



## October Proclaimed as Head Start Awareness Month in Fairfax County

### Head Start Policy Council Celebrates with Reception, Open Houses



On October 15, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors designated October as Head Start Awareness Month at its meeting at the Fairfax County Government Center. Head Start Provides quality early childhood education and comprehensive services to income eligible pregnant women and families with children from birth to 5 years old.

Head Start Awareness Month is a national celebration that pays tribute to the families and children in Head Start and recognizes the work of staff in promoting a whole child and whole community approach that puts children and their families on a path to success.

Following the proclamation, Chairman of the Board Sharon Bulova invited Chairperson of the Fairfax County Head Start Policy

Council, Abdeltif Bensouda, to say a few words. Mr. Bensouda, who is also Fairfax County Public School's Head Start Parent Committee Chair, is father to three children who have participated in Head Start. He has served various capacities in the program since 2010 and is the recipient of this year's Nancy Elmore Scholarship from the Virginia Head Start Association.

Mr. Bensouda highlighted the importance of Head Start's support for both children and their families and expressed gratitude for its role in helping him to pursue a degree in Business Management at George Mason University.

The Fairfax County Head Start Policy Council hosted a reception preceding the proclamation. In

attendance were Mr. Bensouda; Glendy Bowman, Policy Council Chair; Jennifer Branch, Director of Fairfax County Head Start and Early Head Start; Bryan Hill, County Executive; and Board of Supervisors members Catherine Hudgins, Daniel Storck and John Cook.

The celebration continued throughout October with a series of open houses at Head Start classrooms and centers. Fairfax County's Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve more than 2,000 children at Fairfax County Public Schools, Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start in Alexandria, Higher Horizons Day Care Center in Bailey's Crossroads, and family child care partner programs throughout the county.



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# First Lady of Virginia Visits Fairfax County

Promotes School Readiness During “Back to School” Tour

Pamela Northam, the First Lady of Virginia, visited Fairfax County as part of her second annual “Back to School” tour in September. The tour highlights the importance of school readiness, which develops years before the first day of kindergarten. During the month of September, Mrs. Northam traveled more than 2,327 miles and made 42 stops. Her visit included three Fairfax County early childhood programs in community, school and home settings.

Accompanied by her staff and Office for Children Director Anne-Marie Twohie, the First Lady began the tour at **Main Street Child Development Center** in Fairfax, where she chatted with preschool students during lunchtime. Executive Director Carol Lieske provided a tour of the center, which was founded in 1973 to prepare young children for kindergarten while helping their parents to maintain full-time

employment. Each year, the center serves 125 students, ages 2 to 5, predominantly from families with low income.

The Office for Children provides professional learning opportunities and resources for the early childhood educators at the center, which is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (a distinction held by less than 10 percent of child care centers nationwide). OFC also facilitates Main Street’s participation in the community-based Virginia Preschool Initiative and the Virginia Quality rating and improvement system.

The tour continued to **Dogwood Elementary School** in Reston, where Mrs. Northam visited Pre-K and Early Head Start classes with school principal Mie Devers. Fairfax County Public Schools provides classroom-based Head Start and

Early Head Start programs, which provide high-quality learning experiences to children ages 6 weeks to 4 years. The curriculum is language rich and emphasizes communication, early literacy, social development, and development of other skills as designated in each student’s Individualized Education Program.

The tour concluded at the home of **Angelina Piaggio Farfan**. Farfan has been a county permitted family child care provider for more than eight years and partners with the Office for Children to provide a high-quality program that supports children’s success in kindergarten and beyond. She also participates in the USDA Child and Adult Food Care Program to provide meals and snacks that meet recommended nutrition guidelines to the children in her care.



**Main Street Child Development Center**  
(Pictured left to right – First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam and Carol Lieske)



**Dogwood Elementary School**  
(Pictured left to right – Catherine M. Hudgins, Mie Devers, Douglas Tyson, Pamela Northam, Karen Keys-Gamarra, Anne-Marie Twohie, Maura Burke and Ryan McElveen)



**Family Child Care Provider**  
(Pictured left to right – Pamela Northam, Angelina Piaggio Farfan, Patricia Jordan, Anne-Marie Twohie and Eduardo Valderrama)



## Children's Achievements Celebrated at Infant & Toddler Connection Graduation

In October, approximately 80 children and their families joined ITC staff for a graduation celebration at Van Dyck Park in the City of Fairfax. On a beautiful fall afternoon, children enjoyed snacks and fun activities in addition to participating in the graduation ceremony.

The Infant & Toddler Connection provides evaluations and early intervention services for infants and toddlers (up to age 3) who have a developmental delay or a

diagnosis that may lead to developmental delays. The annual graduation ceremony celebrates the accomplishments of children who are leaving the program.

Before a crowd of beaming family and friends, each child was invited to join ITC director Susan Sigler to receive a congratulatory handshake and bubble wand. Parents also received certificates to mark their children's achievements.

Prior to and after the ceremony, children delighted in making music with Therapeutic Rhythms' Myra Goodrich, visited with two of Heeling House's therapy dogs and met Teddy the therapy horse. They also explored the playground with new friends and played with toys and sensory bins. Children, families and ITC staff thoroughly enjoyed this unique opportunity to reconnect and celebrate each child's success!



## Self-Care Takes Center Stage at Professional Development Event for Early Intervention Providers

ITC hosted a day-long professional development event for staff in September focusing on safeguarding the emotional health of human services providers. While working in the field of human services can be highly rewarding, it can also be emotionally intense – which can negatively impact an employee's quality of life and ability to provide care. Licensed clinical social workers Denise Studeny and Naomi Grinney presented on topics such as

stress, burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Participants worked together to identify strategies to help them stay healthy, both physically and emotionally, while providing quality evidenced-based supports to children and their families. One topic discussed was how the practice of self-care by a provider also benefits the families they serve. Self-care tips include everything from exercising and getting enough sleep to setting

boundaries and learning to say "no." The training served as a bonding exercise for staff – allowing them to learn and reconnect while spending time together. Attendees appreciated the opportunity to discuss the emotional consequences of working with challenging human services issues. In addition, sharing stories and strategies with peers set an example for self-care and reflection.

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# Families Fall into Fun at Seasonal OFC Events

The Office for Children ushered in fall with family-friendly events throughout the community.

On October 5-6, OFC participated in Fall for Fairfax's KidsFest, a popular seasonal event held at the Government Center. Enthusiastic staff supported the two day event and enjoyed sharing information about OFC programs and services with families and community members. Staff also provided an array of hands-on crafts and fun games. Children were delighted to

reveal a rainbow of colors as they used scratch art paper to design fall leaf greeting cards. Children also enjoyed decorating their own mini house necklaces, an activity inspired by the School Age Child Care program's curriculum, "It's All About Community - Here, There and Everywhere!" The game area was a big hit and offered children and families the opportunity to play a variety of games together including tabletop bowling, jumbo-sized Jenga and a large version of Connect 4.

Meanwhile, the Employees' Child Care Center held its annual Fall Festival for children and families at the center. At the event, the children learned about seasonal changes as they explored the ECCC playground, transformed for the occasion with hay bales and straw. Everyone enjoyed fall-themed activities such as "pony" riding on hay bales, a hay maze, face painting, pumpkin painting and wagon rides. The kids also loved touching and feeling the different textures of pumpkins, gourds and ears of corn around the playground.



Families enjoyed spending time together during this special event. In September, the Infant & Toddler Connection invited families to its fall fun event at Frying Pan Farm Park in Herndon. Children in the program, which provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers up to age 3, visited with the farm's many animals, including chickens, sheep, cows and rabbits. ITC families were able to meet and connect with one another as the kids made animal-themed crafts and explored sensory bins.



Fairfax County

**O F C** Office for Children

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services. If you have any questions, contact Gwen Jones at 703-324-7137 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. [Fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](http://Fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc).



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