



Smart Start Update --- September 2014

www.SmartStartAlabama.org

Alabama Partnership for Children Receives Funding to Pilot Research Project with Morehouse School of Medicine

The Alabama Partnership for Children (APC) has received \$50,000 in grant funding to pilot the Smart and Secure Children (SSC) model of parent leadership and to work with a state leadership team to examine policy and funding concerns that impact early childhood healthy development and health disparities. The funding is part of the Transdisciplinary Collaborative Center on Health Equity Policy Research (TCC) and Practice's Pilot Project Program at Morehouse School of Medicine. Through this pilot research program, the TCC aims to support innovative research studies focusing on addressing the unmet needs of people in communities that are disproportionately impacted by health disparities.

The APC plans to pilot the SSC model of parent leadership as a specific parental capacity-building curriculum and process to better deliver and measure the impact of building strong families in supportive communities. The APC anticipates program replication that will produce similar outcomes to those found in the initial SSC model. Findings include enhanced school readiness, positive impact on family nutrition and obesity, increased parent engagement and leadership, and improved parenting behaviors - all while building capacity in communities.

"The research is clear that health and developmental disparities begin early and are impacted by the experiences within the first few months and years of life," said Gail Piggott, Executive Director of the APC. "It is also clear that parents and families play the most crucial roles in optimum development of young children and that leadership skills and effective parenting can be taught and learned. Meaningful parent leadership occurs when parents gain the knowledge and skills to function in leadership roles and represent a 'parent voice' to help shape the direction of their families, programs, policies, and communities."

Coordinated by APC staff, the SSC model provides professional development and support for a Parent Mentor who supports (3) Parent Leaders who each work with up to six Parent Peer Learners. Parent Leaders guide the Parent Peer Learners through a 12-week curriculum that covers basic parenting and self-care topics in a way that provides time for self-reflection and for building connections with other group members.

Zero to Five Matters

*~A newsletter
focused on our most
valuable
investment~*

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Don't Forget
to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). The APC launched a social media campaign in November that targets parents, early childhood professionals, business leaders and our partners in the state. 'A Tweet a Day for Learning and Play' provides early education tips and research, including information on our initiatives and partners. Check it out today!

Mark Your Calendars:

[2014 Home Visiting
Conference & Infant/Toddler
Academy](#)

September 23-25, 2014
Montgomery, AL

[2014 Strengthening Families
Leadership Summit](#)

October 7-8, 2014
Chicago, IL

[2014 Alabama Pre-K](#)



Dr. Cassandra Kirkland of Morehouse School of Medicine traveled from Atlanta to train Montgomery's first SSC Parent Mentors and Leaders. The leadership training takes the new leaders through the elements used in the weekly sessions. The members of Montgomery's leadership team felt such a bond during the training that they exchanged contact information and made plans to continue to meet together after the 12 weeks are over.

"The leadership group was very open and shared personal experiences," said Felicia Wilburn, Early Childhood Resources Coordinator at APC, and Parent Mentor. "We shared concerns as well as tips and suggestions. We really bonded. If the groups we facilitate are open and share of themselves, they will also form authentic connections and find the support they need to make positive changes in their families and in their communities."

The grant from Morehouse has leveraged additional funding from the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation to have a concurrent program in Lowndes County during 2014.

Partner Focus:



Leslie Guy, Parent Services Coordinator Child Development Resources, The University of Alabama

Baby TALK (Teaching Activities for Learning and Knowledge), an outreach component of [Child Development Resources](#) in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Alabama is a community collaborative effort designed to encourage parents in nurturing their children from birth - age 3. It is a preventative model that delivers services at hospitals, schools, libraries, health departments, and other agencies or programs working on behalf of families. Parents are provided with basic child development information and suggestions for developmentally appropriate activities as well as suggestions for managing parenting struggles, issues and concerns.



A significant component of Baby TALK is the focus on early literacy. A free age-appropriate board book is given to parents to read aloud to their children,

[2014 Alabama PER
Conference](#)

October 15-17, 2014
Montgomery, AL

[2014 NAEYC Annual
Conference & Expo](#)

November 5-8, 2014
Dallas, Texas

[2014 Early Intervention
Preschool Conference](#)

November 17-19, 2014
Mobile, AL

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believing that reading aloud, more than any other single activity, will enhance the parent-child relationship as it encourages the child's mental, social, and language development. In our work with families we always keep in mind a couple of questions regarding early literacy:

Why should I read to my young child?

- Reading together is a cozy activity. It is an excellent time to give undivided attention to one another. It also helps to make your child feel special and loved.
- Reading helps children learn about language. They learn and hear new words that they may not hear in everyday conversations.
- Reading to young children helps prepare them for school success. Hearing books read aloud helps them to learn to listen!
- Reading about the unfamiliar can make it less threatening and can expand your child's understanding of the whole world! Books can prepare a child for her first visit to the dentist, or her first day of school.
- Books can make parenting easier. Once your child has learned to enjoy reading, books provide a fun activity. When you have to wait to see the doctor or have your car fixed, reading together can help pass the time quickly.

How do I read aloud to my child?

- Choose a time when your child is alert and happy. Turn off the TV and focus all of your attention on your child. Hold him on your lap or sit close to one another.
- Choose a book you know will interest him. Start with something short. Talk about the cover and let him look at the pictures.
- Ask questions that will make him curious about the story. "Why is the boy sad?" or "Where is the dog hiding?". Your child will get more out of the book if you talk about it together.
- When you read to your child, do it with enthusiasm! Use different voices for different characters. Read slowly to enjoy every word. Then read fast in exciting parts!
- Be patient if she loses interest. You don't have to finish the whole book. You can put it aside to finish later. Never force a bored child to sit still and listen. Keep offering books in a positive way. She will learn that reading means special times with you.

Baby TALK has been serving families in the Tuscaloosa/Northport area since 2009 and has the distinction of becoming the "First Baby TALK community in Alabama." In that time, Baby TALK hospital visits have been made to 26,892 new parents at DCH Regional Medical Center and Northport Medical Center. There have been 45,804 visits made to families receiving well-child and prenatal services at the Tuscaloosa County Health Department, University Medical Center and Maude Whatley Health Clinic. There have been a total of 169,247 developmental newsletters mailed to those families. More than 260 different volunteers have assisted with the implementation of Baby TALK.



Initiative Focus:

T.E.A.C.H. Impacts Alabama Early Childhood Teachers

This month, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ALABAMA was featured in [The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's](#) newsletter. The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham awarded a \$25,000 grant to the Alabama Partnership for Children during 2014. The funding will provide T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, which support job training and access to higher education for a minimum of 10 single women working in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair and Walker Counties. The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham chose to highlight Jessica, a T.E.A.C.H. recipient, in their current newsletter. This is what Jessica had to say about the T.E.A.C.H. program and staff:

"You have been my own personal group of cheerleaders. I feel like everyone on your staff is on Team Jessica. You always call to check on me and ask if there is anything else that you can do to help me even though you have already gone above and beyond. It gives me great joy that many more men and women will be supported through higher education because of your presence in their lives. Between your organization and the many people who have decided to invest their lives into children, the early childhood field will continue to grow and give the next generation all of the tools they need to succeed."

[T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ALABAMA](#) is a scholarship program that was developed to increase the level of education and effectiveness of early learning professionals by making the educational process more affordable, increasing wages, and reducing staff turnover rates. Scholarships are currently offered for the CDA (Child Development Associate) Assessment Fee, Associate Degrees in Child Development and Early Care and Education, and Bachelor Degrees in Child Development and Early Care and Education. If you would like to read more from The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's newsletter click [here](#).

ensure that they are healthy, protected, nurtured, and offered every opportunity to succeed in life.

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