

With money delivered from Washington, R2LP moves forward with new initiatives

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READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE

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R2LP is a program of
The Providence Plan

Having won two highly competitive federal grants totaling \$7 million, Ready to Learn Providence is now hard at work developing an ambitious professional development project and launching a second Early Reading First program.

The \$3.2 million Early Childhood Educator Professional Development grant – one of only three awarded in the country – will fund a research-based program for early childhood educators. In partnership with the Community College of Rhode Island, Wheelock College and the Providence Public Library, R2LP and its parent organization, The Providence Plan, have developed a rigorous program in which over 200 early childhood educators, including family-care providers, will receive intensive professional development intervention over the course of a year.

This intervention includes two college-level courses focused on early literacy, on-the-job coaching and mentoring, and participation in R2LP clubs and leadership activities. These early-child educators have the capacity to serve over 1,500 children in the city of Providence.



Leslie Gell

1995 to 2002, she served as executive director of the Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center and for the past four years she has been the director of adult education/literacy services in the Division for Lifelong Learning at the Community College of Rhode Island. And Leslie is no stranger to the R2LP community; for several years she has been involved in the ESL program for home-care

R2LP Director Joyce Butler is serving as the program's project director and Leslie Gell, who recently joined R2LP as director of professional development, has assumed the initiative as her primary task.

Leslie brings a passion and background in both early-care and adult education. From



Above, top: U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings delivers the checks in person to R2LP. Above: (L-r) Governor Donald Carcieri, Secretary Spellings, and former Senator Lincoln Chafee take turns reading to children at R2LP.



providers.

“When I first moved to Rhode Island in the early '90s, it was just glaring to me how little training was available for providers,” Leslie notes. “It’s incredibly exciting to see how far we’ve come in 15 years.”

The \$3.6 million R2LP received for its second Early Reading First program will fund centers of educational excellence at four Providence preschool centers – Federal Hill House, Genesis Center, John Hope Settlement House and West End Community Center. With support from early literacy mentors and coaches, teachers at these centers will learn and apply instructional techniques to develop

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From the Director

On October 6 our Family Engagement Committee put on an extraordinary event at Classical High School – the Cultural Community Family Friendly Fashion Show. While the first-time event had a few technical glitches, the passion and enthusiasm that emanated from the more than 300 people who filled the auditorium that night more than made up for it. Gorgeous, colorful garments representing the many cultures found in Providence generated cheers, foot stomping and wild applause, as did the performances of ethnic dancers and other entertainers. What a wonderful vehicle for children and families to honor their own traditions as well as those of their neighbors.

The effort that led up to the show was equally impressive. For months, dedicated volunteers gathered here at R2LP to plan for the event and attend rehearsals. In the process, they developed a sense of community, forging bonds with one another that will last long after the costumes have been packed away.

R2LP's family engagement initiative is central to our vision. It may seem trite to say that a parent is a child's first teacher, but it's absolutely true. If you ask adults who had the most influence on them as young children, most will point to the person who raised them. Only by listening to and addressing the needs of parents (and other guardians) will we reach our vision that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. It is not something we do *to* them; it's something we do *with* them.

Research also shows us that social isolation undermines the well-being of parents and their children. Sadly, many American neighborhoods today do not foster the social connectedness that once existed, and studies have found that social isolation is a greater predictor of unhappiness than most other factors – even poverty. Our family engagement programs are designed to bring

people together as we all pursue a common vision. Members of our Family Engagement Committee often tell me how much they look forward to the warmth and camaraderie they find at meetings and events here at R2LP.

One of our current goals is to reach greater numbers of young parents by linking up with some of the local public and charter schools. Jackie Jackson, coordinator of family engagement, is leading our efforts to develop a family friendly workshop series based on the Family Fun Activity Kits that were developed to accompany the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards. We think this workshop series, which will begin this winter, will be especially useful to

young parents. In addition to learning how they can help their children be better prepared for school, participants will have a chance to make new acquaintances and will host house parties so that friends and neighbors can also share in what they have learned.

We welcome all parents, grandparents and other guardians to join our family engagement activities. They really are both a joyful and meaningful way for you to become part of a larger community and to share your wisdom and experiences with others.

Please accept my very best wishes to you and your family. May the new year bring you much happiness and peace.

Joyce Butler, Director



Entertainers and colorful costumes filled the stage at the October 6 Cultural Community Family Friendly Fashion Show. For more pictures, see page 6.

R2LP measures the success of its AmeriCorps program

“When you walk into any gathering of the R2LP AmeriCorps team, you are met with a palpable sense of shared vision, commitment and mutual support. These corps members are highly devoted to their work and to each other, and, in a very short period of time they have developed one of the very best programs in the state. From the exemplary training members receive, to the comprehensive and compassionate support they receive from staff, to the way in which AmeriCorps is fully integrated into the larger program – in all of these ways, the R2LP AmeriCorps program is truly innovative and transformative. This program has been launched with so much thoughtfulness, purpose and passion that it cannot help but be successful for many years to come.”

These remarks come from Rick Benjamin, co-executive director of the R.I. Service Alliance, the nonprofit organization that serves as the state commission for national and community service. It is through the R.I. Service Alliance that R2LP’s AmeriCorps program receives federal funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Data gathered recently for an end-of-year report certainly support Rick’s high estimation of the R2LP AmeriCorps program, an initiative that got under way in August 2005. In an effort to widen the use of the city’s libraries, for example, the 10 members assigned to the branches visited 99 different child-care sites, with most sites averaging six to seven visits. Of these sites, 48 were home child-care providers, many of them new friends of the library. Members brought literacy activity kits and books, spent time reading with the children, and encouraged providers to get library cards and take advantage of library programs.

Library branches were able to offer nearly twice as many early childhood programs as they had the previous year, thanks in large part to the skilled and trained AmeriCorps members who either



Members of R2LP’s first AmeriCorps team enjoy a laugh at their graduation ceremony last June.

led them or assisted in their delivery. In one such program, Cradle to Crayons, the libraries saw a 25 percent increase in the number of Spanish-speaking participants, a primary goal of R2LP’s AmeriCorps initiative.

The 12 members assigned to child-care settings played a critical role in strengthening their literacy programs, according to their site supervisors. Members at these sites developed parent centers, created classroom literacy centers, read one-on-one with children, set up literacy libraries for parents, children and teachers, and brought enthusiasm and ideas to each classroom.

Members not assigned to libraries and child-care settings held positions at R2LP providing programmatic assistance – recruiting volunteers, enhancing the family engagement initiative, and assisting in R2LP’s HeadsUp! Reading and Early Reading First programs.

All 29 members spent the first month of their service and every Friday throughout the rest of the year receiving training in early literacy, data evaluation and child development, many of them earning college credits for these courses. Thirteen of last year’s members elected to serve a second year in the program, a remarkable

retention rate.

“We felt throughout the year that things ‘felt good’ – that the members were learning, contributing and having fun – but the data we see in this report make it all so much more concrete,” notes Nancy Worthen, who with Nazly Guzman-Singleton co-directs the R2LP AmeriCorps program. “In fact, we really didn’t know just how much we had accomplished until we saw our achievements clearly outlined and measured in black and white.”

R2LP moves forward with new programs

Continued from page 1

language and early literacy skills. The classrooms will provide rich environments designed to improve early reading and writing skills, and teachers will learn how to use assessment tools to identify and help children who are most at risk of early reading difficulty.

Receiving both these grants was viewed as such an extraordinary achievement that U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings delivered the checks in person in late August.

R2LP's Tania Quezada receives the Juanita Sanchez Award

As a student at Hope High School, Tania Quezada, director of community learning at Ready to Learn Providence, viewed Juanita Sanchez as a vibrant role model. Back then, Tania volunteered in a program Sanchez ran at the school – the Rainbow Center, a teen pregnancy initiative.

Sanchez, a highly regarded advocate in the Latino community, died in 1992 at the age of 39, but her legacy lives on through people like Tania, who on October 25 received the Juanita Sanchez Award from Quisqueya in Action. "Receiving this award, named after someone I admired so much, was just a tremendous honor," Tania says.

Since 2003, this prestigious award has been given annually to a person who embodies Sanchez' spirit, drive and

commitment. The recipient is a person who is viewed as a community leader, and as someone who stands up for his or her political beliefs.

Tania is certainly a worthy recipient. For years she has worked tirelessly on political campaigns for candidates and issues supporting the interests of the Latino community. This past spring she was a graduate of the Latina Leadership Institute, which is sponsored by the R.I. Latino Civic Fund. And at Ready to Learn Providence, she has overseen the successful early literacy program for child-care providers, HeadsUp! Reading – a course that more than 350 Providence providers have now completed.

"Watching her work with providers – and seeing the high esteem they have for her – is truly impressive," says R2LP



Director Joyce Butler. Joyce, along with Quisqueya President Janet Pichardo, presented the award to Tania at a dinner held at the Marriott. Quisqueya in Action is a community organization created by Dominican-Americans. Its major goals include youth empowerment, educational advancement, economic and community development, and cultural awareness.

Noticias de Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)

R2LP adelanta nuevos programas

Después de haber sido otorgado dos distintos fondos federales sumamente competitivos, Ready to Learn Providence [R2LP] (Listos para aprender Providence) se encuentra trabajando arduamente para desarrollar un ambicioso proyecto de desarrollo profesional y lanzar un segundo programa de Early Reading First.

El fondo de Desarrollo profesional para la educación infantil (Early Childhood Education Professional Development) patrocinara un programa, basado en investigaciones, para los educadores infantiles basado en investigaciones. En asociación con el Community College of Rhode Island, la Universidad Wheelock y la biblioteca publica de Providence; R2LP ha desarrollado un excitante programa que reclutará a más de 200 educadores infantiles (incluyendo a proveedoras de

cuidado infantil) para participar en un programa de desarrollo profesional que durara un año.

El programa de Early Reading First patrocinara a centros de excelencia educacional en cuatro centros preescolares de la ciudad de Providence – Federal Hill House, Genesis Center, John Hope Settlement House y el centro comunitario West End.

El haber recibido ambos fondos federales fue considerado tan extraordinario logro que la Secretaria de educación de la nación, Margaret Spell-ing, visitó las oficinas de R2LP a finales de Agosto.

Tania Quezada recibe el Premio Juanita Sánchez

Cuando Tania Quezada (Coordinadora de aprendizaje comunitario en Ready to Learn Provi-

dence) era una estudiante de secundaria en Hope High School y Juanita Sánchez supervisaba un programa en esa escuela, Tania consideraba a Juanita Sánchez como un brillante ejemplar. Juanita Sánchez, quien era estimada por la comunidad Latina y por la cual ella abogaba, murió en el año 1992 a edad de 39 años. El legado de Juanita Sánchez vive a través de personas como Tania Quezada, quien recibió el Premio Juanita Sánchez otorgado por Quisqueya en Acción el 25 de octubre.

Desde el año 2003, este prestigioso premio ha sido otorgado anualmente a una persona que personifique el espíritu, ambición y compromiso de Juanita Sánchez. El ganador del premio es siempre una persona considerada como líder comunitario y defensor(a) de sus creencias políticas.

Budding artists blossom at InTown Y's Gallery Night

Using materials received through a Ready to Learn Providence Early Learning Grant – and skills acquired in the grant workshop – teachers at the InTown YMCA Kid's World incorporated “open-ended” art into their curriculum. To celebrate the students' work, the InTown Y held a Gallery Night on October 12, inviting parents and others to admire the framed pieces and to purchase them with donations of \$1. The money raised will fund future Gallery Nights, which the center hopes to make an annual tradition.



(L-r) Samantha McCormack, head teacher and acting director of the InTown Y; Tatiana Pereira; and Tatiana's mother, Rosaura Fernandez, enjoy an artistic creation at Gallery Night.

Institute participants identify Latino family values –and seek ways to incorporate them in their settings

The importance of family, ancestral traditions, respect for others, faith, community and one's native language. These were just some of the values that emerged over and over again in a Latino focus group that launched a three-day institute held in September at Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP).

The National Council of La Raza – the largest Latino advocacy organization in the country – teamed up with R2LP to sponsor the Sembrando Semillas (Planting Seeds) Institute. The purpose of the Institute, a national initiative that is now in its third year, is to identify Latino family values and to help those who serve large numbers of Latino children incorporate them into their curricula, settings and interactions with families.

The focus group, which was held in Spanish and translated for the 21 participants of the Institute, included parents from various Latin American countries. While it became apparent that Latinos from different regions do share many

values, members of the focus group cautioned participants from assuming that all Latin countries have identical cultures. Just as Ireland and England have different histories and values, they noted, so too do countries and regions within Latin America.

The participants who attended the Institute were center-based providers, family-care providers, librarians, public-school educators and others who serve a large Latino population. All but the participants from Progreso Latino, which is in Central Falls, work in Providence.

At the first session, participants listened to members of the focus group relate a childhood memory and then identify the values embedded in that story. The following two days, participants discussed what they had heard and proposed ways of using this knowledge to inform their work with both parents and children.

Of particular interest was the high value Latinos place on respect for others

in the community – or, in the case of children, in the classroom. When comparing early learning standards from Peru and Mexico with those from Rhode Island, participants were struck by the far greater emphasis that the Peruvian and Mexican standards placed on the ability to work cooperatively and respectfully.

“If a person behaves poorly and doesn't treat others with respect, he or she is not considered an educated person,” notes R2LP's Nazly Guzman-Singletary. Nazly and Tania Quezada, also from R2LP, are serving as coaches for Institute participants and will do follow-up work at participant settings.

Facilitating the Institute, which was held Sept. 21 to 23, were Antonia Lopez, La Raza's director of early care and education, and Cecilia Alvarado, primary consultant for the Sembrando Semillas Institutes. The project is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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Cultural traditions honored at R2LP's Fashion Show



See page 2 for details