

palm beach county head start & early head start

West Palm Beach, FL

Overview

Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start works with low-income families from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The Early Head Start component promotes healthy prenatal outcomes, enhances the development of children ages birth to three, and enhances the role of parents as primary caregivers. The Head Start program serves children ages three to five and their families. Children with special needs and their families are targeted by both programs.

The mission of Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start is to provide world-class comprehensive services that empower children, families, and the community. This mission is carried out through: modeling (leading the way), mentoring (helping others), and monitoring (checking progress every day). Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start seeks to be a force for positive change and to improve the quality of life for children, families, community partners, staff, and communities. Families are offered programs 249 days a year, 10 hours a day, to meet their needs. Staff members build excellent rapport with families.

Sites are present in urban, suburban, and rural areas and serve families who have low and medium incomes. Of families participating: 5% are Asian or Pacific Islanders, 83.5% are Black, 11.4% are Hispanic, and 4.6% are white. Of program staff: 84% are Black, 5%

Profile

Staffing

Total: 273

Children & Families Served

- Early Head Start: 180
- Head Start: 1871
- On waiting list: 1000

Budget

Head Start: \$17,594,473

Early Head Start: \$1,333,467

Childcare Food Program: \$873,666

Per Child

Head Start: \$8,314

Early Head Start: \$11,305

Locations

Total: 32

Services Provided On-Site

- Before- and after-school care
- Family support
- Home visits
- Links to job skills training
- Parent meetings

are Hispanic, and 11% are white. Men make up 11% of staff. Children participating speak English, Spanish, or Creole in their homes.

How The Program Builds Protective Factors

Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start builds five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

Parental Resilience

- Cultural Responsiveness
- Family Partnership Agreement
- Leadership Training
- Parent Meetings and Surveys
- Peer Organizers
- Policy Council and Committees
- Social Events and Celebrations
- Volunteerism

Social Connections

- Cultural Responsiveness
- Free to Grow
- Leadership Training
- Male Involvement
- Parent Meetings and Surveys
- Parent Services Project Model
- Parent Workshops
- Parenting Education and Support Groups
- Parenting Skills Training
- PEACE Curriculum
- Social Events and Celebrations

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Classes and Workshops
- Family Literacy
- Parent-Child Activities
- Parent Services Project Model

- Parenting classes
- Referrals to social services
- Respite care
- Social events and celebrations
- Support groups
- Transportation

Partners

- Americorps
- Child Abuse and Neglect Task Force
- Childcare Resource & Referral
- Community Action Program
- Drug Abuse Foundation
- ESE Program
- Foster Grandparent Program
- Godparent Volunteer Program
- Legal Aid Society
- Lighthouse Gallery and School of the Arts
- Miller Early Childhood Initiative
- Nova Southeastern University
- Palm Beach Community College
- Palm Beach County Children's Services Council
- Palm Beach County Workforce Development Board
- Pre-Kindergarten Early Intervention Program
- Quantum Foundation
- School districts
- South County Mental Health
- United Way
- Urban League
- WAGES

Ways of Identifying When Families Are at Risk

- Constant vigilance under many pairs of eyes
- Staff training on indicators and warning signs
- Family service specialists and mental health coordinators assist staff

- Parenting Education and Support Groups
- Socialization Activities
- Volunteerism

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Dietitians
- Family Services Specialists
- Home Visits
- IMPACT
- Job Skills Training
- Mental Health Services
- Resource and Referral
- Respite Care

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Creative Beginnings Curriculum
- Curricula and Teaching Tools
- Devereux Early Childhood Assessment
- Galileo On-Line Tracking System
- Gentle Teaching
- Group Activities
- I Can Problem Solve Curriculum

Key Program Features

Community Assessment

Each year, the program participates in a comprehensive community assessment, and then identifies short- and long-term goals. Examples of goals include:

- To work with alcohol and substance abuse agencies to better educate staff, parents, and the community
- To coordinate with housing programs in the county to better assist families with housing needs
- To increase social support and stress management for families and link them with social and recreational activities in their communities

- Child / family staffing and on-going assessment meeting with each family three times per year
- Special outreach to families:

- ✚ With children with special needs
- ✚ With multiple children in the home
- ✚ Facing multiple stressors
- ✚ Lacking outside support
- ✚ Headed by teen parents
- ✚ Who are immigrants

Staff development on child abuse and neglect includes:

- Annual training and distribution of materials
- Orientation on reporting protocols (Head Start & county)
- Information on community agencies that assist families
- Conference training on child abuse laws, child abuse, neglect, domestic violence, etc.
- Participation in county-wide child abuse and neglect prevention month (including planning)

Response Protocol

If a staff member is concerned about a family:

- He or she talks with the head teacher, who talks with the family services specialist
- A staffing is scheduled that includes staff from all sections
- A plan is developed for contacting the family and offering assistance

- To promote family self-sufficiency (employment, housing, finances, etc.) through referrals, follow-up, and training and workshops

Cultural Responsiveness

The diversity among families participating in Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start presents both strengths and challenges. To ensure that all families feel welcome and supported, program staff are hired who represent the cultures of the children enrolled and speak the languages of their parents. All materials are printed in the three languages spoken by participants, and interpreters are provided at all events. World of Difference training is provided to staff through the Miller Early Childhood Initiative.

Parents fill out a nutrition questionnaire that enables staff to provide a variety of foods which take ethnic and cultural preferences into account and broaden all children’s food experiences.

Curricula and Teaching Tools

In all Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start classrooms, group activities allow children to experience cooperative learning, working together, and positive problem resolution. To promote gentle teaching strategies, staff are first assessed, then trained, coached, and mentored by a consulting psychologist.

The Creative Beginnings Curriculum, the basis of Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start activities, is a comprehensive, anti-bias, multicultural curriculum that allows each child to develop at his or her own pace. The curriculum encourages all children to learn through creative play. It includes activities that promote children’s self-esteem and provides plenty of opportunities for them to interact.

The I Can Problem Solve curriculum developed by Myrna B. Shure is used in each classroom to manage behavioral concerns and help children learn to make good decisions in their interactions with others.

Staff Resources

When staff are concerned about a family, they can get support and information from:

- Family service specialists
- Mental health coordinator
- Each other—in person and via e-mail and phone
- Community programs that address substance abuse, child abuse, and other high-risk behaviors
- Support and education for staff teaching children with special needs
- Where to Turn resource directory
- Materials from and about community agencies

Staggered schedules allow staff to spend additional time with families about whom they are concerned.

Licensing & Accreditation

- Licensed by Palm Beach County Health Department
- NAEYC–accredited
- National Head Start Association Quality Initiative / Program of Excellence

What People Say

“We train staff to listen with eyes, ears, and heart.”
—Carmen Nicholas, director

“We want to give kids the opportunity to be successful. That’s all they need.”
—Larry Shraeder, police chief, Head Start partner

The PEACE curriculum helps facilitate efforts to transform the communities served by the programs. The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment is used to help staff and parents understand a child’s strengths and weaknesses with regard to self-control, initiative, attachment, and behavior.

Family Literacy

Through Read With Me, children come to Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start centers to read in small groups and one-on-one. After story-time, each parent can take home a book to read with his or her children; this enables families to create home libraries. Simon & Schuster, Inc.; Scholastic; WXEL-TV; and Borders provide books for this program.

Free to Grow

Free to Grow is a national initiative that prevents alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse. Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start, one of 18 sites, carries out the initiative in southwest Delray Beach and western Palm Beach County. After an annual community assessment revealed substance abuse to be of concern to residents, community agencies took it up as a priority. Through Free to Grow, they have created a common vision, collaborated as partners, and received training and technical assistance.

With training from Free to Grow, Head Start staff in the two targeted areas identify circumstances that increase families’ risk of substance abuse, identify families at risk, assess their needs, and determine appropriate interventions, which are provided by interagency committees. These staff also facilitate outreach, provide resources and referrals, and arrange for intensive case management, treatment, and other services from partner agencies.

Many programs described in this summary are provided through the Free to Grow initiative.

“Respect is the beginning of relationships, from the very first day. Respect is a two-way street based on trust. We have an open-door policy for everyone—parents, community partners, even people on our waiting list.”

—Family services specialist

“Head Start performance standards should be a minimum requirement, not a goal. They tell you what to do, not how to do it. Outcomes depend on how it’s done.”

—Carmen Nicholas, director

“I attended this Head Start when I was a kid. I moved back here so I could take my kids here, too. [Staff] answered every question I had in just the way I wanted.”

—Eric, father

“I thought I was getting childcare. I didn’t know I was getting care for myself, too. This place is full of love. Now I am able to give back what was given to me.”

—Cathy, peer organizer

“Free to Grow offered hope, real hope, at a time when we were spinning our wheels. We needed an entry point for parents, not just prevention programs for kids who were not yet involved in drugs.”

—Palm Beach Health Care Board member

Health Services

Through collaboration with the Maternal Health Alliance, participants in Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start Health receive screenings, developmental assessments, examinations, immunizations, and services for pregnant women and teen mothers. These are provided by health care providers and a full-time maternal-health registered nurse. Comprehensive prenatal and postpartum health care and education related to breastfeeding, labor, delivery, nutrition, fetal development, and mental health are provided.

IMPACT

Involved, Motivated Parents as Classroom Teachers (IMPACT) Inc., conceived by the director of Palm Beach County Head Start, is a parent-owned, parent-staffed company that provides classroom substitutes to Head Start and childcare providers. IMPACT helps parents gain employment and build self-sufficiency and helps address teacher shortages.

Individual Development Plan

An individual development plan, including prescriptive activities, is created for each child and is updated throughout the year following observations. In the classroom and during home visits, teachers share information with each parent about his or her child's plan. Developmental information is also available to parents on-line through the Galileo On-Line Tracking System.

Leadership Training

Parents of children enrolled in Head Start and other community residents participate in an intensive leadership training program. Parents become leaders on issues such as healthy child development, community safety, housing, and drug abuse prevention. Special efforts are made to nurture

leadership among Haitian, Hispanic, and other immigrants. The training is offered in English and Creole.

Male Involvement

The Male Involvement Program promotes positive involvement of males in the lives of children and families and at Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start. The program recruits biological fathers as well as stepfathers, uncles, grandparents, and older brothers. It offers parenting education (on topics such as child development, building children's self-esteem, and fathers' role in parenting) and training in life skills (on topics such as setting goals, relationships, family health, money management, family literacy, job skills training, and career development). Positive male role models from the community, fraternities, and other service agencies have been trained as mentors and matched with program participants.

Parent-Child Activities

On-site parent-child activities include holiday and cultural celebrations, family field trips, award ceremonies, an annual picnic, and more. Monthly cultural activities based on art, music, cuisine, and creativity from different cultures are provided for 20 parents and their children by the Lighthouse Gallery and School of the Arts.

Parent Meetings and Surveys

Monthly parent meetings at each center provide another layer of parent participation. At these meetings, families receive important information about program operations, events, and issues and have opportunities to raise concerns and provide feedback. Parents have input into the workshops and other training and educational activities available to them through an annual parent interest survey.

Parent Services Project Model

Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start adopted the Parent Services Project model in 1996.

Parent Services Project is a nationally recognized model that ensures the well-being of the child by ensuring the well-being of the parent. Programs using its model build on strengths found in all families; engage parents as decision makers; respect the cultures of all families; acknowledge that social support is important for families; and recognize that joy, hope, and fun are essential for family and community well-being.

The Parent Services Project model enables Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start to be a stress buffer for parents with little support. Informational, social, emotional, and instrumental support and skill building are provided through numerous parent-driven activities. These include social and recreational activities (both for families and for adults only), classes and workshops, respite care, parenting education and support groups, and more. Twice each month, socialization activities occur to help parents learn about child development.

One or more family services specialists are available at each site; a senior specialist can also provide intensive case management for families if necessary. Home visits are provided as needed.

Through all of these activities, support increases, stress and stressful situations are reduced, and the risk of child abuse and neglect and substance abuse is lowered.

Parent Workshops

Parent workshops are offered regularly and include instruction, group activities, individual reflection, and time for parents to solve problems together. Educational sessions provide parents with information on social services, health, and safety concerns. Topics include domestic violence, substance abuse, nutrition, cold and flu prevention, family exercise, kitchen and food safety, car safety, and household safety. Parenting workshops are conducted by mental health

and other community agencies. Healthy-cooking seminars are offered three times a month on-site. Written materials are offered on all topics, usually in English, Spanish, and Creole.

Parenting Skills Training

In partnership with Hanley-Hazelden, a non-profit organization that treats alcoholism, drug-dependency, and related diseases, Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start is providing Roots & Wings, a six-week training program to build parenting skills. In a warm and safe atmosphere, parents are encouraged to discuss their families' strengths and learn how to build on them. Approximately 60 parents are in each session; childcare and snacks for children of participants are provided.

Peer Organizers

Ten parents serve as paid peer organizers for the Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start sites at which they participate. They work with program staff to plan, implement, and evaluate parent activities. Their main role is to motivate parents to participate and increase parent involvement. Peer organizers are treated like other staff and are included in training opportunities throughout the year.

Policy Council

Parents are involved on a volunteer basis in the Head Start Policy Council and its various committees, including the personnel committee, which approves staff hiring.

Resource and Referral

Staff regularly connect families with the Community Action Program and many other agencies to help respond to crises and emergencies and to meet basic needs.

A partnership with the Urban League makes it possible for participants to take part in job skills training.

Social Events and Celebrations

Families participating in Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start have access to myriad activities, including:

- Arts and crafts
- Dinner and entertainment for parents
- Fashion shows
- Favorite Male Day
- International night / multi-cultural nights
- Mothers' Day tea and Fathers' Day breakfast
- Multi-island event
- Pampering Parents (makeovers)
- Parent breakfast (served by staff)
- Parents' night out (formal)
- Parents' talent show
- Pot-lucks

Special-Needs Support

All parents of children with special needs have access to supplemental supports. Special orientation sessions are provided on enrollment for children with pre-diagnosed conditions. Parents of children with disabilities receive information on their rights and training to foster the development of their children. Additional education and support is provided to teachers with special-needs children in their classrooms.

Staff with Specialized Skills

The director of Palm Beach County Head Start has been a national trainer for the Parent Services Project since 1990. Program staff have been trained according to the Parent Services Project model since 1996. Training for new program staff and refresher training are provided regularly.

Staff of Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start serve on many inter-agency committees and task forces—including the Child Abuse and Neglect

Prevention Task Force—which provide them with knowledge and expertise that help them positively impact the lives of children, families, and the community.

A full-time coordinator is in charge of mental health services and ensures families' mental health needs are met. This person contracts with licensed mental health consultants to provide counseling for parents and families and training for parents and staff throughout the year.

Dietitians are also available to help families ensure that all members are receiving proper nutrition.

Team Approach to Families

Parents collaborate with staff to ensure that services are being accessed appropriately and support systems are in place. Each family develops a Family Partnership Agreement with the staff each year, outlining goals and needs. Then, three times throughout the year, staff meet across disciplines to discuss and assess the child and family and determine whether they may need intensive case management by the senior family services specialist. This staff member advocates on behalf of the family and integrates appropriate development activities in the family's daily life. In addition, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers visit each home at least twice a year. Each week (for Head Start participants) or day (for Early Head Start participants), staff send home documentation of children's daily activities.

Volunteer Grandparents and Godparents

Foster grandparents work at each Palm Beach County Head Start & Early Head Start center. They help teachers by working one-on-one with children who have special physical, emotional, and social needs. All of the grandparents are trained monthly and take part in an annual pre-service training conference.

Through the Godparent Volunteer Program, volunteers from all walks of life and all ages give individual attention to children enrolled in Head Start

and donate time, resources, and services to the children and the program.

Volunteerism

Most parents volunteer in some capacity. Opportunities include classroom assistance, administrative support, fundraising, planning special events, and facility improvements. Many parents spend time volunteering in their children's classrooms or chaperoning field trips. Incentives and acknowledgement of volunteers include an annual luncheon and awards ceremony as well as opportunities to travel to regional and national Head Start conferences.