



ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.

Annual Report for March 2020-February 2021

FROM THE CEO

From the beginning, this year was different from any we have ever experienced.

A little background information to the start of the year is needed. Our Head Start/Early Head Start programs use the HighScope Curriculum as well as Conscious Discipline by Loving Guidance. Understanding and using the skills from Conscious Discipline helps children modify their behavior in positive ways, but we have learned that it also helps adults.

During spring break in the previous fiscal year, we provided ALL ACHR staff and some of our community partners a two-day agency-wide Conscious Discipline training event. Some of our staff who have little or nothing to do with Head Start told supervisors that they personally benefited from that training. We could see the changes in how some of those staff handled difficult situations day-to-day. Educators, who attended multiple weeklong Conscious Discipline training events in Orlando, knew that multiple trainings increase depth of knowledge.

As a result, to build on the knowledge staff had gained and the improvement across our agency in ability help children and families as a result of that training, we planned a follow up training with the same trainer during spring break in March of 2020, beginning March 16. On Thursday March 12 after watching the news about COVID-19, I cancelled the training. The next day Governor Ivy closed all schools, so of course we at Early/Head Start did not come back after spring break. Instead, staff came back into centers at staggered times to gather what they would need to work from home.

We were very appreciative of the Office of Head Start and Dr. Deborah Bergeron who was the Office of Head Start (OHS) Director at that time for their quick action in providing Early/Head Start programs with information, suggestions and directives. Directives included that E/HS staff work virtually from wherever they could to support our children and their families and that they were to continue to be paid so we would retain our staff.

I am very proud of our staff. They worked hard to find innovative ways to continue to support families, both to help the children continue to learn (and to feel cared about by their teachers and staff) and to try to relieve stress for parents. They quickly pulled together materials and later supplies to help parents be able to better help their children learn at home. Many parents lost their jobs; others continued work in challenging conditions. When there were requests from families in need, staff returned to centers to gather and arrange distribution of items we had on hand such as diapers and formula. Staff planned and then we purchased items like crayons, markers, glue, scissors, colored paper, toothbrushes and toothpaste as well as plastic boxes to house the items. Boxes for Early Head Start included other things like bubbles, and Head Start boxes included a big set of letters and numbers. A



staff member and her husband volunteered to put the materials in boxes rather than try to have unrelated staff working together in the center. Drive through events were held to distribute the boxes. Bus drivers called to check on their families as did Family engagement staff who also offered resources and ideas to help families obtain what they needed. Teachers used their own laptop computers or phones to record videos of themselves reading to “their” children or doing activities. Our registered dietician created cooking videos. Our webmaster posted the videos on Facebook and then on our YouTube channel, so parents could access them with whatever resources they had including smart phones. Teachers talked with parents regularly over phone or zoom to help them help their children learn, and to be a listening ear for anxious or frustrated parents.

Staff created a fillable parent survey for the website to assess how many families had internet access and what needs/concerns they had so we would know how to orient our time. About 140 families responded to that survey which automatically emailed to the Family Engagement Advocate (FEA) the parent named on the survey. FEAs reviewed the surveys and staff called the remaining parents so we had information about needs, concerns and resources then available.

Meanwhile other staff read about COVID, listened to webinars about COVID – and read and listened to webinars about how to teach effectively at a distance and wrote new materials and procedures to lay out a new way of helping families and keeping everyone safe. They planned, situations changed and they re-planned. They researched the best supplies to keep staff safe.

I am very pleased to say that our CSBG/LIHEAP staff briefly tried serving clients on-site but distanced but had to close. They consulted with the state and soon found a ways to serve clients completely off site using a realtor’s box so clients could pick up applications and a locked mailbox for clients to drop off completed, signed applications. In this way, they were able to continue to serve clients with almost no break in service. Although our community garden suffered, staff found a way to continue the VITA tax program.

Early/Head Start staff mailed out packets of forms for parents enrolling children and created a drive through orientation. Parents were able to return completed forms and have them checked and be given additional materials with parents and staff in fresh air and at a distance.

We purchased a tablet for every HS child and older EHS children and a laptop computer for every classroom staff member. Programs for the tablets were chosen carefully because the survey showed that fewer than a quarter of our parents have Internet access that could be used for this purpose. Many families’ access was limited in quantity or had unreliable connections– and of course, with gaps children soon lose interest. We found one program that could up-date and send information about a child’s progress to our staff with only a weekly connection to the internet. We had set our wireless not to bleed far outside our buildings. Changing that gave parents one more access opportunity in addition to libraries, school hot spots and so forth. Our staff member who works with computers set up an assembly line to check out and set up each tablet or computer, and found another staff member willing to assist with the basics. They managed to check and set up about 60 classroom staff laptops and 400 tablets.

In July, the new school year for EHS and Head Start children on the duration model began virtually with the addition of providing a tablet for each child loaded with children's programs (some for learning, some for fun) and a Zoom link so parents could more easily communicate with the teacher. We usually give new children a booklet called *Going to Preschool*, which helps children with transition from home to the center. Staff created a new booklet called *ACHR Head Start: Learning From Home*.

Due to COVID19, weekly staff meetings (about 13 key staff on Zoom) grew from the usual two hours a week to as much as four hours. Sometimes it took a while to work out new COVID19 safe systems that meet all needs. For example, how we would admit children, were parents going to be allowed in the building, how to do temperature checks/documentation and a daily symptom questionnaire, how to safely and quickly sign children in and back out twice each day . . . the list seemed endless.

Maintenance staff deep cleaned centers, installed touchless faucets, touchless soap dispensers, hands-free trashcans and paper towel holders. Staff removed soft cuddly things and items not easy to sanitize such as dress up clothes (no fun). Thanks to COVID funds a covered walkway, extending from the entrance toward the parking lot was installed so parents and children had a covered place to wait at Darden as staff checked temperatures and symptoms before entry. Additional new items included purchases of staff masks and smocks. A system for safely sanitizing rooms nightly was purchased and used. Sanitizing wipes were added to restrooms and for teachers to use on frequently touched playground equipment surfaces.

Services for all children, including home based families, continued virtually into October when we finally were able to re-open. We kept group sizes smaller in HS to improve physical distancing and some parents preferred their children return virtually, so the solution was three virtual classes at King Center HS in Auburn, two virtual classes at Darden Center HS and one virtual class at Edelman Center HS. EHS Darden and EHS Edelman each served a handful of virtual children. Our Homebased program remained completely virtual, with a few porch/yard visits and material drop-off events in addition to regular virtual home visits. In spite of our multiple service options, enrollment was a challenge, largely because parents were hesitant, and partly because it is hard to recruit when staff can have little contact and cannot be out and about in the community.

In December, on very short notice. ACHR was offered and hosted a huge Feed the Children event, this one only for ACHR families, unlike the two we have hosted previously. Normally, the events include a resource fair that because of COVID could not be held. We were able to serve families from all three centers. Normally Feed the Children provides volunteers, but because of COVID could not, so many ACHR staff stepped forward to make sure that this drive through event was a success for our families. Each family received a box of food, a box of toiletries and essentials, a pack of vitamins, and a toy for each child in the family. Our families were appreciative, and so are we. I am proud of our staff in this effort to provide one more way to help families during this challenging time.

Somehow, during this time staff managed to do some regular work planned back in December 2019 and January 2020 for this period. This included a continued search for a location for Early/Head Start classrooms in eastern Lee or Russel Counties due to changing community need,

review/revision of the *ACHR Policy and Procedure Manual* for board approval, review/revision of about 50 job descriptions, review/revision of our parent handbook, and more. Not everything planned was possible to implement due to the time COVID absorbed. It was that kind of year.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

ACHR, incorporated in Montgomery in 1954, has provided Head Start (HS) services in Lee County since 1965 and in much of Russell County since 1992. ACHR has provided Early Head Start in both counties since 1998. In addition to HS and EHS, ACHR administers other programs, including: the Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACA), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (serving daycare homes in multiple counties), housing counseling (also multiple counties), VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance in two counties). The Emergency Services Program includes resources for clients such as LIHEAP (Low Income Heating Assistance Program), that offers energy counseling and assistance with payment of energy bills and funds from the ABC Trust. ACHR also offers low-income housing at 12 housing complexes in seven counties. ACHR is the designated Community Services Block Grant program provider for Lee County.

ACHR's Early Head Start (EHS) program, which started in 1998, is an integral part of the agency's overall program. It is widely recognized that the years from conception to age three are vital to growth and development. Staff in both the EHS classroom program and in the EHS Home visit program provide EHS families with suggestions enrich their child's development and to ensure a support system for both the child and primary caregiver.



ACHR has three centers offering services to children, two in Lee County and one in Russell County. Darden in Opelika is the largest center, with 11 HS classrooms and five EHS classrooms, as well as a school-aged class serving 18-20 school-aged children (mostly siblings of HS/EHS children or former HS children) who come to the center for before and/or after school and for summer care.



The Darden campus also includes Darden on the Hill. That area houses the Sunshine Shop where staff accept, store and display donated goods for easy free access by HS/EHS families. There is a building with office space for EHS home visitors and a socialization area for 104 home-based infants, toddlers and pregnant women/teens served by the home visitors in Lee County. The Frankie B. King Center houses the ACHR Main Office that provides space for administrative, fiscal, secretarial, and other agency support functions and eight Head Start classrooms serving children and families in Auburn and Eastern Lee County. There are offices for services including energy assistance, housing counseling and weatherization for Lee County. The Marian Wright Edelman Center, located in Hurtsboro in Russell County, houses three HS and three EHS classrooms, as well as offices and socialization space for home visitors for 24 EHS infants, children and/or pregnant women.

In addition to these centers, there are some auxiliary facilities, such as a garage to service agency buses and other vehicles.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

NUMBERS FUNDED/SERVED

As we have stated, our grant year runs from March to February. Now that we have both EHS and the HS duration grant and run EHS and duration classrooms well over 200 days, our school year for many of our children runs from July to June. For non-duration HS children the year runs from late August into May. It is a challenge to reconcile those three periods. We normally base the data

in this section on the school year and the numbers in the Early/Head Start Program Information Reports. Due to COVID, the report was not required for 2019-20. It resumed in 2021 and we do have data for the period of July 2020-June 2021). However, of course COVID had a tremendous impact on that period.



An ACHR EHS Classroom

The ACHR-CDP was funded for 344 Head Start children and 168 Early Head Start children. By then, due to the up-dated information in the community needs assessment we realized that if possible the two new EHS classes from conversion the prior year should be in the areas toward Phenix City instead of in Opelika as had

been planned. After a search, we found a possible community partner offering space, so we began that period serving those 16 children home based while we worked toward agreement.

During the school year, as reported on the 2020-21 PIR we served 306 Head Start children, 38 less than our funded enrollment due to COVID and parent concerns. We served 188 EHS children (counting drops) and 18 pregnant women, so 38 more than our funded enrollment.

Home Visitors visited each home-based parent and child once a week, for much of the year virtually, and together with the parent, provided the full array of EHS services. During most of this time, socialization visits were suspended.



EHS Homebased Virtual Learning

According to the community needs assessment, among the various programs available, including additional Pre-K classes in both Lee and Russell Counties, most of the need for preschool services was met in rural Russell County and approximately 80% of the need met in Lee County. According to the community needs assessment the number of infants and toddlers served was approximately 65% of the need in rural Russell County but only about 20% of the need in Lee County.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Health

It was a challenging year in the health area. Parents were reluctant to take their children into the physician's offices for non-essential visits such as well-child screenings. If parents missed these well child check-ups, the wait time to schedule a "new appointment" was weeks, sometimes, months. When parents did get children into the office for screening and follow up, some did not get documentation. Normally if that happens when staff call, having sent a copy of the parent's permission form, the pediatric office staff will give the needed documentation. During this period, the offices told us that they would get to us when able and recommended that the parents go to the office and request. Many parents have been hesitant to do so.

Screenings were completed but not all within the 45 days; many items such as the ASQ, were done via phone and Zoom, which works, but it is slow.

During the period from July 2020 to June 2021, 79% of the Head Start were up-to-date on preventive and primary care. All HS children and EHS center-based children were up-to-date on immunizations. Only 43% of HS children were up-to-date on dental care. Of the 36 needing treatment, 92% received treatment.

Though 94% of the EHS children had access to care, only 33% of our EHS children were up-to-date on age-appropriate preventative care and 19% on preventative dental care (our pediatric dentists do not want to see children until age two; with COVID it was even more difficult). Overall 96% of EHS children had up-to-date immunizations. Of our EHS pregnant moms, 94% had health insurance and accessed care.

Family Engagement

In addition to the many phone calls they made to parents to stay in contact, Family Engagement Advocates (FEAs) created new lists of sources where families could access needed services such as food and housing assistance and sometimes education and employment. They shared information with families during calls and information was posted on the website and on Facebook. As an agency we already were focused on learning more about and finding ways to assist with trauma and resilience. FEAs attended several virtual trainings related to those topics (as well as many others) to be better prepared to assist families during this period.

Recruiting and enrollment was different this year. It is a challenge to recruit at a distance in terms of everything from explaining the program to getting paperwork back and forth. Both parents as well as staff involved have legitimate safety concerns. It took some thought, but creativity surfaced and new ways were discovered. Family Engagement working with education staff who had design skills created yard signs that were posted at strategic locations. They found a way to set up orientation, transfer paperwork and information and yet remain at a distance. Eventually the team designed table runners and



other signage, business cards, materials and small giveaways with recruitment information to attract attention. Those were used to attract attention when FEAs and Home Based Educators (home visitors) had the occasional opportunity to be present safely at small community events.

Education - Preparing Children for School

For more than 40 years, the ACHR-CDP has used the HighScope Curriculum in its efforts to have children ready for school. This approach takes each child at his/her level and works to build knowledge and critical thinking skills using the child's interests and strengths. All learning areas required by Office of Head Start as outlined in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework Ages 0-5 (HSELOF), including Social Emotional Development, Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development, Approaches to Learning, Cognition, and Language and Literacy are embedded in children's everyday activities. This research-based curriculum approach is developmentally appropriate and is tailored for children ages birth through five years.

It is amazing what pre-school children can learn from resources visitors and field trips and how much fun they can have in the process. Teachers talk with the children before the visit, during the visit, and after the visit to stretch children's knowledge and vocabulary. Sadly during the pandemic, that was not an available option.

We encourage parents to do much the same thing with their own children as part of our school readiness parent program called RAGS (Reading, Activities and Growth for Success). Teachers send home RAGS activity sheets with suggestions of ways parents can help their child to grow in a particular focus that supports some of the classroom activities that week. These activities continued by handouts for center-based children and by posting RAGS activities for virtual families.

The activity sheets can help parents change a routine visit to the grocery store from an event that is frustrating for parent and child into a learning "adventure" that helps increase vocabulary, sentence length, ability to follow directions, or to increase math skills or self-regulation. The same child who was bored and crying can be enlisted to help find a can of green peas for dinner and the box with the big "K" on it for breakfast. We suggest that when parents have their child with them at the store, that they take a few moments to say things like: "The peas are in a can with a *green* label. Can you find it?" "Look one shelf *higher*." "Good find! Please put it *in* the cart." Of course, as a child gets better at this game, we encourage parents to make the skills progressively more challenging. ("Please put the can *in* the cart *beside* the corn and beans. Now we have *three* cans.") Repeated over a several visits, these "adventures" make a difference in a child's skills including those needed for school readiness. Even with the difficulties in transferring documents during this



period due to COVID, 38% of our Early Head Start parents, and 69% of our Head Start parents provided documentation of their efforts.

Teachers make frequent observations of children and place them into each child's Child Observation Record (COR) to track each child's progress towards school readiness goals and to know when to help a child stretch for the next level. For some children for part of the year, that had to be done through discussions with the parent, sometimes via Zoom. In addition, classroom staff focus on children's social skills and self-regulation in an effort to have the children ready to fit into a kindergarten classroom. Additionally, during the past several years ACHR has been training staff to implement the Conscious Discipline approach within our classrooms and spreading the approach to home visitors. The program has provided staff new ways to improve classroom management and assist children in developing self-regulation and other skills that help them to be connected, cooperative, and helpful members of a classroom family.

Additional challenges during this period in HS/EHS included retaining and recruiting classroom staff. Reasons for resignations included family illness, personal COVID anxiety, and higher paying jobs. A general shortage of available qualified classroom staff exists in our state. Additionally, the yearly increase in the number of Pre-K classrooms across the state (which pays teachers substantially more than HS) has significantly reduced the number of available qualified teaching staff.

SCHOOL READINESS REPORT: Analysis of Child Outcomes 2020-21

As per Head Start requirements, ACHR tracks children's development and progress toward school readiness goals. ACHR uses the *Child Observation Record (COR Advantage)* to document ongoing assessment of Early Head Start and Head Start children. There is an alignment between the COR, the HighScope Curriculum and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF). Teachers and Parent Educators (home visitors) gather and score observations using the COR Advantage online tool. COR Advantage is organized around 8 Categories and has 34 observation items. The tool covers birth through the end of kindergarten. It has scores that range from 0-7.

Head Start requires programs to aggregate and analyze child data three times per year; a baseline, in the middle, and at the end of each program year to determine the effectiveness of its program on child outcomes.

COR categories include:

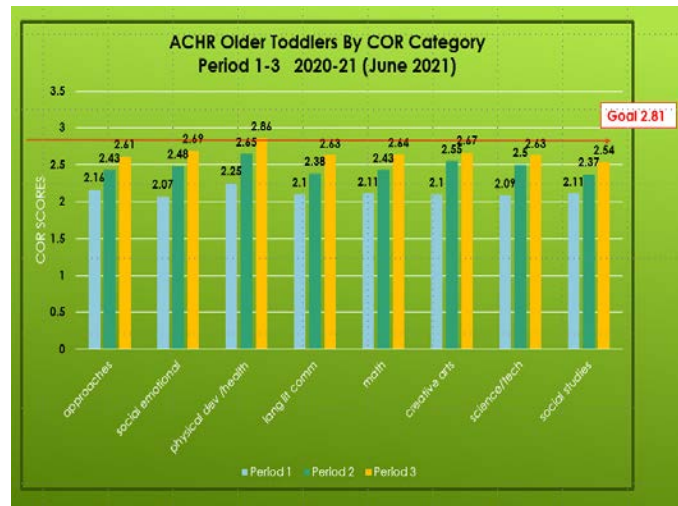
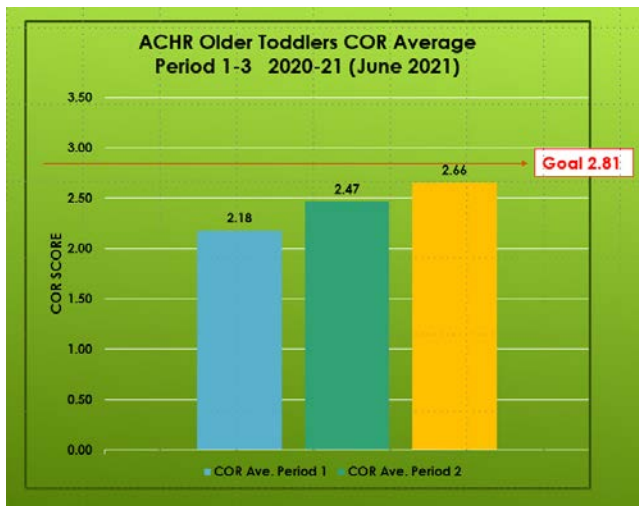
Approaches to Learning	Social & Emotional Development	Physical Development & Health
Creative Arts	Mathematics	Language, Literacy & Communication
Science & Technology	Social Studies	

Group Data after Period 3 (ended in May 2021 for King/Edelman HS and June for Darden duration HS and all of EHS) helps determine growth in children's developmental levels and progress towards school readiness goals at the end of the program year. We compared children in various data groups such as age, centers, gender, home language, and ethnicity. We also compare typically-developing children versus those with special needs.

Older Toddler Group:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically Developing children grew from 2.47 in period two to 2.66 in period three, a score increase of 7.7% increase (Special Needs: [2 ch.] went from 1.87 in period two to 1.92 in period three, a score increase of 2.7%). The final COR Average of 2.66 for typically developing Older Toddlers is 95% to goal of 2.81.
- Highest Category Scores for typically developing children (after *Physical Development and Health*, which always scores high) was *Social Studies* 2.54 out of 2.5, or 1.6% over its goal and *Mathematics* 2.64 out of 2.6, or 1.5% over its goal. Lowest Category: *Approaches to Learning* at 2.61 out of 3, or 87% to its goal. The other five categories were between 90% - 97% towards their goals.
- Highest single item for its goal was item *CC. Experimenting, predicting, and drawing conclusions*. It was 2.71 out of a goal of 2, or 35.5% above its goal.
- The lowest single item was a tie with *Item A: Initiative and Planning* and *Item DD: Natural and Physical World*. Both were 2.5 out of goal of 3.

Graphs Older Toddlers: 2020-21

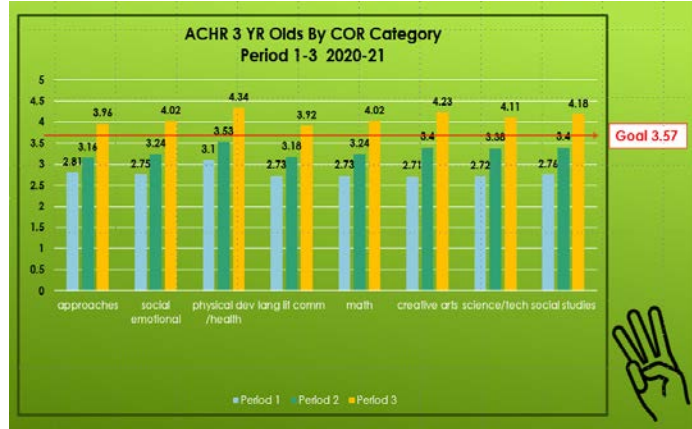
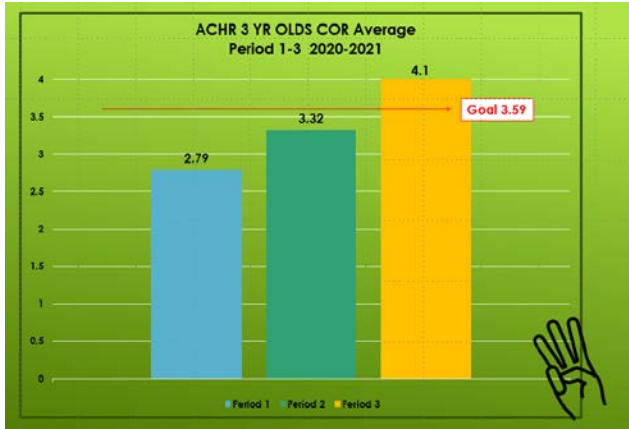


3 YR Old Group:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically-developing children grew from 3.32 in period two to 4.1 in period three, a score increase of 23.5% (Special Needs went from 2.45 in period two to 3.3 in period three, a score increase of 35%).
- Typically developing three year olds were over their goals in all 8 categories. The highest category score for typically developing 3 yr. old children was *Social Studies* with a score of 4.18 out of 3.5, or 19% above its goal. The lowest category: *Approaches to Learning* at 3.96 out of goal of 3.66, or 8.2% over its goal. The other six categories were 10-18% above their goals.

- The lowest single item was *Item M: Listening and Comprehension* at a score of 3.86 out of 4, or 96% to its goal.

Graphs 3 YR Old Group:



4 YR Old Group

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically Developing 4 yr. old children grew from 3.6 in period two to 4.4 in period three, an increase of 22% (Special Needs went from 2.53 to 3.3, an increase in score of 30%). The final COR Average of 4.4 for typically developing 4 yr. olds was 96% to goal of 4.59.
- For typically developing children, after *Physical Development and Health* at 100% of its goal the highest category was *Creative Arts* with a score of 4.55 out of goal of 4.62 or 98.5% to its goal. Lowest Category: *Approaches to Learning* with a score of 4.26 out of its goal of 4.67, or 91.2% to goal. The other six categories were between 92.6-98% to their goals.

▪ Additional information for the typically developing 4 yr. olds:

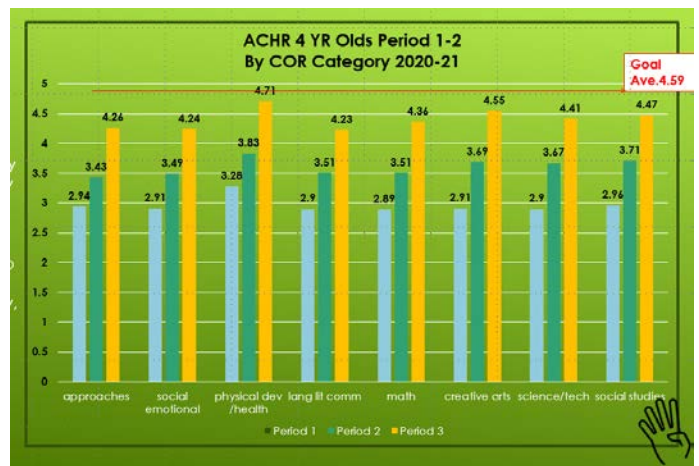
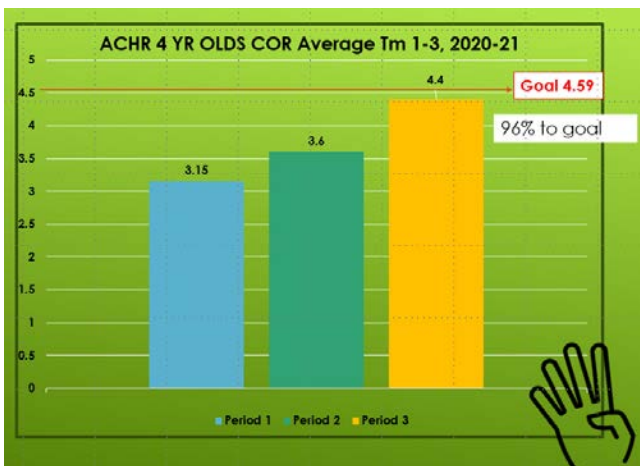
- When examining various groupings such as gender, race, ethnicity, language, and ethnicity, there are no significant differences among any groupings other than those with disabilities. The score average difference between typically developing children and those with disabilities was 3.29 verses 4.4 or an average of 34% lower scores for the children in the special needs data group.
- Data from skills tracking at the end of period three indicated children going on to kindergarten knew an average of:



- o 17.5 uppercase letters (down 16.7% from 21 in 2018-19 data)

- 13 lower case letters (down 23.5% from 17 in 2018-19 data)
- 9 letter sounds (down 35.7% from 14 in 2018-19 data)
- 9.3 numerals between 0-25 (down 28.5% from 13 in 2018-19 data)
- 7.2 shapes (down 20% from 9 in 2018-19 data)
- 9.3 colors (down 7% from 10 in 2018-19 data)
- 79% could write their first name (down 1.25% from 80% in 2018-19 data) and 37% could write their last names (down 26% from 50% in 2018-19 data).

Graphs 4 yr old Group:



Conclusions From 2020-21:

Baseline data was typical of previous years; however, at the mid-point the Head Start children’s gains were less than in previous years. Overall scores at the mid-point were lower for both three and four year old groups in comparison to previous years. For example, the typically developing 3 yr. old group at the mid-point was at an average of 3.3 in 2019-20 but this year were at 3.01 or 9.6% lower. The 4 yr. old group at the mid-point was at an average of 3.86 in 2019-20 but the same age group in 2020-21 was an average of 3.6 or 7.2% lower than at the same time in 2019-20.

After the end of period three, as predicted, some age groups did not meet 100% of the average COR goal. This included older toddlers and the King Center 4 yr. old groups although they did attain respectively 95% and 92% of their goals.

Contributing causes of somewhat lower average scores for some groups after period 3 may include:

- Changes in children’s home lives since the pandemic began (loss of employment, changing homes, illness/death in the family) are stress inducing. Stress affects the functioning of the brain and learning.
- COVID quarantines when children went back and forth between center-based services and virtual teaching.
- Sporadic child attendance of some center-based children, meaning they received less Head Start time than other children did.

Note: Children who received virtual services from home verses classroom (virtual learners) did not have lower scores than other groups of children, but scores were lower than scores of classroom based children in previous years.

These causes mean two things: 1) children spending less direct time with teachers and peers in the classroom due to periods of quarantine, stress, or poor attendance have fewer gains, and 2) data collection is more challenging when center-based children are out of the classroom. In-depth observations are also more difficult to attain while distancing in the classroom and during virtual teaching of any kind.

In addition to the overall COR data for the program, child outcome data of various groups is reviewed, including centers. King Center’s typically developing 4 yr. old children started an average of .8 behind Edelman and .5 behind Darden. After the mid-point, King’s 4 yr. olds remained behind Edelman by .4 and Darden by .5. After the third time period, King remained behind Darden by .36 and Edelman by .43 scoring points. The difference between King, Darden and Edelman is a little more than usual but King’s trajectory was upward through all periods.

We also looked for differences among gender, race, home language and children with special needs (IEP/IFSP) verses typically developing children.

- There is no significant difference in the scores between genders and races.
- There is no significant difference between English speakers and the overall Dual Language learning (DLL) group. Many DLL’s parents are college educated foreign students. They score generally as high or higher on the COR than the typical age groupings. Spanish speaking DLLs scored an average of 12.4% less than the overall DLL group.
- Children with special needs: There was low enrollment in HS and low numbers of enrolled children with IEPs/IFSPs during the pandemic this program year. Scores among these children varied with the severity and type of disability. As with previous years, this group of children



tended to score significantly lower than typically developing children. Within their age groups, the Older Toddlers with special needs scored 18.75% or .39 of a point lower than their typically developing peers did. The 3 yr. old group’s scores were equal with their typically developing peers. In the 4 yr. old group, the children scored 25% lower than their typically developing peers, and .87 of a point behind. Each child with an IEP/IFSP has their own benchmarks established in their personalized plan overseen by the public school (3-5 yr. olds) or Early Intervention (0-up to 3 yrs.).

ACHR helps each child to move from wherever he/she starts towards their benchmarks and school readiness goals.

- Attendance 2020-21: Average daily attendance of enrolled children in Early Head Start was 71.12% and Head Start’s was 71.37%. Against funded enrollment, however, Head Start attendance was an average of 55.49% and Early Head Start’s was 57.11%. This difference was due to the low enrollment.

ACHR predicted earlier in the year that skills and scores of children going on to kindergarten in 2021 might not meet our goal of 4.59. In spite of the difficulties of 2020-21 program year, children’s outcomes were 92% and higher. Individual skill logs of the same group, however, show less progress than in 2018-19 pre-pandemic program year. Less classroom time and time with teachers results in less progress.

While there were many challenges during the 2020-21 program year, the pandemic was also responsible for elements that may have ameliorated some of its negative effects on children. Low enrollment and the necessity of social distancing led to smaller than usual group sizes in Head Start. Classrooms started with no more than 10 preschool children. Some classrooms added a few more children later in the program year, but overall the center group sizes stayed small. This resulted in calmer classrooms, more teacher-child time and a large decrease in challenging behaviors. ACHR transported less children per bus with children more spread out, so buses also experienced a calmer transportation experience with less challenging behaviors.

The preschool children had fewer issues with mask wearing than we expected☺. Staff wore buttons with photos of their smiling faces on them so children could see what staff/teachers looked like under their masks. Families adapted to COVID screenings at doors of the buses and centers and the new center sign-in/out procedures. ACHR adapted to new ways of working with parents by phone and virtual parent teacher conferences, family engagement contacts, and parent meetings.



As stated in the last board report, it is the nature of things that children grow and develop constantly—thus the COR Advantage observations, computer logging and daily lesson planning are a huge piece of the classroom staff’s work. The ACHR Education Team want parents, Policy Counsel, and Board members to be aware of the dedication and hard work ACHR teachers and Parent Home Educators do to implement the Early and Head Start programs. The ACHR Education Team is proud of the classroom staff’s efforts and consistency during this very difficult time in our nation’s history.

ACHR PROGRAMS OTHER THAN HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START



ACHR is the designated Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) provider in Lee County. CSBG funds assist, extend and strengthen a variety of programs and make it possible for the agency to provide services that otherwise could not be provided.

CSBG assists with funding for many programs, including housing counseling and the gardening projects described below.

ACHR's LIFE (Learning Information about Food and Exercise) began in 2014 through CSBG funds, because of a 10% up-tick in self-reported obesity by clients completing our community assessment survey. The program was planned and implemented to help participants living with low income improve their overall health and maintain or decrease their weight. Our Registered Dietitian (RD), Certified Fitness Instructor provides weigh-ins and individualized diet counseling (including for a variety of health concerns, such as diabetes). Some participants check-in by phone, others in person. As a certified fitness instructor, in most years she offers low-impact aerobic exercise program at Darden, Edelman and King Centers. During this year, in-person classes were suspended. During this year, in-person classes were suspended. Online exercise classes were offered twice a week via Zoom with between 2 and 15 people attending the Zoom exercise classes. We also started a LIFE Facebook page linked to our ACHR Facebook page, where the RD shares diet tips and nutrition advice periodically. She recorded a few healthy eating and cooking videos that have been uploaded onto ACHR's YouTube channel.

Other programs ACHR administers designed to assist families living with low incomes in Lee County and, in some cases, in other areas of Alabama, include:

- **Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACAH)**, with a current emphasis on community gardens in Lee and Russell Counties. Normally one of the gardens in Lee County is a collaboration with several churches and with youth involvement and we have gardens at King Center that the children are involved in. With the pandemic, both were suspended because of the need for distancing and the fact that there were no children at the center for most of the period. The King Center garden was cleaned and a fall crop was planted. Some clients from the CSGG programs were able to harvest and use some of the produce.
- **Child & Adult Care Food Program**, which provides training and reimbursement for qualified meals at the beginning of the pandemic, had 27 day care home providers serving approximately 212 children. Many homes closed for a time during the pandemic and three providers chose to retire before most of the remaining homes re-opened.
- **The Emergency Services Program** includes various energy/rental assistance programs including ABC Trust, CSBG, EFSP, and LIHEAP. When ACHR shut down due to the pandemic, there were 278 clients scheduled for assistance in March 2020. Staff were able to assist 38 out of the 278 before shutting down and rescheduling the remaining 240. Once staff returned to the office, while practicing social distancing, they were able to call and verify clients' mailing address and described the process for virtual services. Staff also attended virtual workshops with ADECA (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs) concerning ABC, CSBG and LIHEAP procedures, exemptions and COVID-19 grants. During the summer months, despite the challenges of the pandemic, staff were able to assist 1455 households using LIHEAP Cooling funds and 535 through LIHEAP Crisis.

During this time, ACHR's Emergency Services Program received the first time ever in Alabama the CSBG Disaster Relief Grant. This grant was used to assist ten households that

were impacted by the tornadoes that destroyed parts of Beauregard and surrounding areas in March of 2019.

Through the Lee-Russell Council of Governments, we applied and received EFSP Phase 37, 38 and CARES funds to offer rental and mortgage assistance to those households that were impacted by COVID-19. We also received ABC CARES COVID-19 funds. These funds were used to assist those households who were over income for the LIHEAP assistance program.

- **Housing Counseling** (Department of Housing and Urban Development-certified Housing Counseling Agency) to residents with problems with mortgages, tenant/landlord relations, etc. Our Housing Counselor provided services through on-line courses. She studied for the HUD housing counseling exam, passed, and is now a Nationally Certified HUD Housing Counselor. She also received a three-year NeighborWorks certification.
- **Certified Community Housing Development Organization** has 13 low-income housing complexes in seven counties. Efforts in this area continued including a rehabilitation deal for the complex in Marion Alabama to improve the complex.
- **Weatherization** - assesses and then contracts to weatherize homes (including mobile homes) for homeowners who qualify. The program was suspended during this period because our staff member who assesses and reassess and contractors would have had to be in homes. The five homes that were in process were completed later in the year.
- **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program** participant; ACHR staff and two volunteers were received intensive training and served 151 families during this period while maintaining COVID precautions through distancing virtual, and drop-off. Persons were served in both Lee and Russell Counties.
- **S.T.E.P.S. (Systems to Empower Parents and Students)** is a relatively new, youth focused effort, in partnership with other community groups. The goal is to encourage young people to stay in school, work to become eligible, and attend college. The S.T.E.P.S. Chairperson worked one-on-one with students who requested help.



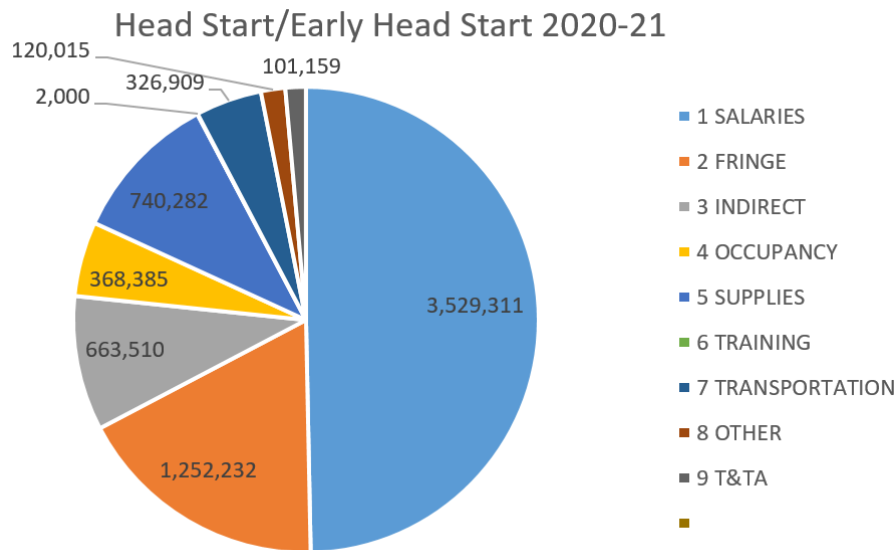
FINANCIAL INFORMATION/FUNDING

Head Start/Early Head Start

The Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc., received funding from Health and Human Services in the amount of \$7,103,803 to fund its Head Start (4,670,598) and Early Head Start (2,833,205) programs. That included the supplemental funding for the Head Start children who were able to be in the program additional days.

Because Head Start/Early Head Start programs are required to have a 20% Non-Federal Share (NFS) also called “match” or “in-kind,” we must find donated goods or volunteer time within the

community in that amount that is of benefit to the program. Because of the difficulty during COVID of securing donations and especially volunteer time, we requested and received a waiver of NFS that was granted for the majority of the required amount. We were able to secure the agreed on \$330,987. The pie chart below shows the percentages of funds spent in key areas for the HS/EHS programs.



Funding For Other Programs

Funds in the amount of only \$77,629 were awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide meals for children. The kitchen for all three centers were closed down for six months and operating only partly for the other six months The Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP), serving family day care homes in four counties received \$275,696.00. The City of Opelika provided \$20,000 to assist with extended day/year care for children of working parents. In combination with funding through the state voucher program and parent fees on a sliding scale, the City of Opelika funding allowed us to provide before and/or after school and summer care for approximately 100 children of mothers who were working or in school when centers were able to be open.

Beyond that, we have LIHEAP funds of \$1,632,000 (most of which provides heating and cooling assistance directly to clients), Alabama Charitable Trust Funds of \$32,058 which were used to assist clients who were not eligible for LIHEAP funding or who needed additional assistance, and CSBG funding of \$410,158 (which supplements various programs as well as providing direct services). Last year, we received \$10,181 in General Funds from the State of Alabama and weatherization funds of \$51,426 received this year. We also received funding from H.U.D. in the amount of \$13,940 to aid clients in home counselling and F.E.M.A FOR 16,219 for emergency housing needs.

At this writing, we expect our budget and expenditure in all grant areas for the coming year to be similar to that in the past year.

Audit Results

The independent audit done by an outside Certified Public Accountant on ACHR programs for the 2019-20 year resulted in no audit findings. The most recent Head Start/Early Head Start was favorable allowing us to remain eligible for the five-year designation. In addition, various programs including Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program), and Weatherization were audited during this year and although there were a few things to respond to, there were no significant findings.

IN-KIND -- DONORS AND BENEFACTORS

Federal requirements state that HS/EHS programs must match the federal grant funds on an 80-20 basis. That means that “in-kind” or “Non-Federal Share (NFS) which include donations of time, goods and funds) is essential to the continuation of the federal funding that allows ACHR to provide children and families living with low incomes Head Start/Early Head Start services.

Normally we have large numbers of volunteers (more than 700 the previous year) from the community who come to our centers to provide assistance in various ways. This includes volunteers from the Auburn University such as the Department of Kinesiology, which provided a program that helps children improve motor skills, and supported classroom staff with information, students from the AU School of Nursing (health education), the department of early education and more. We also had volunteers from other schools including Southern Union State Community College and many individual volunteers. Starting at the beginning of this fiscal year, this year was very different. Just as we closed, all universities and colleges closed. When we returned to on-site classes in October, staff decided that to limit exposure to COVID it was not wise to have anyone in our centers or classrooms that was not staff. Additionally business that previously donated goods or sometimes funds were no longer in a position to do so. When we began to see that the pandemic was not going to end anytime soon, we applied for and received a waiver of about 80% of our Non Federal Share obligation.

We are appreciative of the 384 parents who provided documentation during this period some of it through our RAGS (Reading, Activities and Growth for Success) program that supports children’s school readiness, of at least some of the effort they put forth in helping our classroom staff help their children learn. We are also appreciative of the few businesses that were able to continue to donate part of their services, such as the company that helps us maintain a secure internet connection and assists with computer problems our staff could not resolve, all mostly, and the company that assists with lawn services. Though it no longer has the Jean-Dean RIF program, the Kiwanis Club, none-the less donated books to help parents help their children learn at home; the books were given out at some of the parent pick-up events

We look forward to the time when we can return to a more normal mode when our children can benefit from many talented, caring volunteers and businesses are again flourishing and able to share.