



Head Start Celebrates A Successful Year



The Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start Program engaged in some family fun on Thursday, July 10 at Fort Hunt Park. Center Director Anne Taggart explained, "One of Head Start's areas of focus is family and community engagement, and building relationships with families. The annual Family Fun Day provides an opportunity for families and staff to celebrate a successful program year together."

A team of staff and parents planned the activities for the day. Children, their families and Head Start staff enjoyed a variety of carnival style activities and a picnic lunch.

It was also a day of celebration for rising kindergarteners, who

received certificates recognizing their accomplishments in Head Start. They were also presented backpacks donated by Brothers Keepers of Alfred Street Baptist

Church in Alexandria, whose goal is to ensure that children receive the supplies needed for a successful school year.





Early Learning Guidelines to be Revised

In 2006 the Fairfax County School Readiness Collaborative developed and published “Early Learning Guidelines” for our community. These guidelines have been a valuable resource to early childhood professionals in Fairfax County and other communities. They provide early childhood professionals with guidance about the development of children from infancy through the preschool years. The guidelines include behaviors that children display which demonstrate that they have learned or are learning a skill. The “Early Learning Guidelines” also includes suggested daily activities to help support children’s growth in all the major areas of development.

The “Early Learning Guidelines” are being updated by a committee convened by OFC including early childhood educators from Fairfax County government agencies, the Fairfax County Public Schools and the community, most of whom were partners in the development of the original 2006 guidelines. The new guidelines will include guidance reflecting current early childhood research and best practices regarding skills and activities to encourage children’s overall skill development. The guidelines will also be aligned with “Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds.” The target completion date is fall 2014.

IFEL Sensory Awareness Class Incorporates STEM Experiences

There has been much discussion over the past several years about the importance of STEM education and the need to prepare children to excel in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and math.

Recognizing this, for many years the Office for Children’s Institute for Early Learning has incorporated STEM related instruction into a variety of professional development courses offered for early childhood educators.



One such class is Sensory Awareness. Bronwyn Dean, the class instructor, shares that, “We know that young children engage all of their senses when learning about the world around them. In the Sensory Awareness class, I explain that allowing young children to participate in sensory play experiences plays a crucial part in brain development.”

Sensory play is using one’s senses – hearing, sight, touch, smell, taste and motion – to explore materials in the environment. As children

explore, they are developing their senses which lays the foundation for further learning. For example, through touch, children are able to explore attributes such as warm or cold, wet or dry, rough or smooth, textured or slimy. Being able to differentiate these characteristics is the first step in sorting and classification – an important part of early science experiences for preschoolers.

The materials used in Dean’s sensory awareness experiments are things that can be found in the home. Some of the experiences included slime made from water, glue and Borax; cloud dough made from baby powder and baby oil; and clean mud made from water, white baby soap and toilet paper.



“Combining common household materials into simple science experiments is one way to create interesting textures, smells and sights that will keep children engaged in the sensory experience,” said Dean.

Head Start Offers American Sign Language Training



Studies have shown that young children naturally use their hands to communicate before they can talk. To enhance what comes intuitively, American Sign Language offers a common language with which adults, infants and children with disabilities can communicate with one another regardless of the language spoken at home.



So in June, Early Head Start provided an opportunity for EHS family child care providers to attend professional development classes to

help them begin using ASL with young children in their care. In the class, participants learned about the many benefits of using ASL including its positive impact on the social-emotional development, receptive and expressive language development, and academic and literacy skills of young, preverbal, hearing children, as well as children with disabilities.

During the class, participants had an opportunity to learn and practice using more than 50 signs applicable in caring for young children. Signs included things such as people, places, actions, manners, play time, meal time, clothing, opposites and feelings.

Participants gave very positive feedback, with 100 percent of respondents using signs with children in their care. Furthermore, 90 percent would like to attend additional classes to learn more

signs, and expressed interest in having the trainer provide a class for children's families, so they can learn the signs and reinforce the practice at home.



Signing serves as a language bridge for children and staff who do not necessarily speak or understand the same language and in cases where children are delayed in their speech development. Sign language gives all children a means of expressing themselves and connecting with their caregiving adult and peers, all while strengthening the ability to produce expressive speech.

September is Emergency Preparedness Month

September is Emergency Preparedness Month. In anticipation of this observance, the Office for Children is sending a postcard to all child care programs in Fairfax County as a reminder to check their emergency plans, make any necessary updates and communicate their plans with families of children they care for.

The postcard also provides a list of important emergency resources including emergency information websites and contact information for local emergency organizations. "This is a great opportunity to reach out to child care programs throughout the community and start a dialogue about best practices surrounding emergency

September is **Emergency Preparedness Month**

Take Time to Prepare for Emergencies Now



planning. Taking steps now can help save time and increase safety in any unexpected situation" said OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie.

Summer Fun at SACC Camp Discovery

Children attending SACC's Camp Discovery enjoy an adventure filled summer of fun and friendships as they participate in experiences designed to appeal to the artist, performer and athlete in every child. Teachers guide children through activities designed to develop their talents, enhance their skills and nurture their creativity. Children also enjoy making community connections as they learn about the community around them and engage in important service projects and activities.

Children choose to participate in the Athlete's Cabin which offers the excitement of outdoor adventures and a variety of team sports, the Artist's Cabin where they enjoy the creativity of photography, culinary art, printmaking and recycled art or the Performer's Cabin where they experience the thrill of bringing stories to life through dance and theatrical performances.

Throughout the summer, swimming and field trips offer additional opportunities for fun. Field trips for the Athlete's Cabin include attending a Washington Mystic's basketball clinic and a Washington Nationals baseball game, for the Artist's Cabin trips such as the National Children's Museum and the Lorton Workhouse Arts Center offer hands-on experiences, and the Performer's Cabin field trips include attending live theatrical performances at the Riverside Children's Theatre and Medieval Times. The highlight of the summer for all children is the excitement of attending a Washington Mystics basketball game, featuring pre-game and half-time performances by children attending SACC Camp Discovery!



Office for Children

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.



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