During the 2009-2011 fiscal years, the Maine Roads to Quality Accreditation Project was pleased to be made a steward of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds from the Department of Health and Human Services. One of the purposes of this stimulus funding was to create mini-grant awards, small equipment and quality improvement grants, to child care programs to improve the quality of programs for children and staff.
Mini-Grant Money and Quality Improvement

As MRTQ program staff reflected upon the use of the ARRA mini-grants one thing that stood out was how thoughtful, creative and cost effective programs were as they made decisions about the best way to use the mini-grant money. Because of space limitations, we have chosen to highlight only a few projects in this report. It is important to state, however, there are many more notable projects to feature, and upon request, MRTQ is happy to provide additional program outcomes from his grant to interested parties. This money was truly well spent and represents positive, long lasting quality improvements to the child care environments, a solid investment in Maine.

It is important to highlight the degree of technical assistance that MRTQ project facilitators used to support the programs not only through the accreditation process, but also through the planning and implementation of the mini-grant award. It was engaging and educational for the facilitators and program staff to be able to work together in this way. Programs were asked to attach an accreditation standard to the items purchased; this was part of the eligibility for the grant award. By doing this, it was easy to tie the purchases to quality standards and to help program leaders see the importance of using the money for quality improvement. This combination of technical assistance and mini grant funding provided a catalyst for programs to make further improvements in their programming. Additionally, it is also of note that many programs used funds of their own to extend and deepen the quality improvement activities.
Mini-Grant Money and Quality Improvement

Mini-Grant Award Distribution, by Program Type

- Family Child Care (NAFCC): 46%
- Center Based (NAEYC): 42%
- School Age (COA): 12%

Mini-Grant Funds Awarded to NAEYC Center Based Accredited Programs:
- 19 programs were accredited for the first time
- 4 programs were re-accredited
- 25 programs are in the process of initial accreditation

Mini-Grant Funds Awarded to NAFCC Family Child Care Accredited Programs:
- 26 programs were accredited for the first time
- 14 programs were re-accredited
- 16 programs are in the process of initial accreditation

Mini-Grant Funds Awarded to COA School Age Accredited Programs:
- 10 programs were accredited for the first time
- 4 programs were re-accredited
Mini-Grant Money, Quality Improvement and Technical Assistance

“To me, the bathroom project at Home Sweet Home Child Care is a poignant example of the importance of allocating quality improvement mini-grant money, relationship building between a provider and a facilitator, and the importance of technical assistance in the mini-grant application process. Initially Tricia submitted a mini-grant application for a portable sink. The Home Sweet Home facility is in the daylight basement of Tricia’s home. I knew that Tricia and her husband had built their house, and I also knew that climbing the stairs each time a child needed to wash hands or use the toilet disrupted the flow of the day and made meeting accreditation supervision standards a challenge. With this in mind, I contacted Tricia to see if she was interested in a permanent bathroom rather than just the portable sink. The quote for the portable sink was quite expensive and it was conceivable that they could put a bathroom in for just a bit more money if they did the work themselves. The rest is history. Home Sweet Home now has a bathroom on the same floor level as the childcare space.”

–Sonja Howard, Maine Roads to Quality Accreditation Director

“During the seven plus years that I have owned my child care, I have had to rely on the upstairs bathroom for myself and the children in my care. Now that I have a permanent bathroom in my facility (due to the grant money), I have been able to spend more of my time with the children. It has provided a safer solution for potty training and supervision, as well as a more sanitary environment as I am able to monitor this better and give them time instead of a rushed experience. I could not be more appreciative of the mini-grant! Thank you, thank you!" –Tricia Cesena, Family Child Care Provider in Ripley, ME
4,096 children and 718 staff members were positively impacted by the purchases made with the mini-grant awards. While these numbers, on their own, are large, it is yet to be known how many more children and staff will be impacted in the future. The types of purchases made were primarily for items that will last a long time; new outside climbers, outside play spaces, heavy duty tricycles, and inside lofts are some examples. These items will continue to improve the lives of children and staff for many years.
### Top Standards Targeted for Each Content Area Addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area #1</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>1.15</th>
<th>Open communication with parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Area #2</td>
<td>The Environment</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>Enough materials to meet needs of all developmental ages served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Safe outdoor equipment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Program physical set up</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>Books for all children under two</td>
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<td>2.37</td>
<td>Materials that promote language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Area #3</td>
<td>Developmental Learning Activities</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>Daily opportunity for large motor activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>Access to books everyday</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>Books are used to stimulate conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>Opportunities to explore the natural and physical environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>Using music with children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>Promoting pretend play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Area #4</td>
<td>Health &amp; Safety</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Equipment is safe and in good repair</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>Diapering / toileting areas are separate from food areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>Diapering area improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>Running water availability for bathroom and diapering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Area #5</td>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Practices</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>Provider has information about community resources that offer services to parents and children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family child care provider Marcia Kimpton, owner of Chickadee Tree Early Childhood Program in Waldoboro, ME, used mini-grants funds to create a chicken tractor and a hoophouse style greenhouse for year round gardening. This project is a wonderful example of how learning is incorporated into the context of everyday activities.

On a daily basis, children at this program gain valuable social interaction skills and begin to develop a deeper appreciation for nature while working together to feed and care for the chickens and collect their eggs. While in the greenhouse, children explore their natural and physical environment as well as learn math and science concepts as they engage in planting seeds, watering plants and harvesting vegetables for weekly soup days.

“It’s super warm inside, so we can grow lettuce in the winter.” – A child from Chickadee Tree Early Childhood program
We embraced a new year at school by having a day for the children to come with their parents, to each plant a row in the new hoop house. Once school was in session, daily trips were made to water and weed and check on which plants had sprouted and how fast they grew. Would our predictions come true? Why and why not?! –Marcia Kimpton, Family Child Care Provider

“"I like going out to pick eggs and feed the chickens.” –A child from the Chickadee Tree Early Childhood Program.

“My beets!” – A child, age 3, from the Chickadee Tree Early Childhood Program.

The program prepared for the arrival of the 2-day old baby chicks by enlisting the help of a neighbor who was a kindergarten teacher and had hatched chickens in her classroom every year. She brought stories of baby chicks and their care, and helped to build an ‘indoor barn’ to keep the chicks in until they were old enough to go outside. The children cut doors and windows, painted the barn, helped to install a rod for the light to keep the chicks warm, and made a roof. After the chicks arrived, they took them out of the barn daily, which much gentleness, put a tarp on the floor and watched the chicks eat and hop around, while the children sat on the floor making fences with their legs. The children learned to move slowly and to pick up the chicks gently and support them from below.
Karen Corson, a family child care provider in Athens, collaborated with a local artist and builder to transform their outdoor space into a natural playground complete with a ‘hobbit house’ and a series of trails. Children attending this program are now able to go on nature walks and explore play equipment that has been beautifully integrated into the physical environment. The end result is a play space that is both functional and a work of art.

“I love the open-endedness and constant changes that occur in it that we discover every time we go in it... The grant impacted me, as it gave me an amount of money to do things I already knew I wanted to do and it got the project off the ground in a hurry! Thanks for overseeing such a wonderful project. I hope other child care providers come see it and see its potential in their own setting!” –Karen Corson, Family Child Care Provider
Karen Corson, Wee Care 2 Daycare in Athens, ME
Family Child Care Program, NAFCC Accredited
Mini-Grant Award: $4,000 Volunteers & Program Contribution: $2,050

Children from infant age to school age attend this program. The open ended nature of the wood trails and the climber in the woods support all age groups. It is truly a wonderland of new and exciting curricula opportunities.

“I like the hobbit house best because it has a climber. I like walking and running on the nature paths.” – A child, age 4, from Wee Care 2 Daycare

“I like the hobbit house the best. We can climb on it and we can put our hands and toes in it. And I like making fairy houses in the natural playground.” – A child, age 3, from Wee Care 2 Daycare

“I like the sandbox the best and the shovels and buckets. I like to climb on the natural playground climber with all the kids.” – A child, age 3, from Wee Care 2 Daycare

Throughout the hiking trail, several varieties of trees are identified.
### NAEYC Accreditation Standards Addressed

#### Standard 1: Relationships
- 1.D.01 Providing models and visual images of adult roles, differing abilities, and ethnic or cultural backgrounds
- 1.C.02 Helping to make friends
- 1.C.03 Social skills and making friends

#### Standard 2: Curriculum
- 2.C.04 Large motor opportunities
- 2.A.08 Rich variety of materials that reflect the lives of children and accommodate for children’s special needs
- 2.L.03 Cognitive development, social studies
- 2.J.01 Opportunities for art, music, drama, and dance
- 2.G.04 Scientific tools
- 2.G.02 Cognitive learning - science

#### Standard 3: Teaching
- 3.A.03 Support for children’s physical movement
- 3.A.05 Environmental design to aid in diminishing negative behavior in children
- 3.A.02 Environmental design to protect children’s health and safety
- 3.A.04 Environmental design to simulate exploration, experimentation, discovery and conceptual learning.

#### Standard 4: Assessment
- 4.B.02 Program has a written plan for assessment

#### Standard 5: Health
- 5.A.06 Outdoor play, gross motor play
- 5.A.08 Provisions for toileting and hand washing
- 5.A.09 Provisions for hand washing

#### Standard 9: Physical Environment
- 9.A.04 Variety of materials and equipment inside and outside (age appropriate)
- 9.A.01 Classroom equipment
- 9.A.07 Low shelving for easy access by children
- 9.B.06 Outdoor play area protects children (fall zones, playground safety inspection)
- 9.C.05 Toilets, drinking water, and hand washing with in 40 feet of the indoor areas that children use
The Peopleplace Playground Project provides children with a playscape that takes advantage of all the natural elements that are found on the Peopleplace grounds. The finished space includes a path for trike riding, obstacles to climb under, around, and through, water play, dramatic play, music, and construction.

Reflecting the mid coast community was an integral part in planning the sorts of elements the program decided to purchase and construct. They also received support from Cedarworks, a local company that builds cedar play sets, and Viking Lumber, as well as additional grant support from Shaw’s Supermarket, and the Agnes Lindsay Trust. Parents also volunteered their time and equipment to help move the project forward.

“A unique feature of the new climber is the climbing wall. Even our toddlers can climb it AND some are mastering climbing down!” —Lee Lingelbach, Center Director
What a delight to be able to replace the old climber with a new Cedar Works ‘Ship at Sea’ structure for our toddlers and preschoolers! We have used Cedar Works in the past with success and since the company is right here in mid coast Maine we are supporting a local company. The Ship at Sea is such an appropriate structure for our program as we are located on the ocean! Children here definitely identify with boats, fishing, and mountain climbing.” –Lee Lingelbach, Center Director
Deb King and Mary Partridge of A Child’s World Preschool are creating a natural outdoor music space with mini-grant funds. The following pictures represent the items they have purchased. The plan is to create a work weekend for staff and families to install the equipment in the spring. The program will be using this as a Reggio project by involving the children along the way. It will become a true community involvement activity with the end result of creating an outdoor music area for children to enjoy for years to come.

“Over the last year our program’s focus has been leaning towards a more Reggio approach with creative art. While we feel we have done a very nice job restructuring this part of the curriculum, we still feel that we are weak in bringing creative music into our program. We have been looking at ways to integrate this into our curriculum. This grant is the answer.

On our playground we have a large wooded corner that we have always envisioned as the perfect space for an outdoor learning area. There are several trees of various sizes and the sun shines through creating shadows. It would be the perfect place to create an outdoor natural music space.” – Deb King and Mary Partridge, Center Directors

Musical Fence: When children swipe their hands across all the tubes, the tubes swing into each other, setting off a series of resounding, random notes that sound just like a wind chime. Children can also strike the individual tubes with a stick or a stone to create individual notes.
Rain Maker: The Rain Maker is a beautiful, lovely sounding outdoor musical instrument that makes soothing, rain-like sounds. Copper see through pipes offer an interesting optical illusion that will entertain and fascinate children in the program.

Thunder Drum: Playing this instrument can be a collaborative effort, as it can be played by more than one child at a time and on both sides! The finish is a buffered pattern that catches the light as you move around the drum. It never sounds the same from strike to strike, creating numerous opportunities to explore the properties of sound.
The majority of mini-grant funding for school age programs went towards activities to meet children’s interests and needs. The funds have allowed for the expansion of new opportunities at many of the programs, including photography, gardening, and drama. Mini grant-funds have also been especially valuable for improving the environments of school age programs across the state, many of which face the challenge of operating in shared spaces. Administrators, parents, and children alike have all noticed the positive changes:

“I like the listening center best. I can listen to books with my friends and we can talk about it after. It is fun!” – A child from the Vassalboro Before and After School Program

“The ability to purchase items through a mini-grant for both of our childcare programs has been invaluable. Children have had an opportunity to explore activities otherwise untapped in our program such as the electronic marble works which focuses on electricity and motors, and a chemistry set which focuses on science.” – A Program Administrator from the Vassalboro Before and After School Program

“The mini-grant provided unique and diverse supplies for the program. We have noticed our child’s deep interest in the ‘Rush Hour’ game that was purchased with grant funding so we purchased one for him for our own home!” – A parent from the Vassalboro Before and After School Program
The George J. Mitchell Before and After School Program created a loft with three different levels:

- Level #1: Quiet zone with bean bag chairs and books for children to read and relax
- Level #2: Building blocks and large interlocking blocks
- Level #3: Dramatic play area with baby dolls and accessories

The program saved about $900 in labor costs by having a volunteer build the loft. They were then able to use remaining mini-grant funds toward other program improvements, such as new bookcases, child-sized tables, coat hooks, shoe lockers, and parent mailboxes.

“I like getting to sit under the loft and read in peace and quiet.” – A Child from the George J. Mitchell Before and After School Program

“I like playing on the top level with the baby dolls.” – A Child from the George J. Mitchell Before and After School Program

“I like being able to play with my friends up high!” – A Child from the George J. Mitchell Before and After School Program
Mini-Grant Final Summary

- A total of $248,318 awarded for quality improvement mini-grants
  - $158,000 or 64% awarded to infant and toddler programming
  - $90,318 or 36% awarded to preschool and school age programming

- Percent per program type:
  - 12% to school age programs
  - 42% to center-based programs
  - 46% to family child care programs

- Total number impacted:
  - Children impacted = 4,096
  - Staff impacted = 718

- Accreditation status:
  - Number of programs accredited for the first time = 55
  - Number of programs re-accredited = 22
  - Number of programs in process of accreditation = 41

- Accreditation standards addressed:
  - NAFCC standards addressed = 44% environment, 40% developmental activities, 13% safety and health, 3% other
  - NAEYC standards addressed = 47% curriculum, 33% physical environment, 8% health, 12% other
  - COA (school age) standards addressed = 68% programming and activities, 28% indoor / outdoor environments, 4% health and relationship standards

The above represents a significant investment in high quality programs for the state of Maine. The quality improvement activities undertaken as a result of the ARRA funding will serve these programs and the children and families they work with well, now and in the coming years.

“...Receiving monies from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in order to help reach national quality standards seems the best, most wise use of the stimulus package President Obama created. I am proud to have earned this money and to have spent it thoughtfully on products that were purchased locally and manufactured in the USA. The ways in which my grant-funded materials will impact the early experiences of the children in my care is immeasurable. Thank you for this incredible opportunity to invest in the early years of children, now and for years to come. We are forever grateful.” —Audrey O’Clair, Family Child Care Provider in Newburgh, ME