

Success Stories:

Mississippi Child Care Resource & Referral Network and the Nurturing Homes Initiative

MSCCR&R Network

1. Technical Assistance

During two and a half months of the summer in 2010, Training Coordinator Jalayna Kraemer devoted forty-three hours of technical assistance to Ms. Faye's class at the Kiddy Karrousel child care center in Fayette, MS. After their 2009 Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) evaluation, they received a one-star rating though they applied for a two-star rating. Ms. Kraemer described her first impression of the center: "She had a lot of materials but needed training on how to use them in multiple ways." Kraemer also noted a need for increased verbal interactions between the teachers and children to encourage language development. An additional challenge was a weak relationship between the teacher and the aide, who did not engage with the children or contribute effectively to the daily routines. With Ms. Kraemer's constant effort and encouragement, the commitment of the teacher and aide to improve, and the director's support, the entire school benefitted from the hours of technical assistance invested. "The other teachers in the center also took advantage of my presence," Kraemer said. "They would listen in on our lunch meeting and help hang art work. During these times the other teachers would ask questions pertaining to their classrooms." As for the classroom Kraemer worked in, the results couldn't be better: "Today Ms. Faye is talking much more – she feels as if she is talking too much, but the director and I continue to tell her more, more, more! You can never talk enough to the children. The aide's presence is now greatly valued and missed when she has the day off. She gets on the floor and talks to the children, preps art activities, and assists with all of the other routine care needs. They are definitely working together as a team. Ms. Faye is showing more self-confidence when working directly with the children, and when writing lesson plans. She explores different activities with the children on a weekly basis." Best of all, when the center was evaluated for their two-star rating, they received a three-star rating! This significant improvement is just one example of the positive impact of the MSCCR&R Network's Technical Assistance program. Director Katherine Jones was very pleased with the results of Ms. Kraemer's work. "We really felt Ms. Faye needed to relax more in the classroom so she could cope better with people coming in her room and monitoring her. Jalayna was wonderful. She had a great impact on the room and on Ms. Faye. With her help, we got a better QRS score than we anticipated!"

2. Parent Referrals

In June 2010, the Carlson family of Kansas made the decision to move to the Jackson, MS area. One of their biggest concerns was finding a positive, nurturing child care experience for their daughter, Ainsley. She related the story of how she found a place for Ainsley at Adrian Lockett's "A New Beginning Family Child Care Center." "I came to Mississippi twice to look for child care and tried looking at centers online. I found some of the larger day care centers, had visited them, and wasn't thinking that would be the best fit for us. Up in Kansas we have a similar child

care referral agency and my provider there had called the Kansas center and gotten the number for the Mississippi center. My provider in Kansas was an in-home child care provider, but I couldn't find much information about the in-home centers online. I called Mississippi Child Care Resource & Referral and they gave me a couple of names. I visited Adrian's center and we decided we would try that. I really like the in-home child care because Ainsley gets more attention, there's a smaller group of kids, and the resource center helps Adrian with materials so there's always new stuff to play with. She's more flexible than the large centers, and she works with us more." Helping parents find quality child care benefits their children, contributes to a stable workforce by providing reliable child care services that enable parents to work, and supports quality programs by helping them build their businesses with additional clients.

Adrian Lockett said, "I voluntarily registered for the referral system because it was an opportunity to advertise and for people to see what I have. It enabled me to meet and greet new people, and learn about different programs. This particular referral was good because it gave me more opportunity to grow my business. It was a positive experience because she called me, I referred her to my Web site, and told her to call me with any questions. When I first met Cynthia, it was so nice to meet people from out of town who want child care, and understand that we can help each other."

3. Training

With the challenges of the economic downturn impacting everyone, the MSCCR&R Network took to heart the complaint that qualifying for higher ratings in the MCCQSS required too much money and developed a new training series: Limited Resources, Unlimited Creativity: Applying ELG Concepts in Your Preschool Classroom. These unique "make and take" trainings demonstrate how to use recycled and low-cost items to create visual displays, educational games and activities, and materials to be used in learning centers. After showing providers a variety of ideas, they get to create some of the projects as part of the training. Participants loved the new trainings, as evidenced by their comments on the course evaluation forms: "I liked making the sun and moon mobile because I already have an idea for using it with a story." "I like the make and take science project very much. I love the hands-on crafts." "Being able to create projects and take them home with me is what I liked about this training." Trainer Lucy Bryant said, "As teachers, they're very busy in their classrooms. This gives them an opportunity to have a resource they can take back to the classroom and use right away with the children. As you know, there's always not enough time have the time to sit down and cut out or create materials, laminate it, etc. This training meets a need, allows us to discuss ways to apply the Early Learning Guidelines and ECERS items and subscales so that teachers can improve the quality of their learning environments and lessons. Teachers also see the importance of hands-on learning – if they love to do crafts, they can better see the need for arranging their environment to encourage these opportunities for their students."

Evidence of the impact of the statewide professional development program can be found in many areas. For example, Tammy East, County Director for Mississippi State University Extension Service in Leake County wrote the following in response to receiving the comments on a workshop evaluation form: "You all do a great job, and it's good to see so many positive comments by the providers! The summaries will also be valuable to me as I develop my annual program plan, as I can justify the need for the classes and the successes your staff has in reaching the providers." The feedback from child care providers indicates changes they will make based on information in the training they attended. For instance, comments on "ELG: Record-Keeping and Observations for Infants and Toddlers" in July 2010 conducted for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' annual conference included: "Make a simple file on each child in the classroom," "Upkeep of records and emergency contacts," and "As a director designee, I will make an emergency contact booklet for myself to have in case of emergency." At the same event, another training coordinator taught "ELG: Developing Self-Help Skills for Infants and Toddlers." Many providers indicated they would be sanitizing the diaper changing areas more frequently, sanitizing the tables before eating, and wash hands appropriately. One provider commented, "I will change the way I talk to the toddlers more often when changing diapers." These small changes, when replicated throughout child care centers across the state will make a big difference in the lives of children, and in the quality of early childhood education.

Nurturing Homes Initiative

1. Materials

54 percent of Mississippi's children are cared for in unlicensed settings. The quality of these environments has a significant impact on how prepared the children are for entering Kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed. In November 2009, a significant research study found children in in-home child care watched twice as much television as previously thought, up to two hours per day. The need to educate in-home child care providers on developmentally appropriate activities is evident.

Nurturing Homes Initiative (NHI) Assessment Coordinator Kelly Carmody has seen the significance of the lessons and materials provided by NHI can have on the early childhood educational experience. She said, "One of the first providers I worked with kept her grandson and nephew while her daughter served in Iraq. She lived in an old trailer in rural Madison County. When I first arrived, she was very welcoming and invited me to have a seat. There were crumpled tissues on the sofa and coffee table. I just assumed they were used. Little did I know! After observing for a short time, I soon realized that the tissues were their toys. The boys would take different sizes of tissue to make trucks, cars and trains. They would race their

tissue cars and trucks on the table. The only materials she had for the children were a small basket that held three wooden blocks and a handful of small crayons. I could hardly wait to begin technical assistance lessons. The first technical assistance lesson was on language development, which provided the children with their first books. I can't begin to tell you how excited the children were to have their very own books. Each month I would conduct a technical assistance lesson and provide the children with materials to use. It was such a joy to watch the children smile, play and just have fun being a child. The Nurturing Homes Initiative Project has made it possible for so many children across the state to have the opportunity to play and be a child. In the process of play, they are learning the skills they will need to be successful in kindergarten."

2. Technical Assistance

A key aspect of the NHI program, cited repeatedly by both NHI staff and participating in-home child care providers, is the relationship that forms between both parties during the technical assistance visits. As providers grow to trust their field technical assistant, they become more open to change. LaLetrice Fletcher reflected on one of her participants in Sunflower County: "She had some toys, but they were old, and she needed to get some more materials. They were not accessible to the children, so I explained to her that the toys need to be accessible, and now they are. The provider really did not know how to set up her learning areas, so I showed her, and with me helping set up her centers, her day is running more smoothly. At first she was not attending many childcare workshops, but with me letting her know that it is always good to learn new things, and get ideas on childcare, she always attends them when she can. She told me that with my help and encouragement, she decided to take some classes, and before the year is out she hopes to be a licensed home provider and a mentor to other home providers."

As Field Technical Assistant Norma Hayes said, building that relationship is essential to the success of the technical assistance program, "One provider I recruited was basically babysitting. She would only keep infants and toddlers until they turned two years old, because she wanted them to start learning. After her first year with Nurturing Homes, she realized that learning starts in the first three years. She moved from babysitting to being a quality child care provider," because of the lessons and materials Hayes offered. "Once I build a relationship with them and gain their trust, I can get them to be more open during one-on-one technical assistance lessons," she said.

Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS)

1. Data

Total number of centers currently enrolled: 421

Centers with 1 Star Rating	210
Centers with 2 Star Rating	57
Centers with 3 Star Rating	20
Centers with 4 Star Rating	9
Centers with 5 Star Rating	2

Total With Current Rating 298

- Began QRS process in 2006 and is in the fourth year of operation.
- Began statewide operation in July 2009.

2. Impact

Statistics tell only part of the story. Media coverage celebrates the progress of centers in their pursuit of quality. For example, the Sanderson Farms Child Care Center was profiled in the Mississippi State University Extension Service's magazine *Landmarks* (see PDF article "MSU-ES Helps Child-Care Center Thrive") for attaining a 4-star rating.

The significance of the "Quality Rating System" also is found in the personal stories told by child care center directors. The following letters are just two examples showing the impact of the quality improvement initiatives undertaken as part of the MCCQSS.

"The Christian Learning Center is excited to have achieved our goal of a 3 Star rating. We have worked hard in preparation for this time. With no money for extras, we partnered with the agencies and turned up our creativity to improve the quality of childcare at our center. These agencies provided technical assistance, evaluations and mini grants.

Our staff exceeded the minimum amount of training hours required. Specialized classes targeted the areas where improvement was needed. Each caregiver utilized the knowledge in the classroom to improve the quality of education received by our students. Staff and parents spent many weekends searching yard sales for items to improve our learning centers. We are also grateful to the parents who donated games and toys that their children had outgrown.

At the Christian Learning Center, we strive to achieve goals and accomplish the visions given by our Lord and Savior. Though our steps appear small, we continue on the road to helping young children by instilling in them positive characteristics, motivation, and self esteem, as well as preparing them to enter school with an education advantage. As the raging need for change and improvement continues to escalate in early childhood education, we are more determined than ever to see the vision of this program become reality. We have committed our lives to embracing this destiny for the purpose of these children, their families and our community. We look forward to earning the honor of receiving a 5-Star rating."

Thelma Harden, Director
Christian Learning Center
Canton, MS

“In 1995 I had the vision to open a daycare center. With no experience in childcare, I enrolled in the local community college. Two years later, I obtained an Associate of Arts degree in Child Development Technology. Currently about 80% of our staff have a CDA or AA in Child Development. We are encouraging the other 20% to receive their CDA. When I heard of the Quality Step Program, I thought it would be a good way to improve my center. I enrolled in the program immediately and was aiming for a 4 Star. Unfortunately, my center received a 1 Star rating. Even though we were disappointed, we were not discouraged. We tried again. We followed all the suggestions of the Partners representative, and we enhanced our classrooms to improve our ICERS/ECERS scores. The teachers implemented everything they learned. This time WE DID IT! Our center was awarded a 4 Star!”

Sincerely,
Katherine Richardson
Cornerstone Preschool & Nursery
Brookhaven, MS

The Long-Term Impact of Quality Initiatives in Mississippi

Over time, successful programs grow, change, and incorporate effective practices into other programs. For ten years, the Nurturing Homes Initiative has established relationships with in-home child care providers that continue to produce positive benefits for everyone involved. For example, NHI was selected by the Mississippi Department of Human Services to pilot a training program for previous NHI program participants that will facilitate their ability to become licensed providers. This opportunity will enhance existing services and strengthen these child care businesses while also increasing the quality of educational experiences for children.