



Strengthening the quality of early learning opportunities for Alabama's children

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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Message from Our Executive Director

Research shows us time and time again that few things impact a child's success in life as much as his or her early experiences. The first five years of life, culminating in entry into kindergarten, set the stage for all of the learning and achievement that follow. High-quality preschool experiences are key to preparing children for a lifetime of learning and success, and they are one of the smartest investments we can make.

In 2015, Gulf Regional Early Childhood Services had the privilege of expanding our partnerships and collaborations to include The University of Alabama and new Early Head Start partner centers. We entered the year with high hopes and big visions, but we could not have imagined the level of enthusiasm and partnership that has emerged to make these new ventures a success.

The strides made last year are due entirely to the providers, staff, and partners who have taken up the banner of high-quality early childhood education with enthusiasm and expertise. Our communities fully embraced the idea of working together to support children and families, and it shows. From the praise we receive, to the hope and enthusiasm I've heard in conversations with so many, the importance of our work and the difference we make are abundantly clear.

It is with great pride that we publish this report on our activities of 2015 and we look forward to forging ahead in 2016, embracing whatever changes may come our way.



Wendy McEarchern

WENDY MCSEARCHERN
Executive Director

Programs & Services

- **EARLY HEAD START** – Comprehensive services for infants and toddlers of families who live in poverty
- **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS** – Face-to-face workshops and training events; Online and distance learning courses for CEU credit; Quarterly newsletters; Reproducible resources for parents and Early Childhood Education professionals
- **THE RESOURCE PLACE** – A lending library of developmentally appropriate materials, teacher workroom and reusable resource materials
- **ALABAMA PATHWAYS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REGISTRY** – Support services for state-wide Professional Development Registry for those programs participating in Alabama Quality Stars
- **CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER** – Programs to prevent the abuse and neglect of children
- **READING IS FUNDAMENTAL** – Early literacy initiative that provides books and resources to over 2,000 children annually
- **FAMILIES IN TRANSITION** – Short-term child care scholarships for families in crisis

Why It Matters -

Our children are our greatest resource.

Early childhood education for low-income children is one of the best ways to promote upward mobility that pays off for individuals and society. Every child needs effective early childhood education and development from birth to age five; research shows that low-income children are the least likely to get it. Those who experience quality early care and learning have better education, health, social and economic outcomes in life-increasing their productivity and reducing the need for spending later on.

THE NEED - Less than half of low-income children have access to high-quality early childhood programs that could dramatically improve their opportunities for a better future. This statistic is tragic when one considers that skills developed in the first five years of life greatly influence success later in life. Expanding access and options for parents to access quality early childhood programs have proven benefits for individuals and society in reduced healthcare costs, increased school achievement and a more educated workforce.

ECONOMIC

IMPACT - Economic development starts with early childhood development—and the best investment is in providing disadvantaged children with access to high-quality early childhood education. Every dollar invested in quality early childhood education for disadvantaged children provides taxpayers with 7-10 percent return on that investment, per year through better outcomes in education, health, reduced social spending and productivity in the workforce.



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- Brains are built and grow through touch, talk, sight and sound in early childhood experiences. This experiential learning starts long before a child steps foot into kindergarten and, is strengthened through regular interaction and stimulation in the home and in quality early learning settings. Children who receive quality early education demonstrate greater cognitive and socio-emotional growth than children who do not.

SCHOOL

READINESS - The overwhelming evidence shows that children who enter kindergarten behind are likely to remain behind throughout their educational careers and beyond. These gaps in achievement are difficult and expensive to close with K-12 education alone. We can help ensure children show up to kindergarten ready to learn by providing our youngest learners with options to access to high-quality early childhood programs from ages zero to five—where they can develop the full range of skills necessary to compete in school.

Early Head Start

All babies need good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences to foster their healthy intellectual, social, and emotional development. The Early Head Start (EHS) program was created in 1994 and continues to provide comprehensive services for children under age 3 and pregnant women today. Our EHS program partners with select local child care programs to provide families with increased access to high-quality early learning experiences. These partnerships support working families by providing a full-day program so that children have the healthy and enriching early experiences they need. Quite simply, they can help ensure that a child's entire day in non-parental care takes place in a safe, healthy environment.

In addition to early learning opportunities, EHS's comprehensive early childhood development programs provide children and families with access to a range of services such as health screenings, referrals and follow-up support, parenting resources, and social services. Research shows that EHS positively impacts children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development; family self-sufficiency; and parental support of child development.

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~ First Five Years Fund



2015 Program Outcomes

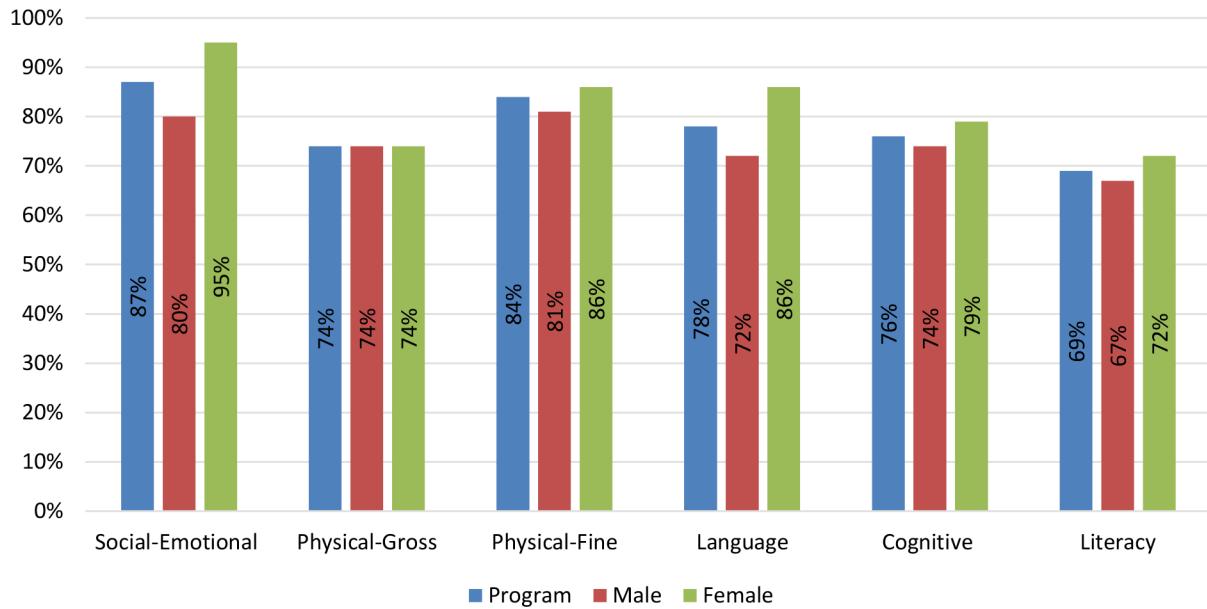
- 192 children ages birth up to three years received comprehensive early learning services (program maintained full enrollment of 192 children throughout the program year), including:
 - ◆ 4 homeless children (both enrolled and those experiencing homelessness during the year)
 - ◆ 23 children with disabilities
 - ◆ 4 children in foster care
 - ◆ 14 children whose primary language is not English
 - ◆ 4 pregnant women
- Average daily attendance was 86.39%. (Head Start Performance Standards require 85% attendance)
- 192 children were provided specific and individualized school readiness plans based on their age and developmental assessment.
- 192 children received developmental screenings, medical screenings, and dental / oral exams.
- A homeless family acquired housing during the program.
- 192 family member adults received parenting education services
- 192 family member adults received health education services
- 28 children were represented in father involvement activities
- 26 family member adults were assisted with services enabling

them to enroll in adult education and/or literacy programs

- 6 family member adults were assisted with referrals and support enabling them to receive job training programs
- 2 families received domestic violence intervention services
- During the 2015 program year, the enrolled children showed significant gains in each developmental domain as indicated by age and domain in the chart below:



Meeting/Exceeding Widely Held Expectations



Early Care & Education Professional Development

Research indicates that outcomes for children are directly related to the quality of care and teaching they receive in their earliest years. In fact, findings are almost uniform in demonstrating significant and meaningful benefits to children when teacher-child interactions are supportive, organized, and cognitively stimulating. It is critically important that early childhood teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to support young children's healthy growth and development.

Because preparing effective, qualified teaching staff is crucial to ensuring high quality early childhood practices, GRECS is committed to providing evidence-based training and professional development activities that have been shown to result in improved teacher practices and educational benefits for children. The training and technical assistance programs offered at GRECS are the primary resource in our area for community-based early childhood education training. We provide the essential information that professionals need to improve their skills. Our educational programs meet the highest standards for continuing education and training, earning our agency the distinction of being awarded Authorized Provider status by the International Association of Continuing Education and Training, the accrediting organization for Continuing Education Training credit (CEU).



In addition to professional development events & activities, GRECS has created and continues to maintain a responsive website that includes resource pages, a copyright-free document library, calendar of events, and other resources for parents and educators. Consistent social media engagement with early childhood educators allows for topic-specific discussion and opportunities to network with peers. Our online training programs give educators access to convenient, customized training and learning resources, and more importantly, improve classroom experiences for children.

Professional Development Numbers that Count!

376

Credit Hours of
Training Offered

510

Online Training Classes
Completed

3022

People that Attended
Training Events

4800

Issues of "Early Learning
News" Distributed

594

Technical Assistance
Visits in Early Learning Programs

9513

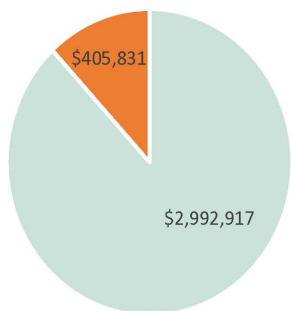
Copyright-Free Resources
Distributed to
Parents & Educators



Stewardship -

Dedication to Responsible Spending

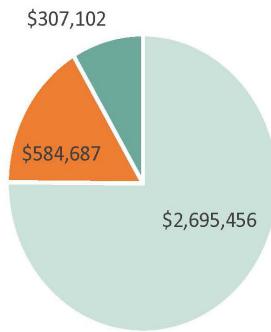
2015 Operational Expenses



Total Expenses - \$3,398,748

■ Program Expenses ■ Administration

2015 Sources of Funding



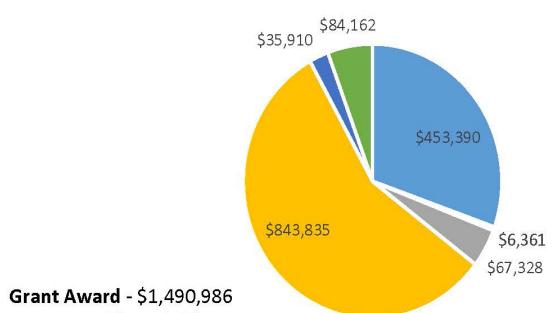
■ Federal Grant ■ State Grants ■ Private Contributions & Other Income

An annual A-133 financial audit was conducted by Smith, Dukes & Buckalew, L.L.P. in accordance with Government Auditing Standards. The audit included all expenditures from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015 and indicates no findings or questioned costs.

Federal Program Review

The Administration for Families and Children (ACF) conducted an on-site monitoring review of our Early Head Start program. As a result of the most recent review, the agency was designated as a program in good standing and had no findings of non-compliance with the Federal Head Start Performance Standards.

Early Head Start Financial Activities
January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2015

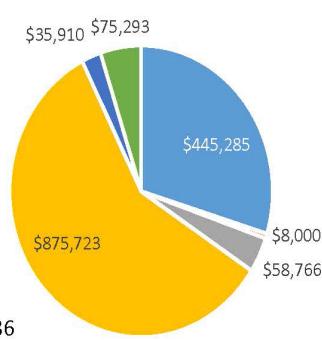


Grant Award - \$1,490,986

Does not include Non-Federal share.

■ Personnel ■ Travel ■ Supplies ■ Contractual ■ Training ■ Other

2016 Projected Budget



Grant Award - \$1,490,986

Does not include Non-Federal share.

■ Personnel ■ Travel ■ Supplies ■ Contractual ■ Training & Technical Assistance ■ Other

Our Team and Our Partners

2015 Board of Directors

*Dr. Abigail Baxter
Mr. Eric B. Jefferson
Mrs. Suzy Hardy,
Ms. Alex Garrett,
Dr. Katrina Trammell, M.D.,
Mr. Micah Wheeler,
Ms. Linda Blassingame
Mr. Cleon Gulley
Mrs. Patricia Vanderpool (Emeritus)*

Senior Management

*Wendy McEarchern, Executive Director
Amy Barter, Finance Director
Kym Carroll, Early Head Start Director
Catherine Kreger, Director of Continuing Education and Training*

Early Head Start Partner Centers

*Dearborn YMCA Community Center
Goodwill Easter Seals CDC
Lighthouse Academy of Excellence
Nina Nicks Joseph CDC
Soaring Eagles Child Development Center
Starlight Child Development Center
Small Wonders Child Care & Learning Center*

Early Head Start Policy Council

*Rachel Alexander, Ciera Turner, Angel Hill,
Cleon Gulley, Alicia Richardson
Elizabeth Cummings, Marsha Harris,
Martha Joiner, Paula Summerville,
Alexis Johnson, Charis Hale, Faith Mack,
Xavier Henderson, Jerica Longmire,
Yvonne Smith, Brandi Watkins
Wakeshia Nelson, Leslie Williams,*

Funders

*Alabama Department of Human Resources
Community Foundation of South Alabama
United Way of Southwest Alabama*



US Department of Health & Human Services - Head Start Bureau

Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect





THANK
YOU