teachers at each center are working with a full-time, on-site Mentor who helps to implement and model literacy strategies in the classrooms. The Mentors are Rosa De Varona at Leviton, Christina Schreiber at Beautiful Beginnings, Jackie Sroka at Cianci Head Start, and Michelle Winston at Intown YMCA Kid's World. All four come with years of early education knowledge and experience. The project also funds a full-time substitute teacher at each center to allow classroom teachers to attend trainings, have planning time, or develop literacy activities for their classrooms.

Each Mentor is supported by ERF Literacy Coaches, Desiree Manley and Susan Zoll, who provide technical assistance with literacy training. Joyce Butler, Director of R2LP manages the ERF project. Marcia Moon, Director of Early Literacy, oversees professional development curriculum for teachers and integration of early literacy activities into the classrooms. ERF sites will also benefit from other R2LP activities



Children at Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center practicing alphabet play with each other's names.

including Parent Engagement and Professional Development.

Each site will receive hundreds of quality children's books, related activities built around the books, purposeful classroom literacy materials, and manipulatives such as alphabet and writing tools. Professional development includes training and support with various assessment tools, *HeadsUp! Reading* training for college credit, professional resource materials, cultural diversity training, and library workshops.

Parents are integral to the success of ERF. Research shows that the roots of reading and writing begin long before children enter school. The parenting component will focus on modeling important literacy habits for their children. They will learn how reading stories, singing songs, and saying silly rhymes help children become aware of the sounds in words – an important skill in learning to read and write. In addition to early literacy workshops, there will be Parent Lending Libraries at each site and library workshops.

ERF in Providence is just beginning. Stay tuned. Over the next few years, all of our partnering sites will be working together to achieve excellence in their daily practice and move one step closer to our vision that all children in Providence enter school healthy and ready to learn.

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PROVIDENCE

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For those of you who have visited our new space at 945 Westminster Street, change at R2LP is evident. R2LP is an incredibly different place this May than at this time in 2004. We are a hive of activity from 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. most days with parents, providers, and community members joining us in our work and helping to shape our direction and priorities.

This newsletter's cover story highlights the debut of Early Reading First (ERF). Our partner sites and ERF staff are diligently working to fulfill the vision of R2LP. The Policy Committee has been reenergized with priorities for 2005. Stan Kuziel and I are working closely with the committee to review issues of importance so that we as a community can make thoughtful contributions to policy matters affecting the early care and education agenda.

You will also find a summary of *How Ready is Providence?*, our recently-released neighborhood indicator report. In addition to helping to guide our future work, the report will serve as a curriculum for our AmeriCorps program.

With this in mind, we are excited to have hired a Director and Assistant Director for the AmeriCorps program. We will be hiring 30 members to work at libraries, child care centers and with family providers. A job description is enclosed. Please help us get the word out!

Finally, let me introduce you to all of our amazing new staff members:

Margarita Martinez, R2LP Administrative Assistant, is originally from LaPaz, Mexico and joined R2LP in January. In Mexico, Margarita was a professor of computer science at the Institute of Technology in LaPaz.

Nancy Worthen, Director of AmeriCorps, comes R2LP after 16 years at the Providence Children's Museum, most recently as Director of

AmeriCorps and Volunteer Programs. Nancy was instrumental in implementing their AmeriCorps program. **Nazly Guzman-Singletary** will work with Nancy as Assistant Director of AmeriCorps. She comes to R2LP via Connecticut, Missouri, and Arizona. Her most recent job was as Student Programs Coordinator for East Central Missouri Area Health Education Center.

Stephanie Enos joined R2LP as Coordinator of Professional Development in May. She had previously been a consultant to R2LP and brings years of experience as a trainer and teacher to the position.

Desiree Manley, Early Literacy Coach with Early Reading First, is known to the R2LP community through prior involvement with our T2K and Parent Engagement committees. Before joining R2LP she was an education coordinator for the Children's Network through Meeting Street Center. **Susan Zoll**, also an ERF Early Literacy Coach, returned to her Rhode Island roots in December 2004 after spending 7 years in Georgia and Alabama. She previously worked as a Teacher Educator with the National Center for Montessori Education - New England.

While they are not employees of R2LP, four On-Site Mentors have also joined the Early Reading First team. **Rosa De Varona** is the mentor at Leviton Annex. She was previously a literacy coach and bilingual kindergarten teacher in the Providence public schools. **Christina Schreiber** mentors at Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center. She has her degree in Elementary Education and taught kindergarten in Maryland. **Jackie Sroka** is a mentor at Cianci Head Start Center. She has 20 years of early education experience in a variety of settings. Her degree is in early childhood education and child psychology. Mentoring at the Intown YMCA Kids' World is **Michelle Winston** who brings 17 years of experience in the preschool classroom to the position. She also served for 3 years as an AmeriCorps member in New Mexico.

We are thrilled with the passion and talents that each of these individuals bring to R2LP. Welcome!

- Joyce Butler, Director



Welcome to R2LP! Back row: Desiree Manley, Nazly Guzman-Singletary, Nancy Worthen, Susan Zoll. Front row: Margarita Martinez, Christine Schreiber, Jackie Sroka, Michelle Winston. Not in photo: Stephanie Enos and Rosa De Varona.

How Ready is Providence?

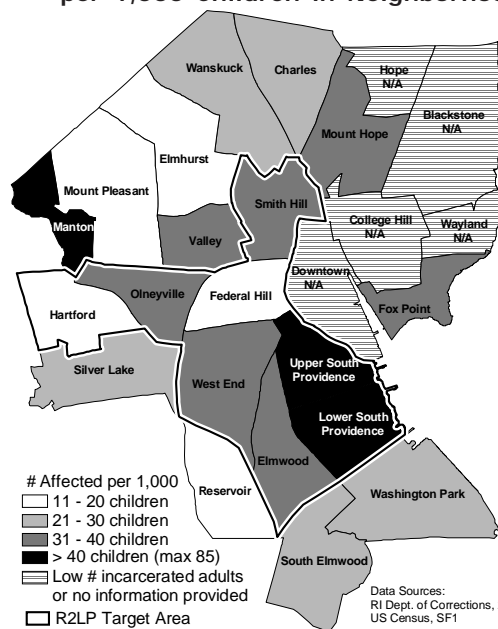
This is the question that our recently-released indicators report asks of the R2LP community. How ready are we as a community to ensure that the children of Providence enter school healthy and ready to learn? Though the question may seem straight-forward, the answer is both complicated and evolving. And although R2LP asks the question, we do not try to answer it with this report. Instead we offer the report's tagline: "Advancing a Community Conversation about School Readiness in Providence" and given some of the feedback thus far received, the conversation is well underway.

How Ready is Providence? provides a holistic look at school readiness by examining many areas that affect a child's overall well-being, and thus their ability to be school ready. The indicators represent essential components of school readiness as identified by the R2LP community. And, as evidenced by the indicators, **the burden falls on the adults in all areas of a child's life - parents, early care providers, teachers, doctors, neighbors - to help ensure that all Providence children enter school healthy and ready to learn.**

How Ready is Providence? is unique in several ways. First, we attempted to obtain all data at the neighborhood level. Analysis at this level highlights the significant differences that exist for children from one location to another, differences that would not be noticed if analysis were conducted only at a City or State level. This level of analysis is also the most meaningful and useful for Providence residents and our partners because it enables them to relate data to places they know well.

The report is also unique because in some cases no data were available for the selected indicator. R2LP chose to consider issues that we might want to track even if data were not readily available. This is important to note because it contradicts most definitions of a good indicator. R2LP decided that if an issue merited inclusion in the report, then in the future we would identify opportunities to gather data and measure progress.

Number of Children with Incarcerated Parents per 1,000 Children in Neighborhood



"Children of Incarcerated Parents" is one of the indicators examined in the report. The map above, taken from the report, shows the rate of children whose parents are in prison. With an average of 35 per 1,000 Providence children having a parent in prison, the wide variations by neighborhood become apparent when the data are examined at this more precise geographic level, as shown by the shading. In some neighborhoods, the rate is two-to four-times the City average.

R2LP selected this indicator because research reveals that incarceration can have profound effects on children. They may exhibit anti-social behavior, perform poorly in school, are at risk for abuse and neglect if placed with unsuitable caregivers, and oftentimes engage in substance abuse and criminal behavior themselves. This is an indicator that R2LP will continue to track in the future.

Access the full report and executive summary online at www.r2lp.org or www.provplan.org.

Funding for R2LP has been provided by:

US Dept. of Health & Human Services, Child Care Bureau
 US Dept. of Education
 Annie E. Casey Foundation
 Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation
 Hasbro Charitable Trust
 RI Department of Health
 United Way of RI

Funding for production of this newsletter provided by a federal ELOA grant from USDHHS. The contents of this newsletter are solely the responsibility of R2LP and do not represent the official views of USDHHS or other funders, nor does this publication in any way constitute an endorsement by the funding agencies.

R2LP Seeks 30 AmeriCorps Members!

Are you creative, enthusiastic, and dependable?

Do you love children?

Do you know someone with these attributes?

Take a look at the description of R2LP's AmeriCorps program (inserted in this newsletter) and consider giving a year of service. Members will serve in libraries and early care and education settings in Providence. The program begins August 1, 2005 and runs until June 30, 2006, is full-time and 40 hours per week. And a great incentive for your year of service is an educational grant of \$4,725! **Application deadline is June 30, 2005**, so please send in a resume and cover letter today.

For more information, email Director of AmeriCorps Nancy Worthen, nworthen@provplan.org

Opportunities for Community Learning

There are several new opportunities for community learning and professional development for all early care and education providers in Providence.

HeadsUp! Reading

This 15-week course that has been offered for the past two years continues to be highly successful. With more than 200 graduates of the program, R2LP is again offering classes throughout the summer. Thirty providers are taking advantage of the program this summer, with a training in Spanish offered every Monday and the English class offered on Wednesday evenings. Classes will run through the first week of August. Tania Quezada, Coordinator of Community Learning for R2LP, will continue to facilitate the Spanish classes. Desiree Manley, who is an Early Literacy Coach at R2LP, is facilitating the English class.

HeadsUp! Reading Club

The *HeadsUp! Reading Club* continues to meet with 25 active members. The Club provides an opportunity for child care providers who are graduates of *HeadsUp! Reading* to continue to enhance the early literacy skills with their friends and colleagues from the 15 week class. Once every other month early-care providers gather for a two-hour evening meeting at R2LP. Participants learn how to select quality books and how to create related activities in their settings. Club members are encouraged to share success stories and examples of children's literacy work with others in the group. All recommended materials, including books, are provided at no cost.

Members meet colleagues who share similar interests, face like challenges, and are committed to enhancing opportunities for themselves and the children in their care. The Clubs are serving to build the R2LP community.

First Aid and CPR

R2LP is providing classroom space for First Aid and CPR certification training. Classes are being offered by Luz Benzant to Spanish-speaking parents, providers, and others who want to learn or refresh their CPR and first aid skills. Luz is a certified instructor with Roger Williams Medical Center. The classes are held at the R2LP offices on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings twice a month. Attendees receive dual certification and learn procedures for both infants and adults. The cost for each five-hour session is \$50. Contact Luz Benzant at 467-9085 to register.

www.provplan.org

The Providence Plan, R2LP's parent organization, has a new web site! It is easy to use and has information about all of ProvPlan's current programs: YouthBuild, the Local Learning Partnership, Information for Change, and R2LP.

The new web site still has the tools that make ProvPlan an essential information resource for Providence: the Neighborhood Profiles and the Mapper. Both have been redesigned to make them more user-friendly. Use the Profiles to access detailed data by neighborhood, including demographics, health, education and crime. With the Mapper you can view details such as neighborhood resources and property ownership.

One new function on the site is "I need info on..." which leads to 10 topic areas including early childhood, housing, and economics. This will make finding answers to data-related questions fast and easy.

Check it out!

English as a Second Language

English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are now being offered through R2LP and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). Providence child care providers looking to improve their beginner-level English skills are encouraged to participate. The classes and textbooks are free and participants who complete the 15-week course receive three college credits from CCRI.

The course is designed to help child care providers improve their reading, writing and oral communication skills and is taught by CCRI instructor Joan Von Glahn. Call Tania Quezada, Coordinator of Community Learning, for more information.



HUR Club members at R2LP creating an activity associated with the children's book Chicka Chicka Boom Boom which they can take back to use in their family care settings.

R2LP Open House Celebration a great success

More than 150 people joined R2LP at our Open House Celebration on March 21st. The event gave R2LP an opportunity to share the good news of our recent grant awards, release our indicator report *How Ready is Providence?* and invite the community to visit our new space.

An array of invited guests spoke on behalf of R2LP. Senator Reed, who has worked tirelessly on our behalf, was joined by Congressmen Kennedy and Langevin, Governor Carcieri, and Mayor Cicilline. Providing the R2LP and TPP community perspective were Khadija Lewis-Khan, John Farley,

Representative Grace Diaz, Tom Anton and Pat McGuigan. Our speakers' collective words of support and encouragement were both rewarding and inspiring.

The day wasn't without surprises, namely for R2LP Director Joyce Butler who received a proclamation from Mayor Cicilline for her dedication to and years of advocacy for the children and families in Providence.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Ellen Loconto of Guy Abelson Catering for generously donating to the event. And many thanks to all of our partners and friends who joined us!

What About Our Children?

What about our children?
We can't let them lose their way.
Babies having babies, now...
Babies are killing babies.
What are we going to do - TODAY?

We've planted these seeds
to watch them grow.
Did we not feed, not water, NOT KNOW?

Teaching begins in the heart of the Home.
Not for all is this a peaceful abode.
Too many strangers in and out of there.
Kids go without breakfast,
without comb to hair.
Five- and six-year olds being shown a gun.
Are they being told that this is fun?

Imagine so young and strung out on drugs.
Homeless, confused, becoming undone.
We are taking away the ARTS in their schools.
Why, when this is such a valuable tool!

We need to feed them not only with food
But with FAITH, LOVE and HOPE
We need to change their attitudes.
Let them know that they can soar
With this in mind, they'll achieve much more.

Our children need mentors to stand by and teach.
Mothers, Fathers, please....
Practice what you Preach.

If we don't do it today...
What About Our Children of Tomorrow?

Gail Wing is Executive Assistant at R2LP. She is also a published poet and shared this poem, which she wrote in 2000, at the Open House Celebration.



Speakers included Congressman Langevin, Governor Carcieri, Senator Reed, Mayor Cicilline, and Congressman Kennedy.



Above left, Khadija Lewis-Khan, Director of Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, addresses the audience. Above right, Rep. Grace Diaz and Maria Farjaldio with R2LP staff Tania Quezada and Susan Zoll. Left, R2LP Director Joyce Butler receiving a proclamation from Mayor Cicilline



Staff from Cianci Head Start Center (left to right): Tiffany Imondi, Eva Lupo, Janet Aquino, and Mike Dulin, and ERF Mentor at Cianci Center, Jackie Sroka.



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Committee Reviews Policy Priorities for 2005

The R2LP Governing Board reactivated the Policy Committee at its February 2005 meeting. The committee will review the following priorities:

1. Unionization of Family Child Care Providers, which is now pending legislation in the RI Senate and House;
2. A Quality Rating System for early care providers;
3. A Tiered Reimbursement system for providers; and
4. Three-quarter Rate Reimbursement systems.

The six-member committee is staffed by the Director of R2LP, Joyce Butler and Director of Program Operations, Stan Kuziel. The first organizational meeting was held on March 24th, to which R2LP invited other community stakeholders also interested in these same issues. The meeting addressed consensus building, organizational format, appropriate model behavior of participants, roles and responsibilities of participants, and setting priorities for the presented issues. Legislation addressing unionization of RI family child care providers was identified as the first key issue to be addressed.

A second meeting was held on May 2nd and R2LP invited presenters from the Governor's Office, the RI Child Care Center Directors Association, sponsors of the bill proposed in the RI Senate and House, and representatives of the Family Day Care provider community/SEIU. However, due to scheduling conflicts and last minute circumstances, none

of the presenters could participate. The committee was undaunted by this challenge. Members chose to address the union issue and conducted a careful review and productive discussion of the proposed legislation and position papers previously provided by those representing both sides of the issue. Following the discussion, the Committee created a list of questions for some of the parties. Once the Committee has received and reviewed the responses, the information will be summarized and shared with R2LP Board members for their review and consideration.

The R2LP Governing Board first established the Policy Committee as an ad hoc committee in November 2003. At that time, Board members needed a group to review the impact of the impending rollback in the Kindergarten Age of Entry on the Providence community. See R2LP's Winter 2004 newsletter for more information on this prior work.

Thank you Kevin Novell!

A special thanks to Kevin Novell, an intern at R2LP since early 2004, who provided incredible assistance to the policy committee and was never daunted by any task or request made of him. Kevin just graduated from Brown University and has relocated to the West Coast. Kevin's talent, intellect, personality, and commitment to his work will be very much missed.

We wish him all the best!