Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine


Coastal ACCESS

2008
Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine


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THANKS

Coastal ACCESS members would like to thank the County Commissioners in Waldo, Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties, and the Town Manager of Brunswick for designating Coastal ACCESS as the Local Council in Mid Coast Maine, making us eligible to apply for these federal grants.

We want to thank the staff at the Children’s Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services for their support and expertise during the implementation of these grants.

We thank all the child care providers for their participation, their eagerness to learn during these past six years, and their desire to provide quality care every day to children and families.

Coastal ACCESS also wishes to thank the parents and caregivers and all the children who have learned along with us and the child care providers. We believe the children have and will benefit from these grants, and we have built strong foundations and system changes to help children in our region tomorrow and in the future.

All photographs taken at child care programs in Mid Coast Maine that have benefited from activities funded from the Early Learning Opportunities Act grants.

Coastal ACCESS

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Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine through Coastal ACCESS

Marie Rawley, owner of Re’s Child Care in Waldoboro, is one of scores of child care providers, staff members, children and families who have participated in the many activities made possible by three federal grants to the Mid Coast region’s child care coalition, Coastal ACCESS.

Her statement, at right, captures the essence of what has been accomplished over the past six years by this regional collaborative effort. In 2001, Coastal ACCESS partners set a goal of working together with child care providers and parents to significantly increase the quality of care in child care centers, Head Start Centers, and family child care homes. Today, six years and three grants later, we have seen results of great benefit to mid coast’s children and families. In addition, a number of the initiatives started locally are being replicated or expanded throughout the state, and are improving quality within Maine and beyond to other states.

Coastal ACCESS is one of only four local councils throughout the United States to receive three federal Early Learning Opportunity Act (ELOA) grants, totaling $2.3 million over the past six years. These grants, from 2001 through 2007, were used to increase the quality of early childhood care and education in Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc and Waldo counties and in the towns of Brunswick and Harpswell in Cumberland County. This successful record results from a strong local collaboration, local government support from County Commissioners, and well-defined goals and strategies that continued to build on local successes.

Our Key Strategies

Each grant focused on specific areas and activities to increase the quality of child care programs in the Mid Coast region of Maine. Four key strategies included in all three grants were to:

1. Enhance early childhood literacy
2. Support programs in their progress toward meeting national accreditation standards
3. Increase professional development and the attainment of more early childhood degrees
4. Improve inclusive early childhood practices.
1. Promoting Early Literacy

Reading books, sharing stories and singing songs with young children have been shown to help children be ready to succeed in school by building their vocabulary, preparing them to be readers, and inspiring a love of learning. Here are some key results:

- 78% of children showed improvements in listening skills and 87% of children improved their ability to retell information from a story, according to child care providers surveyed as part of the Volunteer Reader Network.

- 96% of volunteers, teachers and child care providers surveyed reported that the Community Read Aloud successfully promotes the importance of reading with children. Over 300 volunteers participated each year in the one-day Community Read Aloud, reading to children in classrooms at 21 elementary schools and at 40 family child cares, child care centers, preschools and Head Start sites.

- More than 125 different child care providers participated in early literacy training series, and reported enthusiastically about how they expanded early literacy activities, integrating these with quality children’s books, art, math, science, and issues of diversity. Providers also reported increased communication with parents about their early literacy activities due to the trainings.

2. Meeting National Standards of Excellence and

3. Increasing Professional Development Opportunities

National research shows that meeting national accreditation standards and the education level of the child care provider are two significant indicators of quality. As part of increasing quality and meeting the standards, Coastal ACCESS also expanded the use of a research-based early education curriculum along with the latest in technology. We had significant results:

- Over the six years, our region went from having four child care centers and zero family child care homes nationally accredited to having 24 centers and 23 family child care homes nationally accredited. In addition, ten more programs are in process and six Centers have submitted for re-accreditation under new stricter standards.

- 128 professionals participated in a five-day training series on the nationally recognized, research-based Creative Curriculum. Of these programs, eight programs went on to be further trained and supported in how to document child progress using the on-line assessment tool CreativeCurriculum.net, and to use this technology to communicate regularly with parents, caregivers and the children’s future kindergarten teachers.

- The number of practitioners in the Maine Roads to Quality Registry with a Child Development Associate (CDA) or higher degree of education went from 41 in 2001 to 338 in 2007. 128 of these child care providers increased their early childhood education with the help of scholarship funds from the grants.
4. Improving Inclusive Early Childhood Practices

Coastal ACCESS focused on the issue of inclusion and, during the final grant period, piloted a new partnership program with the region’s mental health provider, a local parent support program, and four child care programs. The results were significant:

- New training opportunities were developed to support child care professionals to include children with special needs (physical, cognitive, developmental, medical and/or behavioral needs) with close to 200 professionals participating. $12,000 worth of developmentally appropriate materials were distributed to enhance early childhood inclusive practices.

- In our innovative Mental Health Child Care Partnership, child care program staff and the local mental health agency staff trained together and partnered with families to improve the children’s outcomes. Mental health clinicians provided consultation to child care staff in four centers and to individual families to support healthy social emotional development for all children, also assisting children with challenging behaviors to successfully remain in the programs.

LASTING CHANGES!

Quality Improvements Go BEYOND Mid Coast

The ELOA grants supported local initiatives, but these grants also created changes that have ripple effects on how early care and education is improving statewide and nationally. For example:

- A solid foundation created for a community-based Pre-K program: An innovative model program launched in 2006 at the Phippsburg Elementary School provided Pre-K options at four area child care programs. The model was adopted in part because all four programs used the same Creative Curriculum and were nationally accredited (as a result of the work through the ELOA grants), ensuring quality and consistency of care. Other Maine regions have looked to this model as they develop their own Pre-K programs.

- Mental Health Child Care Partnership—a state model: Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services is funding the continuation of the Mental Health Child Care Partnership pilot, and in 2007 replicated this model in Lewiston-Auburn.

- Cc.net training goes national: Bath’s YMCA Child Care Director has become a certified Teaching Strategies, Inc. national trainer and has made presentations at both a U.S. conference and to child care directors in Japan on the use of web-based cc.net both as an assessment tool and an important communication tool with parents, caregivers, and the children’s future kindergarten teachers.

- Growing Ideas tip sheets go national: Showcased at several national and international child care conferences, the Growing Ideas tip sheets have also resulted in over 100,000 hits on the website for the University of Maine’s Center for Community Inclusion and Disabilities Studies.

"The opportunities provided by the past three ELOA grants have led the Bath YMCA Child Care program to where it is today. We cannot speak of quality without mentioning the support of ELOA."

– Kathleen Seeley
Director, Bath YMCA Child Care
Building for the Future

Coastal ACCESS Partners are very proud of the work accomplished over the past six years as a result of funding from these three Early Learning Opportunities Act grants. Many of our projects are being continued, replicated, and/or have positively affected state and national initiatives. We have improved quality of care in our region in multiple ways, supported child care providers as professionals in early care and education, launched new pilots such as the use of Creative Curriculum.net and the Mental Health Child Care Partnership, and created systemic changes that will positively affect our region, our child care providers, and the thousands of children and families they serve for many years to come. These grants have provided a basis for quality in our region. We need to continue to improve the quality of all early care and education programs in our region so that all children can be ready to succeed in school and in life.

Coastal ACCESS: ELOA Grant Partners

The Child Care Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded three competitive Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grants to Coastal ACCESS, a regional collaborative of the statewide ACCESS (Alliance for Children’s Care, Education, and Support Services). The Coastal Access members below are local early care and education providers and advocates whose mission is to improve the lives of children in their early years by supporting those who care for them.

- Coastal Enterprises Inc.*
- Family Focus
- Glenwood Research *
- Maine Roads to Quality at the University of Southern Maine *
- Midcoast Maine Community Action, formerly Coastal Economic Development *
- Mid-Coast Resource Development Center *
- Peopleplace Cooperative Child Care Center
- Success By 6 at United Way of Mid Coast Maine *
- Sweetser *
- University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies *
- Waldo County Preschool and Family Services

* Funded partners in the 2005-2007 ELOA grant

Other partners in the first two grants included:
- Boothbay YMCA
- Coastal Community Action Program
- Tri-County Literacy “Read With Me” Family Literacy Project

Coastal ACCESS covers Waldo, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc and northern Cumberland Counties in the State of Maine. For more information contact Coastal ACCESS co-chairs Peter Lindsay at United Way of Mid Coast Maine: 207-443-9752, plindsay@uwmcm.org or Lee Parker at Family Focus: 207-386-1662, leep@familyfocusme.org. The full report, Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine is available on United Way of Mid Coast Maine’s website, www.uwmcm.org
A REPORT ON RESULTS:
Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine

Introduction

“I am better preparing children for school and for life,” says Marie Rawley, owner of Re’s Child Care in Waldoboro. A case study of Re’s Child Care is one of six included in this report that demonstrates how child care providers in child care centers and family child care homes in Mid Coast Maine took advantage of the myriad of opportunities during the last six years to improve the quality of early learning environments in our region.

What changed in our region of Maine? With the support of three federal grants, we increased the quality of care in child care centers, Head Start Centers, and family child care homes; we made significant systemic improvements and piloted new programs that have improved early care and education services statewide and nationally; and we have directly helped the children and families in our mid coast region.

The Children’s Bureau of the U. S. Health and Human Services awarded the Mid Coast region’s child care coalition Coastal ACCESS (Coastal Alliance for Children’s Care, Education, and Supporting Services) three Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grants, totaling $2.3 million over the past six years, to increase the quality of early childhood care and education in Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc and Waldo counties as well as the towns of Brunswick and Harpswell in Cumberland County. Coastal ACCESS is one of only four local councils in the country to receive three ELOA grants.

Each of the three grants focused on specific areas and activities to increase the quality of child care programs in the Mid Coast region of Maine. Four key strategies that were included in all three grants were to:

1. **Enhance** early childhood literacy;
2. **Support** programs in their progress toward meeting national accreditation standards;
3. **Increase** professional development and the attainment of more early childhood degrees;
4. **Improve** inclusive early childhood practices.

This report provides a summary of the key strategies: where we were when the first grant was awarded and where we are now. We list significant accomplishments in each of the four strategic areas, and show how these local initiatives have had positive ripple effects at the state and national levels.

These results show the power of a strong local collaboration partnered with community support. County Commissioners from Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox and Waldo Counties, and town officials from the Town of Brunswick in Cumberland County designated Coastal ACCESS as the eligible Local Council to apply for and coordinate ELOA grants. In addition, the Coastal ACCESS partners contributed in-kind resources to help implement the strategies, and the child care providers often worked longer hours and weekends in order to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Our accomplishments demonstrate an effective use of federal and local resources. Coastal ACCESS members are proud to share in this report our exciting improvements in quality early childhood care and education in Mid Coast Maine.
FOUR KEY STRATEGIES

Strategy #1: Enhancing Early Childhood Literacy

The ELOA grants required local councils to work on enhancing early childhood literacy as this has been shown to be a significant indicator for later success in school. Coastal ACCESS was able to build on successful initiatives already begun in this region.

**Goal:** To increase the number and diversity of early literacy activities in child care settings by providing research-based trainings using quality children’s books and by matching volunteer readers with child care programs.

**Starting Point:** Local kindergarten teachers in the fall of 2000 reported that 29% of children who entered school that fall were experiencing difficulties in basic literacy skills, including recognizing one’s own name, some letter awareness and beginning book sense.

**Action:** 126 professionals participated in the 18-hour training series, Care to Read, and each individual received 16 quality children’s books and resources on how to use them to take back to use with children.

**Result:** 94% of providers read aloud daily using the books and activities from the Care to Read training series.

“I work as a speech-language pathologist and have taken many courses and workshops on literacy. This rates way at the top as user-friendly and supportive, validating practices I already have in place and provides so many great, practical, useable, new and doable activities!”

— A Knox County Speech & Language Pathologist comments on the Care to Read training

**Action:** 66 professionals participated in the training series (21 hours), Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science. Each participant received an Educator Resource Guide, 18 children’s books, and a set of math and science materials for children valued at $300.

**Result:** Six months after the Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science training series, 80% of providers surveyed reported that they frequently use the materials provided through the training, use basic math vocabulary with preschool children and use picture books in many different ways to promote learning. Many also reported that they share the early literacy information with parents more because of these trainings.

“I would like to have more classes like Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science. Sharing ideas with others and working hands-on was great! The enrichment I received in these sessions definitely will be put to good use.”

— A Lincoln County ECE professional

Exploring shadows and shapes, an activity learned during the Mother Goose Cares About Math & Science training series.
“I encourage children to discuss variation in skin tones, hair color and disabilities...Living in Maine, children who do not travel may not be aware of different cultures. Having the materials (from Many Eyes, Many Voices) in the classroom is a step towards an awareness of differences.” — Child care provider

**Action:** 29 professionals attended six-hour series using children’s books to discuss diversity, called Many Eyes, Many Voices, offered by Maine Humanities Council.

**Result:** Six months after Many Eyes, Many Voices, 80% of respondents said they choose books that reflect different cultures, 80% have toys and props that are diverse, and 60% said they read books that include children or adults with disabilities.

**Action:** Volunteers visited child cares on a weekly basis and brought resources from the local libraries as part of the Success By 6 Volunteer Reader Network.

**Result:** Providers reported observing improved behaviors that they believe resulted from the weekly Volunteer Reader’s visits:

- 78% of children showed improvements in listening skills.
- 87% of children improved their ability to retell information from a story.

**Action:** Over 300 volunteers participated each year in the one-day Community Read Aloud event, reading to approximately 4,000 children in classrooms at 21 elementary schools and at 40 family child cares, child care centers, preschools and Head Start sites. This event promotes the importance of reading to young children.

**Result:** Surveys from the volunteers, child care providers and classroom teachers show that 96% of participants report that this event is an effective way to promote the importance of reading with children.

Other activities to promote early literacy included recruiting volunteers to read at Head Start sites in Waldo and Knox County through a partnership with Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), and enhancing the family literacy project “Read With Me” serving eight Head Start sites in Lincoln, Sagadahoc and the Town of Brunswick.

**Readers Comment...**

“I can’t think of a better way to get people from various parts of the community together with local children and teachers.”

— Sally Gray, Volunteer Reader from Bath, talks about the annual Community Read Aloud

“There’s no better way to excite kids about reading than to read to them.”

— Tom McCandless, Volunteer Reader from Georgetown
FOUR KEY STRATEGIES

Strategy #2: Meeting National Standards of Excellence

National research shows that meeting national accreditation standards and the use of a research-based curriculum are significant indicators of quality. Coastal ACCESS trained providers in the use of the web-based technology CreativeCurriculum.net and provided technical assistance for integrating technology in child care centers and family child care homes.

**Goal #1:** To increase the level of quality care and education at child care centers and family child care homes, by helping programs to meet national accreditation standards.

**Starting Point:** One of the definitive indicators of quality Early Childhood Education programs is quality programming for children backed by national standards of excellence. In 2001, our mid coast region had only four centers nationally accredited by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and no family child care homes in mid coast were accredited by National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC).

**Action:** Intensive on-site training and technical assistance was provided to accreditation cohorts*, and mini-grants were awarded to child care programs to purchase materials and equipment to meet national accreditation standards.

**Result:** By 2007, 24 centers were NAEYC accredited and 23 family child cares have been NAFCC accredited. Recently, NAEYC has changed their accreditation standards, making them even more challenging. Six child care centers have currently submitted for re-accreditation candidacy under these new standards with support from the ELOA grant partners. Ten family child care homes are also currently going through the accreditation process.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELOA Years</th>
<th>Child Care Centers Accredited</th>
<th>Family Child Care Homes Accredited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ELOA (2000)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2003</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2005</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2007</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently In Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Re-Accreditation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A “cohort” is a staffed support group with an established group of participants, focused on a specific issue or activity such as accreditation, in which participants learn from one another in addition to receiving expertise from the staff member.

“The Mid-Coast accreditation cohort was the most important part of my experience with accreditation...I cannot speak highly enough about how important this group of colleagues is. I know for certain I would not have had the ambition to go forward during some very trying times. I owe a great deal to this cohort process.”

— Sara Babbidge, Islesboro, Maine Preschool

Achieving national accreditation can take many years, longer than the terms of these grants. Mid Coast region now has the highest percentage of both child care centers and family child care homes accredited in the state.

Additionally, six family child care providers have been formally trained by the National Association of Family Child Care to be NAFCC Observers. These same providers also have been a part of a mentor cohort to offer support to other family child care providers who are in the accreditation process.
**Goal #2:** To increase capacity to promote learning readiness, through curriculum trainings and by using web-based technology.

**Starting Point:** One component of meeting national standards in early childhood care and education is by using a research-based curriculum. A 2003 survey of child care centers in the Mid-Coast region found only three (not including Head Start centers) using an established curriculum. Only Head Start centers and Brunswick Naval Air Station’s child care center were using the research-based *Creative Curriculum* in 2001. Two centers were using other such curricula (Bank Street Curriculum and Bright Horizons Curriculum.) Several centers were interested specifically in using *Creative Curriculum*, and several had already sent a few staff to national trainings, but these programs had not implemented the use of the curriculum into their programs. No family child care program had started using the curriculum and no program was using the web-based *CreativeCurriculum.net*.

In part because *Creative Curriculum* has been successfully used by Head Start centers at Midcoast Maine Community Action (formerly Coastal Economic Development) and at Coastal Community Action Program for many years, Coastal ACCESS set a goal to expand the use of the research-based *Creative Curriculum* throughout the region. To reach this goal, the region needed training in the curriculum and associated assessment tools, including *CreativeCurriculum.net*.

**Action:** A rigorous five-day training series was offered on the nationally recognized, research-based *Creative Curriculum*. This training was followed by on-site technical assistance.

**Result:** Large groups of professionals were trained:

- 21 family child care providers attended the series; each participant received 60 hours of follow-up technical assistance.
- 107 child care center teachers took the training
- 23 mentors from child care centers were trained to offer support.

Following the training, all survey respondents reported using *Creative Curriculum*.

Coastal ACCESS helped increase the use of technology in child care settings by partnering with the Women’s Business Center at Coastal Enterprises, Inc. WBC provided equipment and a good deal of technology assistance; this support made it possible to build distance learning modules for trainings and to implement *CreativeCurriculum.net* to improve assessments and communication with parents, caregivers, family counselors and kindergarten teachers.

"The *Creative Curriculum* gives a good foundation and evidence for families to see what the children are learning and where they are developmentally."

— A Knox County Child Care Center Director

Coastal ACCESS helped increase the use of technology in child care settings by partnering with the Women’s Business Center at Coastal Enterprises, Inc. WBC provided equipment and a good deal of technology assistance; this support made it possible to build distance learning modules for trainings and to implement *CreativeCurriculum.net* to improve assessments and communication with parents, caregivers, family counselors and kindergarten teachers.

While stationed in Iraq, this father followed his children’s progress and communicated with the child care staff online by using *CreativeCurriculum.net*!
FOUR KEY STRATEGIES

Strategy #3: Increasing Professional Development for Child Care Providers

Coastal ACCESS partners worked to increase the education levels of child care providers and to improve the leadership and management skills of center directors and administrators. The Maine Roads to Quality Registry provides a means to document and track the increases in education levels, and gives providers a way to track their personal educational goals and achievements.

Goal #1: To increase the level of professionalism within the early childhood education field, by providing scholarships for higher education and peer support groups for degree candidates.

Starting Point: A significant indicator of quality early childhood placements for children is staff qualifications. The education level of child care providers is an important criterion for accreditation and research links education levels directly to the quality of the program. In 2001, only 48 child care providers in our area had registered in the Maine Roads to Quality Registry, the core of Maine’s professional recognition and tracking system. The Registry keeps a record of each individual child care provider’s professional development in Maine and provides a track toward higher education degrees.

Action: Child care providers participating in any training supported by these grants were encouraged to join the Maine Roads to Quality Registry. Scholarship funds provided incentives to encourage providers to continue to seek educational degrees.

Result: The Maine Roads to Quality Registry has grown significantly from 2000 to 2007:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Registry Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of practitioners in the Registry with a CDA or higher degree of education went from 41 in 2001 to 338 in 2007. 128 of these child care providers increased their early childhood education with the help of scholarship funds from the grants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Registry Members, 2001</th>
<th>Registry Members, 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/GED</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development Associate (CDA)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree (AA/AAS)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree (BA/BS)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree (MA)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate (PhD)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By joining the Registry and using scholarship funds provided by the grants, providers were able to start tracking their educational achievements and view themselves as professionals on a career educational track.
Goal #2: To increase the level of professionalism within the early childhood education field, by providing leadership development for child care center directors.

Starting Point: Research shows that strong leadership skills are needed to motivate staff into making necessary quality improvement changes. Tools such as the Child Care Leadership Institute II trainings had been piloted in Maine only once prior to ELOA grant funding, and were not available to child care providers in the Mid Coast region.

Action: Two opportunities, specifically for child care directors, were offered:

1. The nationally recognized Program Administration Scale (PAS) cohort trained assessors how to measure early childhood leadership and management using this new tool. The training was made available to center-based directors who had demonstrated leadership in the field and to consultants who work with centers. These new assessors then use this Program Administration Scale with centers in the region to set goals for management improvements.

2. The advanced Child Care Leadership Institute II, a five-day training institute, was offered for the first time to all child care center directors in the Mid Coast region who had previously completed the Leadership I training. During these hands-on interactive sessions, participants learn the intricacies of center directing. An important element of this training was the opportunity to network with other directors, building long-term camaraderie and peer support.

Result: Fourteen assessors in the PAS cohort were trained to reliably administer the Program Administration Scale tool to assess program administration.

Several of the newly trained assessors used the PAS tool to work with seven child care center programs to increase quality in risk management, staff qualifications, external and internal communications, and supervision and performance appraisal. Participants also received mini-grant funds to purchase technology such as new computers, software, digital cameras and curriculum supplies.

Sixteen center directors participated in the Child Care Leadership Institute II series and received a strong set of resources to assist them in their day-to-day work running programs.

“The financial support received to support Early Childhood educators in the Mid-Coast area of Maine has made life-changing events happen in my program and changed the lives of teachers, children, families and our community. This funding enabled training, education, collaboration, support and increased quality to the areas of early childhood.”

— A Sagadahoc County Child Care Center Director

“The Leadership II opportunity was an incredibly valuable training that I have recommended heartily to others.”

— A Waldo County Child Care Center Director
FOUR KEY STRATEGIES

Strategy #4: Expanding Inclusive Early Childhood Practices

Coastal ACCESS focused on the issue of inclusion, and, with the resources provided by the final ELOA grant, piloted a new partnership between mental health clinicians and four child care programs.

Goal: To increase access to early learning opportunities for young children with special needs, including developmental delays.

Starting Point: According to our region’s Report of the 2002 School Readiness Survey, one out of five children entering kindergarten in the Mid Coast region was experiencing delays in social and emotional skill development. 22% of children demonstrated difficulties in social skills (i.e. ability to interact with other peers in school setting, ability to problem solve and ability to maintain positive peer relationships) and 21% of children were experiencing difficulties in behavioral skills (i.e. attention to tasks, demonstrating self-control, following daily routines).

Action: A wide variety of new professional development opportunities were created to promote the inclusion of children with special needs and behaviors. Close to 200 professionals participated in a variety of workshops and $12,000 worth of developmentally appropriate materials were distributed to enhance early childhood inclusive practices. Specific explanations are offered below:

Result:

• Expert consultation was provided to 12 child care sites caring for children with special needs, enabling 27 children to remain in their child care programs while improving the learning environment for 186 other children in those programs.

• The Growing Ideas model for providing information on inclusive child care practices for child care programs began in 2003. Ideas for tipsheets on issues such as federal laws around including children with special needs, developmentally appropriate practice, guidance, social emotional development and challenging behaviors (aggression, biting) were based on parent and child care provider calls for assistance to the State of Maine’s regional Child Care Resource Development Centers (RDCs). Twelve specific “hot topics” in child care were identified and tipsheets addressing these issues were developed and distributed by the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS). The tipsheets then led to the creation of a resource toolkit for the RDCs, consisting of the laminated tipsheets, a selection of topical articles, books for children and educators, and a comprehensive list of recommended resources. Information from these toolkits was made available to all providers in the Mid Coast area. Three more tipsheets were developed on topics of early literacy, child care business and daily transitions. The tipsheets were placed on the CCIDS website and have been accessed nationally. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has included the tipsheets as a tool for teachers in their recent publication “Teaching Young Children.”

Soon after the toolkits were developed, Growing Ideas expanded to include interactive, web-based training modules for family child care providers using the “Moodle” course management system. Six family child care providers participated in fourteen sessions of the Growing Ideas distance modules. One provider shared her thoughts on the benefits of the modules: “Learning how to handle behavioral problems such as biting, swearing, and hitting. I really liked the fact that the training taught us how to detect things and then gave us tools to help solve them. The websites were also very informative.”

• Thirteen early childhood professionals were trained as mentors to assist programs with inclusive practices. The mentors provided assistance to center-
based and family child care providers throughout Mid Coast Maine on topics related to including children with special needs, developing policies and procedures, accreditation, higher education, and operating a child care business.

• The Mid Coast Mentors helped design a two-day training retreat, “Plan from the Start: Intentional Design for Early Childhood Learning.” Using the principles of Universal Design, participants learned how to set up their programs to accommodate diverse learners. Workshops provided information on positive guidance, observation and documentation, embedding child’s individual objectives into daily activities and strategies to incorporate musical experiences. 40 providers from child care centers attended the training as well as 18 family child care providers. Each participant received two hundred dollars worth of materials (CD’s, books, musical instruments, toys and art materials) to promote early childhood learning for all children, including those with disabilities.

• Fifty child care professionals attended one of the “Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Environments” retreats, featuring two days of interactive workshops on creating natural outdoor environments, effects of nutrition on child growth and development, music and movement, and children’s yoga. Activities taught in the workshops promote attachment, social skills while playing, self-regulation and spatial awareness—all skills necessary for healthy development. Each participant received materials (CDs, books, resources) to implement what was learned. 23 programs were provided with an average of 5 hours of on-site technical assistance to support music and yoga activities, positively affecting up to 280 children.

• The Mental Health Child Care Partnership pilot focused on providing support to child care staff and individual children and families to promote healthy social emotional development and to assist children with challenging behaviors to successfully remain in programs. The goals of this pilot included capacity building of child care staff and the ability to intervene early with a child and the parents so that the challenging behaviors do not develop into long-term mental health issues for the child or the family. Four child care center-based programs, a mental health agency and the local Parent Program participated in this innovative pilot project. A total of 19 individuals from these programs participated in 60 hours of training on issues related to behavior of young children and promoting healthy social-emotional development. Mental health clinicians were then paired with a child care center to provide regularly scheduled program and individual child consultation up to two days a week for 2-4 hours per session. This model positively affected a total of 210 children with 23 children referred for concerns and 7 children receiving individualized services from the mental health clinicians. No child was expelled from a participating child care program during this pilot.

Providers practice music and movement activities during the two-day retreat at Camp Kieve in Nobleboro.

“For several years I have been learning about specific needs in young children as they appeared in my program. Now at last I have been given some solid ways to help these children while they are in the classroom by implementing good, wholesome, therapeutic activities into the curriculum that will benefit all children.”

—A Sagadahoc County Child Care Center Director
OTHER MID COAST ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSES

In addition to the four key strategies addressed during each of our three ELOA grants, Coastal ACCESS partners initiated several activities that set the stage for further improvements.

• A second survey and report on School Readiness was completed. Mid Coast kindergarten teachers were polled; there was a high return rate of 74%. Report of the 2002 School Readiness Survey was produced in June 2003 by Success By 6 at United Way of Mid Coast Maine. It was prepared by Scott Brezovsky and David Silvernail of the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation, College of Education and Human Development, University of Southern Maine. This report had three general findings:

1. A substantial number of students in the Mid Coast region are arriving at kindergarten ready to learn;
2. Almost one-third of the students arrived at kindergarten in the fall of 2002 experiencing difficulties in three or more of the eleven school readiness areas studied, and
3. Teachers reported that factors that affect school readiness the most include the quality of parental interaction with children, early exposure to quality learning environments, and the importance of early literacy.

Coastal ACCESS based our second and third grant applications on the report’s findings. The report has also helped others apply for funding, and became a significant component in the Maine Department of Education’s study Maine’s Recommendations for Core Indicators of School Readiness 2004.

• A forum was convened to improve transitions from early childhood settings to the kindergarten classroom. During the forum, “Building Bridges for Smooth Transitions: Responding to All Children’s Needs,” kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators participated in reviewing the latest national research, common kindergarten school readiness screening measures, and local existing models of transition to schools. These efforts to improve transitions later received a boost when several child cares began using the CreativeCurriculum.net (see page 5).

• United Way’s “Born Learning” campaign was launched locally. United Way of America in partnership with the Ad Council and Civitas developed the national “Born Learning” public awareness campaign and its related education research-based products. Born Learning materials distributed to parents and caregivers emphasize positive parental interactions with children, and complement the work at Head Start Centers, child cares, home visiting services, hospitals, physicians offices, libraries, and schools. Maine’s Public Health Nursing Program found these materials useful locally and decided to distribute them to parents statewide through the state’s network of Public Health Nurses.

Finally, it is important to note that, as part of these grants, Glenwood Research conducted research on all activities for both the 2003 and 2005 ELOA grants. This research provided the basis for all of our reports to the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as well as the backbone of this report.

Outside play at Laugh and Learn Preschool on North Haven Island.
LASTING CHANGES!
Quality Improvements Affect State and National Practices

While the ELOA grants support local initiatives, these grants also created changes that have ripple effects for improving early care and education statewide and nationally. Below are excellent examples.

Statewide Changes

• **Mentor Project replicated**: Family child care mentors have been traveling throughout Maine to talk to other family child care providers about the benefits of becoming NAFCC accredited. The Mid Coast Family Child Care Mentor Project was the first in the state to be developed and will be replicated statewide.

• **A solid foundation created for community-based Pre-K program**: In order for many school districts to partner with community-based child care programs in developing early education programs for four-year-olds, a prerequisite is for the child care community to prove that they can offer quality educational settings. Being nationally accredited and trained in a scientifically-based curriculum such as *Creative Curriculum* has enabled several Mid Coast programs to offer Pre-K placements for four-year-olds, better preparing them for kindergarten. In Maine, universal Pre-K programs are promoted as a goal of the current Commissioner of Education and the Governor, and many programs have been started over the past six years.

In the Mid Coast region, an innovative community-based model was launched in 2006 at the Phippsburg Elementary School, part of School Union 47. This initiative, titled CHOICES, provided Pre-K options at one of four area child care programs, and the school adopted this model in part because each of the four programs used the same *Creative Curriculum* and were nationally accredited (both results of the work through these ELOA grants), ensuring quality and consistency of care. Other regions of the state have looked to this model as they continue to develop Pre-K programs.

• **Mental Health Child Care Partnership becomes a model for the State**: The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (Childhood Behavioral Health and Early Childhood Division) is funding the continuation of the Mental Health Child Care Partnership pilot for programs that have been involved in the Mid Coast region, and has committed to replicate this model, with state funding, in the Lewiston-Auburn area. The goal is to eventually make these services available statewide.

• **Growing Ideas Toolkit now available**: Using materials developed and lessons learned from the Early Learning Opportunities Act grant activities, toolkits and printed tipsheets have been produced and made available statewide. With funding support from the Maine Department of Human Services Office of Child and Family Services, completed toolkits are now available at all eight Maine Child Care Resource Development Center offices and in two regional child care licensing offices. Training and follow-up technical assistance has been provided to both groups to support their understanding and use of the materials.

• **Web-based training replicated beyond Mid Coast Maine**: A web-based train-the-trainer series is being planned statewide for trainers who are interested in using a model similar to Growing Ideas to promote web-based training statewide.

• **Mentor Curriculum developed**: Maine Roads to Quality has written and printed a 30-hour curriculum to promote family child care mentorship with a special focus on accreditation support, to be available statewide in 2007-2008. It will focus on training mentors to work with protégés going through NAFCC accreditation. This training will draw providers statewide to help build capacity for NAFCC accreditation mentoring throughout Maine. Mentors who are trained NAFCC observers can do “mock” observations for providers in the accreditation process. Money has been added to the Maine Roads to Quality budget to pay providers to do these observations.
National Implications

• Cc.net training goes national, international: Local Bath YMCA Child Care Director Kathleen Seeley has become a certified Teaching Strategies, Inc. national trainer and has presented at a national conference on the use of web-based cc.net both as an assessment tool and an important communication tool with parents, caregivers, and the children’s future kindergarten teachers. In the fall of 2007, Ms. Seeley visited child care programs in Japan to share her experiences with Creative Curriculum.net and to demonstrate how it can help with communications among providers, teachers, parents and other of the children’s caregivers.

• New Program Administration Scale is piloted: The Mid Coast region was one of the first in the nation to use the Program Administration Scale tool. As a result of trying the tool in pre and post assessments, the Program Administration Scale cohort of centers was able to give the developers of the tool feedback on tool improvements, benefiting programs nationally.

• Growing Ideas Tipsheets go national: The Growing Ideas Tipsheets have been showcased at several national and international child care conferences and have also resulted in over 100,000 hits on the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disabilities Studies web site.

• The National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) supports mentor curriculum: NAFCC has viewed the Maine Roads to Quality curriculum on Family Child Care Mentoring and has allowed Maine Roads to use their materials in the writing of the mentor curriculum. Once the curriculum has been piloted in Maine, the curriculum will be given to NAFCC for national distribution.

Building for the Future

Coastal ACCESS Partners are very proud of our work over the past six years with the help of these three Early Learning Opportunities Act grants. Many of our projects are being continued, replicated, and/or have positively affected state and national initiatives. We have improved quality of care in our region in multiple ways, supported child care providers as professionals in early care and education, launched new pilots such as the Creative Curriculum.net and the Mental Health Child Care Partnership, and created systemic changes that will positively affect our region, our child care providers, and the thousands of children and families they serve for many years to come. These grants have provided a basis for quality in our region. We need to continue to improve the quality of all early care and education programs in our region so that all children can be ready to succeed in school and in life.
Six Case Studies

The case studies that follow demonstrate how the ELOA grants have helped four child care centers and two family child care homes in the Mid Coast region make great strides toward quality and excellence in their field of early care and education.

Case Study #1

Belfast Area Children’s Center

“The scholarships and salary supplements for higher education that ELOA provided has meant so much to the staff,” says Barbara Kennedy, Executive Director of Belfast Area Children’s Center. “Many staff saw this as a true incentive to further their education, and as a result of the education received, staff became more professional and informed.”

Other professional development opportunities like the five-day Creative Curriculum series and Leadership I & II also made a difference in the programming at Belfast Area Children’s Center. “Having an established curriculum such as Creative Curriculum supports reflective practice and deliberate curriculum planning that in turn translates into children learning and developing in ways that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful. Also, having an established curriculum seemed necessary in order for our program to become re-accredited with the new NAEC standards.”

“The leadership training,” Barbara explains, “really helped me to feel more confident about my new role as an Executive Director and helped me to make changes that were needed while honoring the history and uniqueness of Belfast Area Children’s Center.”

Staff intentionally plan for literacy-rich experiences and use what they have learned from various literacy trainings in their practice. “Early literacy has created a cultural shift within the program,” states Barbara. “Teachers have a better understanding of pre-literacy skills and their importance in preparing children for school. Literacy techniques are now woven throughout the children’s day with a special focus on encouraging communication skills.”

Belfast Area Children’s Center has been nationally accredited since 1998. Program staff and parents are an integral part of the accreditation process. “Accreditation has provided self-initiation among staff. A good example of this has been in their ability to complete classroom portfolios that really showcase all the learning and development that happens in classrooms. Parents are involved in the decisions involving the center. The Parent Advisory Group provides input into annual goal setting and program review,” Barbara explains.

What other activities have supported the Belfast Area Children’s Center?

• Participation in retreats to promote inclusive child care settings and collegiality among staff.
• On-site assistance from the University of Maine’s Center for Community Inclusion and Disabilities Studies.
• On-site yoga, music and movement instruction to include staff, children and interested families.
• Mini-grant materials to assist with accreditation standards that included safe, durable tricycles for outside play, child-size tables and chairs, and multi-cultural materials.

Belfast Area Children’s Center is a NAEYC accredited child care center located in Waldo, Maine serving 49 children ages 6 weeks to age five. Belfast Area Children’s Center has been providing care for young children since 1973.
Case Study # 2: Bath YMCA Child Care

“We have learned so much from the different grant partners about how to successfully integrate children with all sorts of needs into our program,” says Bath YMCA Child Care Director Kathleen Seeley. The Y has children with diabetes, autism, and severe behavioral issues, and “we used to have to react on the spot when a child’s behavior created chaos in the classroom. Through the Mental Health Child Care Partnership, our staff has learned how to detect a potential problem early, integrate that child better, and bring in help from the community early, not waiting for a crisis. We’re working closer with the families and all the children have benefited in our program. Now instead of dealing with a crisis caused by one child, we can work with all the children in fun and creative activities, improving all the children’s readiness for school.”

With enthusiasm, Kathleen continues. “And we really embraced the Creative Curriculum. It changed our daily activities, how we document a child’s progress and how we communicate now with parents and caregivers. It’s a great curriculum and the children are really thriving with the new activities and overall changes.”

Coastal ACCESS brought national Creative Curriculum trainers to Maine, and staff at the Bath YMCA learned how to use the curriculum and its on-line component cc.net. It has made a difference: “We had a father serving in Iraq who was able to check in on-line and read what his son and daughter did that day at the Y, and see artwork that demonstrated their latest milestone.” This family’s experience was one of three local success stories highlighted in the 2005 Campaign Video at United Way of Mid Coast Maine, which was shown to thousands throughout the Mid Coast area. Kathleen adds, “We also had a divorced parent living in Pennsylvania who loved learning about his child’s daily progress, and even local parents working full time or two jobs have been more involved with the child care staff and their children because of cc.net. This really helps us focus and document the progress of each individual child, a great preparation for kindergarten!”

What else changed at the YMCA because of ELOA grants?
Kathleen has stepped up from an Associates Degree in Early Childhood to pursuing her Masters in the field, thanks to ELOA scholarships and peer supports. She also has gone from learning about the use of the Creative Curriculum to becoming one of the national trainers, teaching others to successfully use the curriculum and cc.net with staff and families.

Y Child Care staff have benefited from:
• The Volunteer Reader Network and Community Read Aloud—with volunteers bringing children’s books and reading with the children.
• Care to Read and Mother Goose early literacy trainings.
• Scholarships for staff professional development.
• NAEYC accreditation cohort, resulting in accreditation.
• Mini-grants to help provide classroom resources that helped meet accreditation standards.
• Mental Health Child Care Partnership—one of four programs in this pilot project.

Bath YMCA Child Care program offers two on-site programs for preschoolers including Y Preschool (part-day preschool option) and Enrichment Center (full-day preschool option). The Bath YMCA Child Care program is NAEYC accredited.
Case Study # 3:
Re’s Child Care

“It is amazing how much I have used the knowledge and ideas gained at ELOA training opportunities in my college coursework,” explains Marie Rawley, proprietor of Re’s Child Care in Waldoboro. “Taking the Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science course helped me develop several science units that were appropriate to preschoolers for the science methods class that I am currently taking. The course really helps take theory into practice by giving practical ideas to promote early learning.”

Marie had her high school diploma when ELOA funding first became available. Throughout the six years of ELOA, Marie went on to earn her CDA, then articulated those credits into an Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education. Now she is enrolled in a Mid Coast bachelors cohort sponsored by the University of Maine—Farmington. “So many of us were ready for bachelors classes, I think that UMaine figured it was worthwhile to sponsor a bachelors degree level cohort in the Mid Coast area.”

Due to the education she has received, Marie now sees herself as a true Early Childhood professional. She serves on the State of Maine Child Care Advisory Council and co-chairs a sub-committee on Maine’s Quality Rating System. She has also testified at the State of Maine Legislature on the importance of Maine’s early childhood professional development system and the importance of professional development on program quality. “Getting better educated in Early Childhood Education along with becoming nationally accredited really changed the quality of my program. I now know that I am offering a developmentally appropriate, quality program for children where meaningful child-led experiences are the main priority. I feel confident that I am better preparing children for school and for life.”

What else changed at Marie’s child care home?

By participating in many early literacy trainings and the Success By 6 Volunteer Reader program, Marie now realizes, “Books are not just for bedtime. There are many ways to extend favorite books both inside and outside. I also now understand the importance of print and label items in the environment. I do a lot more in getting children to recognize names and put their words on paper whenever we are telling stories or sharing our learning.”

Marie has participated in other opportunities made possible by funding and peer support that grew out of the ELOA funding:

- Creative Curriculum training specific to Family Child Care providers.
- CreativeCurriculum.net pilot.
- NAFCC Accreditation cohort and mentor training.
- Serving as a NAFCC Accreditation mentor.
- Inclusive child care practice training series, including “Universal Design for Learning” and “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, Healthy Environments.”
- Mini grant funds to help Marie design a child-size bathroom in her child care space, purchase developmentally appropriate materials to promote early learning and purchase a safe, durable outside structure.
- Scholarships to achieve a CDA credential, AA degree and now a Bachelor’s degree.

Marie has been in business since 1996 and first became NAFCC accredited in 2003 and re-accredited in 2006. She offers preschool programming for three and four-year-olds and also provides before and after school care.
Judy and Debbie Sawyer, proprietors of Quality Day Care (and sister-in-laws), have been providing care for children since the early 1980s. Quality Day Care, located in the town of Warren, first became accredited in 2002 and re-accredited in 2005, and each time Judy and Debbie made quality improvements to better meet the standards. “The standards have created a rich, safe, inclusive environment,” says Debbie. “They really have become a way of life for us. The trainings provided on inclusive child care settings and the on-site technical assistance really helped us make adaptations to the environment that helped all children become more successful and tolerant of one another. These adaptations decreased frustration levels and increased an understanding of individual needs in ways that help us each day.” “Also, we are more aware of community resources,” notes Judy. “We can really help parents get the services they need for their children to succeed.”

Due to their experience with NAFCC accreditation, Judy and Debbie are now mentors to those going through the process. “It is important to share our experiences if we want the quality of care to be improved for children in our region. It helps the reputation of all child care programs if we all offer quality programs,” says Judy. “We feel it is very important to express to new providers the importance of getting involved with professional development opportunities and cohorts to gain not only knowledge but the support needed to make programs better. As many providers in the area begin thinking of retirement, it is vital to know that parents have quality options for their children and the greatest gift we experienced providers can give is assistance to those who can provide these options.” Judy and Debbie offer mock observations, CDA support, on-site visits, ideas for program improvement, business advice and personal experiences to their protégés. “We really try to model to our protégés what our NAFCC accreditation cohort facilitator provided to us: immediate feedback without overwhelming them,” explains Debbie. “The work we do with new providers make us evaluate our own program to ensure that we are truly abiding by the standards.”

Judy and Debbie have earned their CDA credential, which they promote in their work with their protégés. “We are always expressing that higher education is critical and attainable even for family child care providers and that parents do take notice of the credentials of providers.”

**What other activities have made a difference at Quality Day Care?**

Both Judy and Debbie participated in literacy training opportunities including, *Care to Read* and *Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science*. Books that have been favorites of Judy, Debbie and the children are now used in new ways. “We now extend books throughout the curriculum. Books are no longer just read, but are tools that open the door to many activities. The children have become so used to incorporating books into their day that they use books on their own in other areas,” says Judy. “Questions and discussions about books are a part of the routine, which we feel helps build strong comprehension skills for later learning.”

Parents are made aware of literacy activities and books used during the day through daily postings and through parent newsletters. Families are also encouraged to share their favorite books.

Quality Day Care was also a Home Start site for nine years offering comprehensive Head Start services to eligible three and four-year-olds.
Staff at Family Focus has always treasured books and the world they can open for a child, but through the vast array of professional development opportunities provided by the ELOA grants, teachers are now taking literacy experiences outside of the book for children,” explains Sheila Youmans, Family Focus's Children's Services Director. Family Focus operates centers in both Bath and Brunswick, and also offers before and after school programs in area schools. Sheila continues, “Storytelling, flannel board stories, big books, child environments that are labeled with print and lots of rich conversations are very much apart of the everyday experience for the children.”

“Our long history of partnership with Success By 6 has provided our children with classroom visits from Volunteer Readers for over five years,” Sheila adds. “Children really know when it’s time for their special reader to come, and look forward to seeing their bag of books. The children are even found imitating their special reader, reading to a group of children during dramatic play time.”

Staff at Family Focus recognize through training experiences like Mother Goose Cares About Math and Science and Care to Read that providing a literacy-rich environment, beginning with infants and toddlers, better prepares children for school. Family Focus recently sponsored a community literacy event at the local library for children and families to celebrate “The Week of the Young Child” with a special focus on how to choose books for the different ages and stages.

Sheila has also noticed a big change in staff. “Degreed staff members are able to bring richer experiences for the children by turning early childhood theory into practice. Many experiences have gone from teacher-focused and directed to child-focused and directed. Those that have completed a degree show a great deal of pride in their achievement.” Twelve Family Focus staff members have either received or were working toward higher degrees in the six-year grant period. “Even though I already had a Bachelor’s degree in another field, I decided to go back to school myself to get a Bachelor’s in Early Childhood. I feel I have been a role model to my staff that learning is definitely a life-long experience,” states Sheila.

What other activities have helped Family Focus strive toward excellence?

- Participating in the five-day training series on Creative Curriculum for both preschool and infant/toddler.
- Being a pilot site for using the on-line child assessment tool, CreativeCurriculum.net.
- Participating in the Mental Health Child Care Partnership.
- Participating in the NAEYC cohorts. Family Focus now has a tool to help organize work around the NAEYC standards and to document progress. One Family Focus site is NAEYC accredited and another is in the process.
- Receiving mini-grants from accreditation cohorts to help purchase materials and equipment necessary for program enrichment and for maintaining accreditation standards.
- Scholarship support to enable staff achieve higher education.
- Participation in Program Administration Scale cohort to improve administrative practices.

Family Focus is a non-profit agency providing affordable community-based services for families and children in Mid Coast. Family Focus Children's Services offers two early childhood learning centers serving 50 children from infancy to age five. Family Focus has been providing child care since 1985. The Bath early learning center was NAEYC-accredited in 2005.
“Laugh and Learn Preschool staff was fortunate enough to attend the Creative Curriculum training series before the preschool was open for business,” explains Keely Felton, Program Director of Laugh and Learn Preschool located on the island of North Haven. “Since we were a new program we were able to start our program with a curriculum framework in place to promote children’s growth and development. Having the Creative Curriculum as our base really allowed us to explain to parents the importance of providing rich experiences through play to parents who were anxious to have their children ready for school.”

After implementing the Creative Curriculum for a year, Laugh and Learn Preschool became a pilot site for CreativeCurriculum.net. “C.C.net’ really helped parents to actually see their child’s accomplishments and progress rather quickly, which helped to alleviate their worry of what their children were learning. Having a scientifically-based curriculum and child assessment system reassured me as a new director that Laugh and Learn was truly a program providing quality services.”

Soon after becoming involved in Creative Curriculum, Laugh and Learn Preschool began the NAEYC accreditation process. “It was interesting. When I was filling out the Creative Curriculum training registration, there was a box to check off on whether or not your program was interested in learning more about NAEYC accreditation so I checked off the box without really knowing what I was checking,” Keely explains. “Once we started the process, I realized what a valuable experience it truly was and how much the standards helped us to craft our policies and procedures. Staff made environmental changes to enhance the quality of the program right away and many new materials were purchased with mini-grant funds. Without the support of the accreditation facilitator and the ability to purchase new materials, I am not sure we would have been able to achieve national accreditation. Being an island community, we were unable to attend all the accreditation cohort support meetings and it was wonderful to have the facilitator come on-site and provide that assistance.”

Laugh and Learn Preschool’s ability to show that they are a program with national standards and a reputable curriculum and assessment system enabled them to become a Head Start collaborative site with the Knox County Head Start program allowing the children of North Haven to receive Head Start services.

What else helped this island community develop a new quality center?

• The accreditation mini-grant funding helped Laugh and Learn Preschool transform their preschool classroom of donated materials and equipment, to a program enhanced with durable child-size furniture, blocks, art materials and storage, books, child-size shelving and props for the dramatic play area.

• Many community members recently participated in the island training of Born to Read resulting in six regularly scheduled volunteer readers who visit Laugh and Learn Preschool.

• The island communities of North Haven and Islesboro recently collaborated in sponsoring an early childhood island conference. The literacy training, Many Eyes, Many Voices was offered enabling many teachers to participate in literacy training to promote...
anti-bias and diversity in preschool settings. All participants received several new children’s books to bring back to their classrooms.

Waterman’s Community Center was open to the public on the island of North Haven in 2004 offering programs for young children, teens, and senior citizens with a special focus on the arts and enrichment. A successful program of Waterman’s Community Center is Laugh and Learn Preschool, a NAEYC accredited program for toddlers and preschoolers. Laugh and Learn Preschool offers Head Start programming to all preschool children that attend.

Busy learners at Waterman’s.

Big Changes at Waterman’s Community Center: A Great Example of a Transformation to Quality!

The accreditation mini-grant funding and the technical assistance that came with accreditation support helped transform Laugh and Learn Preschool on North Haven Island. Previously, their preschool classroom consisted of donated materials and equipment. Now the program has been enhanced with durable child-size furniture, blocks, art materials and storage, books, child-size shelving and props for the dramatic play area.

Then
- TV is prominent.
- Open alley down the middle encourages running.
- The table and benches were unstable and too low for children.
- Few play areas set up.
- Children’s work not visible in program.

Now
- Entrance encompasses a welcome area and space for cubbies.
- Items on the wall reflect children’s art work and interests.
- Classroom is labeled to encourage literacy.
- TV is gone.
- Space arranged to encourage play (New playground outside for running!)
- Stable chairs and child appropriate tables added.
- Interest areas and ample play equipment set up.
The Child Care Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded three competitive Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grants to Coastal ACCESS, a regional collaborative of the statewide ACCESS (Alliance for Children’s Care, Education, and Support Services). The Coastal Access members below are local early care and education providers and advocates whose mission is to improve the lives of children in their early years by supporting those who care for them.

- Coastal Enterprises Inc.*
- Family Focus
- Glenwood Research *
- Maine Roads to Quality at the University of Southern Maine *
- Midcoast Maine Community Action, formerly Coastal Economic Development *
- Mid-Coast Resource Development Center *
- Peopleplace Cooperative Child Care Center
- Success By 6 at United Way of Mid Coast Maine *
- Sweetser *
- University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies *
- Waldo County Preschool and Family Services

* (Funded partners in the 2005-2007 ELOA grant)

Other partners in the first two grants included:
- Boothbay YMCA
- Coastal Community Action Program
- Tri-County Literacy “Read With Me” Family Literacy Project

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. served as the fiscal agent and project coordinators for the first two ELOA grants. Midcoast Maine Community Action (formerly Coastal Economic Development Corporation) served as the fiscal agent for the third grant and the Director of Success By 6 at United Way of Mid Coast Maine served as the project coordinator.

Coastal ACCESS covers Waldo, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc and northern Cumberland Counties in the State of Maine.

For more information contact Coastal ACCESS co-chairs Peter Lindsay at United Way of Mid Coast Maine: 207-443-9752, plindsay@uwcm.org or Lee Parker at Family Focus: 207-386-1662, leep@familyfocusme.org

The full report, Six Years of Improvements in Quality Early Care and Education in Mid Coast Maine, and a separate Executive Summary is available on United Way of Mid Coast Maine’s website, www.uwcm.org

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