

**FY 2004 ELOA Grantee Semi-Annual Progress Report &  
Financial Status Report  
Grant Number: 90LO013501**

**Reporting Period: March 30, 2005 – September 30, 2005**

The Johnson County Early Learning Initiative (JCELI) is funded by an Early Learning Opportunities Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. JCELI targets educational and health outcomes for children ages 0 – 5 and prepares them for a successful school experience. The project focuses on three high need neighborhoods in Johnson County, Iowa. Primary components of the project are: 1) the “Yearn to Learn” Community Education Campaign; 2) Provider Training and Support for child care and education providers; and 3) Early Childhood Services and Interventions.

**Project Management**

1. Major Activities

Throughout the reporting period the JCELI Coordinator has continued to make monthly progress reports to the Johnson County empowerment board through its Executive Committee. Although the preschool and family support work continue year round, other public programming that follows the academic calendar was in hiatus through the summer months. These summer months were devoted to transitioning the first preschool class into kindergarten and enrolling a new class of preschoolers. The ‘graduation’ of the first class also marked the point at which we could collect the first complete set of outcome data for program evaluation purposes.

2. Activities Planned For The Next Reporting Period

We will be preparing to submit a request for a no-cost extension allowing us to continue the preschool and related family support work beyond the February, 2006 grant sunset date.

**Yearn To Learn Community Education Campaign**

1. Major Activities

- Commitment: Host 30 *Ready To Learn – First Books* (formerly known as *First Books*) events reaching 250 families.

Performance during the reporting period: Ten *Ready to Learn* events were hosted at the Neighborhood Centers and Mark Twain Elementary School, one of the target elementary schools. A total of 91 families attended. This brings the total number of events offered since the beginning of the grant to 22 events attended by a total of 221 families. *Ready To Learn* events have been conducted in the evenings and begin with a family meal. Following the meal, parents attend a literacy workshop focused on a single book title.

Afterward, parents and children reunite to read the book together. Each month, one *Ready To Learn* event has been conducted in Spanish and one in Arabic to address the needs of immigrant families. At the conclusion of the evening each family receives a book to take home. A list of books titles that have been is used in programming has been included as Attachment 1.

- Commitment: Host 20 *Make and Take Story Box* events.

Performance during the reporting period: JCELI hosted nine *Make and Take Story Box* events attended by a total of 180 adults and children. The *Make and Take Story Box* events hosted by JCELI used titles and activities collected in story boxes produced by the Iowa City Public Library. The story boxes were produced with JCELI funding during the winter and spring months of 2005. These boxes are organized by theme with each box containing books, theme-related parent education materials, activity suggestions and objects (e.g. puppets) that illustrate aspects of the stories and facilitate story retelling.

These *Make and Take* events were offered in several different settings. Six events were conducted in Mark Twain Elementary School or in the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center and were structured much like the *Ready To Learn* events. Families shared a meal then listened to a reading of the selected story. Following the story, parents and children together made a craft related to the story to take home. These six *Make and Take's* were attended by families participating in Family Support programs and/or families with children enrolled in Mark Twain Elementary School.

Three events were offered in larger public forums. During the week of April 2 – 9, the week designated by NAEYC as The Week of the Young Child, JCELI offered three *Make and Take Story Box* events intended to increase public awareness of the needs of young children. Two of these events were offered back to back in a local shopping mall as part of a community celebration of The Week of the Young Child. Families were invited to listen to the story of Judith Vogel's *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* and then complete two take-home activities. A total of 63 parents and children participated in these activities.

The third event was offered at the Iowa City Public Library in partnership with the library and an Even Start ESL class. The event was structured around the Library's preschool story time using the Library's *A Mouse In The House* story box. A children's librarian read several titles all on the theme of mice. Families were then invited to complete activities and crafts related to Felicia Bond's *If You Give A Mouse A Cookie* at six different stations in the library's community room. In addition to the walk-in participants from the community, Family Support Workers transported 17 parents and children of an Even Start ESL class to the library for the event. Most of these Even Start participants had never been in a library before. Walk-in participants from the community in addition to the Even Start families brought the total participation in the event to 47 parents and children.

A complete list of titles and activities for these events is included in Attachment 2.

➤ Commitment: Host 12 *Play Together Learn Together Play Groups*.

Performance during the reporting period: JCELI began the first series of play groups during the last week of the last reporting period. Five play groups were hosted in the reporting period and attended by 32 mothers and children. The play groups were offered at the Pheasant Ridge site of Neighborhood Centers which currently serves a large Arabic-speaking population with families from various counties in the Middle East. Mothers who attended report that their motivation is to network with other mothers for mutual support as well as to provide their children opportunities to acquire English. Each session of the playgroup series has been planned to provide some structured activity and some free play time for the children. Family Support Workers led each play group session and modeled strategies for supporting children's language development as well as other developmental domains. A list of the play-group topics is attached as Attachment 3.

➤ Commitment: Host 30 University of Iowa *Mobile Pediatric Health Clinics*

Performance during the reporting period: JCELI has hosted eight *Mobile Health Clinics* utilized by 96 adults and children. A total of 14 clinics have been offered since the beginning of the grant. Beginning in spring, 2005, two clinics days per month were offered to make the services more accessible. Spanish language interpreters are present during one of the clinics to better serve the Spanish speaking population. Clinic attendance has steadily increased since February due to increased efforts at outreach, the service of the interpreters and increased clinic hours. Clinic days were not offered during June or July during the scheduled break of the UI College of Medicine clinicians.

## 2. Activities Planned For The Next Reporting Period

Ready To Lean events hosted in target elementary schools will move to Roosevelt Elementary School in fall, 2005 and Grant Wood Elementary School in Winter, 2006. The second set of play groups is planned for Fall, 2005. This play group will transport mothers and children to participate in various activities around Johnson County such as farm visits and library story hours.

## 3. Other Activities

On April 8<sup>th</sup> JECLI hosted a legislative lunch and open house for community leaders. The event was intended to increase administrators' and policy makers' awareness of early childhood education issues and the relationship of those issues to other public policy concerns. The event was hosted at the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center and was attended by four state legislators who represent districts that include Johnson County. After lunch with the Director and staff of Neighborhood Centers, the legislators

met with community leaders including members of the Johnson County Empowerment Board, the Iowa City Council, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors and the Iowa City Community School District. Information and conversation was focused on the issues of the accessibility of child care and education for low income families.

## **Area Provider Training and Support Services**

### 1. Major Activities

- Commitment: Host 10 *Ages and Stages Trainings* and five *DECA Trainings*. Identify 35 child care providers for training.

Performance during the reporting period: Two trainings were offered for 12 participants. This brings the total ASQ trainings to 4 with a total of 56 participants. The JCELI Coordinator worked with staff from Community Coordinated Child Care (4C's) and the Johnson County Department of Public Health to contact child care providers who had not received training in the use of developmental screenings. The Coordinator also worked with Grantwood Area Education Association to secure Charlie Bursch, AEA School Psychologist, to provide the trainings. Kits of materials used to administer the ASQ screenings were assembled and will be offered as incentive to complete the trainings.

### 2. Problems

The DECA trainer for a multi-county area moved from Iowa prior to the start of the JCELI grant. No other trainer has been available during the period of the grant.

### 3. Dissemination Activities

Scheduled trainings have been advertised through the newsletters and announcement of 4C's. These newsletters reach over 300 care providers.

### 4. Activities Planned For The Next Reporting Period

Trainings for ASQ and ASQ-SE are scheduled in November, 2005 and January, 2006. We are investigating the possibility of training a new DECA trainer to support future use of the DECA assessment.

## **Early Childhood Service and Intervention Continuum**

### 1. Major Activities

- Commitment: Identify 120 children that require additional support to be a successful learner.

Performance during the reporting period: 42 children were identified and have received continued support. Together with the 55 children identified during the previous reporting period, JCELI has supported the identification of a total of 97 children.

In the various community events conducted by Neighborhood Centers throughout this reporting period and through the wide array of contacts between Neighborhood Centers and other agencies a number of children have been seen. Of all the children seen, 42 have received continuing additional supports. Depending on the needs of each child, the supports range from mild interventions and support to intense, individual remediation and service plans. The supports include some combination of developmental screenings, family support programming, participation in *Ready To Learn* or *Make and Take* literacy events, play group, day care or preschool placement, health interventions via Johnson County Public Health Department and/or referrals to developmental specialists such as speech pathologists or pediatric psychologists.

Of these 42 children:

- 25 have been placed in day care and education settings
  - 2 received an IFSP
  - 9 are receiving speech therapy from Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Clinic and Grant Wood Area Education Agency
  - 2 are receiving speech therapy only from Grant Wood Area Education Agency
  - 4 are in the process of receiving IEP's. Data collection necessary for the determination of the Response to Intervention is underway.
  - 6 currently have positive behavior guidance plans, 2 of which include play therapy.
  - 5 will not need ESL support in elementary school because of their acquisition of English during day care and preschool placements.
  - 1 is receiving on-going instruction from the Grant Wood AEA itinerant teacher for the hearing impaired
  - 1 received a referral for pediatric dental treatment
  - 3 received referrals for pediatric specialists for concerns for growth and nutrition.
- Commitment: Provide parenting and literacy home visits for 80 families enrolled in the family support programs at Neighborhood Centers. Develop a service and intervention plan for these 80 families.

Performance during the reporting period: A total of 22 families have been enrolled in family support programming as a result of receiving the JCELI grant during this reporting period. In addition to the families previously enrolled, we have now served a total of 48 families. Family service plans have been developed for each family.

A total of 596 home visits were made during the reporting period. Family Support Workers, the Lead Teacher from the PREP Preschool and the JCELI Coordinator meet bimonthly for case management. Case management is focused on family goals and needs.

- Commitment: Start and maintain a self-contained PREP classroom.

Performance during the reporting period: Children enrolled in December, 2004 began kindergarten in August, 2005. An new class of 12 children were enrolled in September, 2005. The first Prep class 'graduated' from the Neighborhood Center's preschool and started in their Iowa City Community School District kindergarten classes in late August, 2005. Our top priority during the summer months was to ensure a smooth transition for

these children. Classroom visits were coordinated during the summer for the Principals and kindergarten teachers in schools in which children identified with special needs were registered. The Principals and kindergarten teachers made several visits to the PREP classroom to observe the identified students. These school staff then met with the family, PREP Lead Teacher, Family Service Coordinator and the Director of Special Services of the Iowa City Community School district to plan the most appropriate support for each child.

The PREP Lead Teacher also met with the kindergarten teachers of all the children who did not require special supports when they entered school. Because each of these children is still considered to be at-risk for academic failure it was important that the PREP Lead Teacher transfer information regarding the educational history, social history, strengths and needs of each of the PREP children. We believe that these efforts to build lines of communication between the preschool and the public schools were worth the effort given the fact that the PREP Lead Teacher was still receiving questions regarding these children from the kindergarten teachers through the month of September.

The new PREP preschool class began on September 6<sup>th</sup>. Referrals for enrollment were received many sources including Community Coordinated Child Care (4C's), Iowa City Community School District, Grant Wood AEA and family support workers. As with the previous class, children were enrolled in PREP based on a system of points for risk factors. Prior to the first day of class, each family received a home visit to discuss the family's individual circumstances, their child's needs, and to help form expectations of what their child would do in preschool. Prior to enrollment, each child received an Ages and Stages Questionnaire developmental screening.

The PREP classroom is now housed in the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center. Transportation is provided for ten children. An open-house was held in early September to provide the opportunity for all parents to see the PREP classroom.

Of the children who are currently enrolled:

- All 12 have at least one developmental delay
- 7 are from families in which at least one parent self-identifies a family history of mental illness
- 1 child has a seizure disorder
- 6 received speech and language therapy from Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Clinic.
- 3 are English Language Learners
- 3 have behavior intervention plans
- 2 are currently in foster care
- 2 are being evaluated for their Response to Intervention for a determination of their need for an IEP.

The PREP curriculum integrates activities designed to support all developmental domains. Because each child in the room has some developmental delay, there are special efforts to integrate language remediation, positive social instruction and pre-academic skills into each day's lesson plans. By the end of the reporting period, each

child had received the ASQ, ASQ-SE and DECA screenings, each family had a parent-teacher conference, Wendell Johnson had provided hearing, speech and language assessments for each child and three children received follow-up hearing evaluations in the clinic from a Wendell Johnson audiologist.

Based on these screenings, special support services are provided during the instructional day. AEA consultants including a school psychologist, special education consultant and speech pathologist monitor the children's progress, collect data for individual assessments and advise the Lead Teacher. The Neighborhood Center's staff Behavior Interventionist works with individual children in the room several days a week. Speech therapists from Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Clinic provide therapy three days a week. The Iowa City Community School District's Behavior Interventionist and ESL Curriculum Advisor both consult in the room and have been instrumental in planning the transition to kindergarten for several children.

#### Significant findings or events

1. Because the first PREP class began mid-academic year, JCELI staff were required to expedite the process of identifying children's special needs and helping coordinate appropriate services before they entered kindergarten. Extraordinary efforts were also required from staff of Grant Wood AEA and the Iowa City Community School District due to the fact that both institutions have very limited services through the summer months. The intensity of effort necessitated by this schedule resulted in establishing very methodical and efficient communications between the agency and the institutions. The outcome was a systematic process for transitioning at-risk preschool children to kindergarten. This inter-agency process will be of use not only to future PREP preschoolers but also to all future preschoolers in Neighborhood Centers programs.
2. A second outcome of the intense focus on children's special needs and services in the PREP program was the development of a preschool-age-appropriate procedure for measuring Response to Intervention as required by the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. While a good deal of work has gone on nation-wide to devise a ROI procedure for school-age children, relatively little work has been done for preschoolers. Up to this point, the determination of eligibility for special education services in Johnson County has been done through individual evaluations completed by qualified professionals. The statutory requirement for determination of special education eligibility via the ROI prompted AEA staff to guide JCELI staff in construction of a suitable ROI procedure for 4 and 5 year old children. This is a significant accomplishment that should be beneficial to all preschools operating in the Grant Wood Area AEA.

#### Grant Evaluation

##### 1. Major Activities

The University of Iowa's National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice has published the first draft of its analysis of interviews with the network of agencies who play a role in early childhood care and education in Johnson County. As a result of those surveys, the NRC for Family Centered Practice has also conducted follow-up

meetings with members of these agencies to explore the issues that effect the effectiveness of the network.

Outcome data from the developmental screenings of children is being coded for analysis.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 Books Distributed During Ready To Learn Events

Attachment 2 Schedule of Story Box Events

Attachment 3 Schedule of Play Together Learn Together Play Groups