



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

**"I am
better preparing
children for
school and
for life."**

*Marie Rawley
Owner, Re's Child Care*

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.

"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

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.

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
- Other partners in the first two grants included:
- Boothbay YMCA
 - Coastal Community Action Program
 - Tri-County Literacy “Read With Me” Family Literacy Project
- * Funded partners in the 2005-2007 ELOA grant

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.

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Report written by Peter Lindsay and funded by United Way of Mid Coast Maine.

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