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R2LP is a program of
The Providence Plan

Leslie Gell named director of R2LP

After an extensive four-month search, Pat McGuigan, executive director of The Providence Plan, announced in July that Leslie Gell had been asked to serve as director of Ready to Learn Providence.

The announcement was greeted with a hearty round of applause from her colleagues at R2LP, where Leslie has served as director of professional development since 2006. In that role, she has been responsible for the day-to-day management of the \$3 million Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Grant as well as R2LP's many other professional development initiatives.

Leslie succeeds Joyce Butler, who served as director of R2LP since its inception in 2002. "I've got some tough shoes to fill," says Leslie, "but Joyce has created an extraordinary foundation upon which to build, and build we will! Collectively, we're an incredibly strong organization, and R2LP will continue our work towards realizing the vision that all children will enter school healthy and ready to learn."

Leslie brings more than 17 years of administrative and management experience in the fields of both early care and education and adult education. Prior to joining R2LP, she served as director of Adult Education/Literacy Services in the Division



Leslie Gell, who previously served as director of professional development, is R2LP's new director.

for Lifelong Learning at the Community College of Rhode Island. From 1995 to 2002, she was the executive director of the Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center, where she continues to serve on the board of directors. For four years in the early '90s she was the coordinator of vocational training programs at the International Institute of Rhode Island and prior to that she worked as a preschool teacher at a kibbutz in Israel.

The search committee was composed of representatives from R2LP, The Providence Plan (R2LP's parent organization), the early-care community and other R2LP partners.

R2LP to operate a preschool classroom for families who lost child-care subsidies



Tiziana Filippini (leaning forward on right) discusses ways in which the classroom environment can become more child-centered.

This fall, pending approval from the R.I. Department of Children, Youth and Families, Ready to Learn Providence will open a small preschool program on the Liston Campus of the Community College of Rhode Island in South Providence. The classroom will serve up to 18 three- to five-year-olds who no longer qualify for child-care subsidies because of the state's new eligibility requirements.

The program will be funded through R2LP's U.S. Department of Education Early Reading First (ERF) grant and will be offered at no cost to Providence families who qualify. As a demonstration space for "best practices" in early childhood

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R2LP Strategic Advisory Team

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Chair

R2LP Staff

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Administrative Assistant

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Early Literacy Coach

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Early Reading First 2

Cynthia Ferguson
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Jeffrey Priest
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Nancy Worthen
Coordinator of AmeriCorps

Susan Zoll
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Development

R2LP honors the early-care providers in its PD program

“You have changed our children’s educational trajectory,” Leslie Gell, director of Ready to Learn Providence, told the 139 early-care providers who were celebrating the completion of their participation in the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development (ECEPD) program.

“For 30 weeks you came to Ready to Learn Providence to learn how children read and write,” Leslie continued. “Then you went back to your settings and transformed the way your children learn.”

Participants in the ECEPD program, which is funded with federal dollars, complete two college-level courses in early literacy and receive intensive support from course facilitators and mentors in their settings. A rigorous external evaluation will measure the effects of this intervention on some 850 children.

The celebration was held on June 13 at the Providence Academy of International Studies.



ECEPD participants receive their certificates.

Families and friends filled the large auditorium to applaud the accomplishments of the providers.

“The children you care for will be more

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R2LP classroom

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education, the classroom will serve as a dynamic professional development resource for ERF teaching staff, CCRI students and faculty, and early childhood educators throughout the city.

An experienced preschool teacher and a trained R2LP AmeriCorps member will staff the classroom. R2LP coaches will provide additional support.

The R2LP classroom helps to address the impact of the child-care subsidy cuts on families as well as on R2LP’s ERF program. Those cuts caused sharp declines in enrollment in most of the ERF child-care centers.

Instruction in the R2LP classroom will revolve around the same programs and cur-

ricula used in the ERF centers – *Building Language for Literacy* and *Creative Curriculum*. In a nod to the Reggio Emilia approach to early-care education, the physical environment will play a large role in facilitating the learning that takes place.

While here as a visiting scholar at Wheelock College, Tiziana Filippini, who is coordinator of pedagogy for the Reggio Emilia early-care program, met with members of the R2LP staff and community to offer suggestions on creating a child-centered environment and bringing children into the decision making.

In September 2007, the state eliminated child-care subsidies for families who fell above 180 percent of the fed-

eral poverty level, disqualifying about 1,900 children statewide. If demand for the R2LP classroom exceeds the number of available slots, enrollment will be based on a lottery of children who meet all of the criteria.

Parents of children enrolled in the program will be required to sign a participation agreement requiring attendance, child assessments and at-home activities. The program will run 11 months a year from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

R2LP is about to enter the second year of its second ERF program, which seeks to create “centers of educational excellence” through various forms of professional development and support.



Members of the 2007-2008 AmeriCorps team at their graduation ceremony on June 30.

Ready to Learn’s AmeriCorps program seen as the ‘ideal’

“If I had to point to my ideal of what community action should be, this would be it,” Rick Benjamin told the 24 Ready to Learn Providence AmeriCorps members at their June 30th graduation. Until recently, Rick served as a co-director of the Rhode Island Service Alliance, the organization that funds AmeriCorps programs in the state. “There is no more important thing

you can do than to give to a young person and make them ready for the world,” added Bernie Boudreau, who now heads the R.I. Service Alliance. Bernie previously served as director of the R.I. Food Bank.

“For me, this is the most important program we have at R2LP,” Joyce Butler told the graduates on her final day as R2LP’s director. “I could not be prouder

of anything I’ve ever done.”

Amid laughter, cheers and tears, the AmeriCorps members celebrated their year of service with families and friends in tow. With extensive training under their belts, they have worked in libraries, child-care settings and at the R2LP offices to enhance the literacy and well-being of our city’s young children.

This team was the third in R2LP’s first three-year contract with AmeriCorps. A second contract will fund an even larger program – 35 members – for an additional three years.

Seven members of the 2007-2008 team are returning for a second year of service.

R2LP welcomes new AmeriCorps members

Ready to Learn Providence’s fourth AmeriCorps team got under way on August 1. After a month of training in early literacy, early childhood, data analysis, and the neighborhoods R2LP serves, the 35 members will begin their work in libraries, child-care settings and at the R2LP offices. See the fall issue for more information on this energetic and talented team.

ECEPD celebration

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ready to learn because of you,” predicted Jerry Hatfield, chair of the Department of Human Services at Community College of Rhode Island.

CCRI awards college credits for the two courses that ECEPD participants are required to take – *HeadsUp! Reading* and *Early Literacy Curriculum*. These courses, offered in both English and Spanish, can also be used toward a new certificate in early-care education offered at CCRI.

The early-care educators in this professional development program work in a wide array of settings – center-based child care, Head Start, and family child-care homes – in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls. A second group of about

150 providers will begin their coursework in September.

“If I hadn’t taken these classes, I would never have been able to do what I’m doing now for my children and my children’s parents,” said Miosotis Rodriguez, a teacher at McMichael Head Start Center.

Speakers at the celebration were: Joyce Butler (former director of R2LP), Leslie Gell, Jerry Hatfield, Catherine Grundy and Miosotis Rodriguez (teachers at McMichael

Head Start), and three family child-care providers: Celeste Thomason, who was acknowledged as the first person to complete the new early childhood certificate program at CCRI, Adriana Muñoz and Delba Nuñez.





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Let's get ready!

Ready Families, an R2LP initiative designed to support families in their role as a child's "first teacher," has scheduled two classes this fall of its popular course *Fun Family Activities for Preschoolers* – one in English and the other in Spanish.

The six-session classes will be held on alternate Mondays at Knight Memorial Library from 5:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. A light dinner is served at 5 p.m.



This program brings families together to discuss simple activities they can do at home to increase the school readiness of their children. The program, which is led by early-care professionals, provides families with dozens of fun and inexpensive ideas for developing the different domains stressed in the R.I. Early Learning Standards, which are guidelines for what children should be able to do when they enter kindergarten.

Participants at these sessions acquire not only a new set of skills – but also a new group of friends.

The first session of the English class will get under way on September 22. The Spanish class will begin on September 29. Children two years of age and older will be supervised by library staff and AmeriCorps members.

For more information or to register, please call Stan or Nina at R2LP (490-9960).