

## Office for Children Receives Trailblazer Award

The Office for Children received the Fairfax County Park Authority's Good Neighbor Award on Sept. 18 at the Park Authority's Annual Trailblazer Awards Ceremony. The award is presented to an agency or organization for providing "exceptional support and cooperation" to the Park Authority.

The partnership between the Office for Children and the Park Authority began in October 2010 when staff in OFC's Institute for Early Learning organized a conference for more than 200 child care professionals centered on the theme "Discovering Nature with Children." Three Park Authority naturalists were invited to present the keynote address and lead two breakout sessions. Since then, OFC staff has worked with Suzanne Holland, assistant manager at Hidden Oaks Nature Center, to



host multiple professional development classes on-site for early childhood educators. This collaboration continues this fall with the class "Outdoor Play Every Day."

Holland also worked with OFC child care specialists to provide a



Carol Keil (center) of the Office for Children accepts the Trailblazer Good Neighbor Award from Hidden Oaks Nature Center Assistant Manager Suzanne Holland, and Fairfax County Park Authority Director John W. Dargle, Jr.

statewide audio-conference in conjunction with the Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network. Holland presented strategies that early childhood educators can use to incorporate nature education experiences for children ages birth-3 years.

"Children who have positive nature experiences before age 7 are more likely to maintain an appreciation for nature," said Holland. "Academic readiness, pediatric depression, ADHD, and childhood obesity are all issues that can be positively impacted by getting unplugged and playing outdoors."

Through this OFC-Park Authority collaboration hundreds of early childhood professionals have learned strategies to encourage children's outdoor exploration and support children's curiosity about the natural world.

Betsi Closter, OFC School Readiness coordinator said "The Office for Children is committed to providing professional development opportunities to early care and education professionals. We are delighted to do this in partnership with the Park Authority."

## Moving Forward

On August 22, Family Services' new Annandale Regional Office in the West Wing of the Heritage Center at 7611 Little River Turnpike opened to the public. All of the Fairfax County Human Service Agencies located in the Falls Church Office, moved to the new facility in Annandale. OFC's Child Care Assistance and Referral staff made the move during the first phase between Aug 17 and Aug 22.

Four CCAR teams alternate staffing this regional office. These teams include Rachel Copeland and Helen Brewer-Irons; Jody Withrow and Stacy Lambert; Cherise Pinto, Erin Isbell and Leigh King; and Susan Hansell-Davis and Mariam Nadi Lane. They were all active in making a smooth transition to the new office. Susan Jackson, the CCAR regional supervisor for the area,

assisted with planning and coordinating the teams' activities.

"Moving into the new space required a lot of hard work on the part of our staff. Their patience and commitment to make the transition smooth for the families we serve is outstanding," Jackson said.

CCAR staff is in the new office Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. to meet with CCAR families, vendors and individuals from the community who may need assistance with child care issues.

This location is convenient for residents of Fairfax County who reside in Annandale, Alexandria, Falls Church, and



Left to right: Susan Hansell-Davis, Cherise Pinto, Erin Isbell, and Susan Jackson.

Springfield, and it is on Connector bus routes 401 and 402, an important feature for many CCAR families.

"Families travel from all over the county to this office. It is nice to be able to welcome them with more space and newer facilities" said Jackson.



## Fairfax County Office for Children to Assist with State Childhood Needs Assessment Survey

This fall, the Virginia Department of Social Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Development is seeking input from families with children ages 0-5 years and early childhood educators across the state of Virginia. Teresa Harris, Susan Barnes, and John Almarode, James Madison University professors of Elementary and Early Childhood education are gathering this information through surveys and focus groups.

Called the Virginia Early Childhood Needs Assessment Project, this initiative aims to identify families' areas of need related to early childhood education and services. It will determine gaps in services and their cause, identify childhood quality indicators important to families and opportunities to more effectively coordinate and maximize resources to

meet the needs of children and families.

The Office for Children, Fairfax County Public Schools and community organizations are working together to reach out to as many people as possible. Copies of the family survey will be distributed through the public schools, and they will be available at a variety of public locations including the public libraries, health department, early care and education programs and community centers. The educator's survey will be distributed in January by the Office for Children to educators in our extensive database. Both surveys are also available online at [www.jmu.edu/coe](http://www.jmu.edu/coe) under departments, Early, Elementary & Reading Education.

The survey is also available in Spanish and Arabic.



# October is Head Start Awareness Month

October is National Head Start Awareness Month. Since 1965 Head Start has served millions of children ages birth to five from families with low-income by promoting school readiness, providing comprehensive services, and emphasizing the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher.

The Fairfax County Head Start program serves 1,613 preschool children and their families in Head Start, and 244 infants, toddlers and expectant parents and their families in Early Head Start, for a total of 1,857 children and expectant parents.

Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in the following domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical development and health, social and emotional development, and approaches to learning.

Head Start programs also provide comprehensive services to enrolled children and their families, which include health, nutrition, social, education and cognitive development services. Head Start services are designed to be responsive to each child and family's ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage.

Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Head Start programs build relationships with families that support: family well-being and positive parent-child relationships, families as learners and lifelong educators, family engagement in transitions, family connections to peers and community and families as advocates and leaders.

"Research has shown that Head Start helps provide educational, economic, health, and social benefits," said OFC Head Start Director Jennifer Branch. "Our community can celebrate the impact Head Start makes every day."



## Workforce Survey

The Office for Children has contracted with Mills Consulting Group to conduct a survey of the county's child care workforce this fall. Mills Consulting Group specializes in researching early childhood and school age care issues and has extensive experience with this type of survey. OFC worked with Mills Consulting on a previous survey in 2005.

This survey will gather information about professionals' education, training and experience, income and benefits, and other things that

will help OFC understand what supports and services can best meet the needs of the early childhood and school age workforce.

OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie said "These surveys provide our office with information that can help the county develop initiatives supporting early childhood and school age professionals in their work. We value their input and appreciate their time in completing the survey."





## Fun for All Ages

The Office for Children welcomed hundreds of area children and families to our booth at the annual Fall for Fairfax Kidsfest at the Fairfax County Government Center. For the first time the event was extended to two days, Sept. 29 and 30.

In keeping with SACC's 2012-2013 curriculum, "Kaleidoscope of the Arts," activities encouraged expression in visual, language and performing arts. Children enjoyed filling test tubes with bird seed to make maraca-like rhythm maker tubes, which they decorated with stickers and markers. Children also made colorful marble paintings, filled in Mad Libs silly sentences, and decorated cardboard squares that were added to a collaborative sculpture. Parents and children alike loved the idea of a quiet Book Nook where kids could take a break for a few minutes, while reading a book or playing with foam blocks.



**O F C** Office for Children



A Fairfax County, VA Publication

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services. If you have any questions, contact Angela Morlu at 703-324-7528 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc).



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