



ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year March 1, 2021-February 28, 2022

FROM THE CEO

During this period, COVID continued to have an impact on our clients, children, and staff. For some of our clients, it brought another year of uncertainty and challenges in how to get what they needed, including how to access the internet which continued to be important to be able to locate sources of assistance and access them. For Head Start and Early Head Start children, despite our staff's best efforts, it brought another period of sudden disruptions to their ability to get to and/or be in their classrooms. It brought all too frequent temporary changes in bus routes and classroom staff due to illness, and thus continued challenges in children's feeling of security, and continuity and in their ability to learn as quickly as normal. For our staff, it brought about another year of challenges, changes, and frequent adjustments to offer services with the least risk of transmission of illness.

For the second year, we could not offer the planned two-day on-site Conscious Discipline training for our ACHR Early/Head Start staff. This training is part of our multi-year effort to help staff better understand the varied causes of trauma, its effect at the time, and as important, long term for both children and adults, and how to help mitigate it by strengthening resilience. This is one of the goals in Head Start's five-year plan. The training planned for spring break 2020 was a follow-up to the training held in 2019 so all of our Early/Head Start staff and some others could build on the knowledge from the first training. That training was well-received and helped some staff cope better with their own concerns. I directed staff to cancel the training planned for spring break in 2020 at the last minute due to the beginning of what turned out to be a COVID pandemic. In March of 2021, it continued to be not safe to gather a large group, so again we did not offer the training. Education staff found a Conscious Discipline video training series provided some of our staff access, but it is not the same as the hands-on group events. Perhaps next year.

During this year, we had to close individual classrooms too often, because we did not have enough staff to keep the classroom(s) open. Fortunately, because soon after COVID surfaced the Office of Head Start encouraged programs to purchase technology to allow staff to work virtually, many of our teachers were able to return to our virtual mode when a room was closed and offer parents and children services during the shorter closures. Unfortunately, several staff got COVID and some were affected by "long" COVID.

Related to COVID, late in 2021, we received notification that Head Start would be under a mandate to assure that all Early/Head Start staff had proof of vaccination by January 31, 2022, or had a medical or religious exemption combined with weekly negative tests. Sources of free testing were ending. The copay for testing for most staff would be \$30/week. Having staff test at home could create other difficulties. Management staff spend time planning how we could safely offer the tests at a reasonable cost. They planned a system to document test results and a system to document vaccine status for those who obtained the vaccine. In January 2022, the

Supreme Court struck down the mandate for federal employees, including Head Start, and a few days later the one for OSHA for businesses employing more than 100 people. In retrospect, the time spent on researching, planning, creating procedures, forms and so on could have been used to help the program in other ways.

During this time, staff in all areas continued to improve their ability to offer services at a distance. Emergency Services staff continued to provide services without their clients coming into the facility, by using a combination of applications available from on website and paper copies available in realtor-type boxes combined with secure drop boxes to leave paper applications and required documentation. Early/Head Start staff used a similar system for applications to the program. Both programs offered drive-through services, Emergency Services for items they gave away to help local residents, and Early/Head Start for receiving and checking multiple required documents that are part of the application process for new and returning children and at the same time providing educational information. All areas used similar systems for new staff applications, and some used Zoom to interview.

Staff handled the data collection for the Community Needs Assessment that needed to be completed by August by creating, and informing people about how to access, surveys for clients, staff, and community providers on the ACHR website (accessible on computers, tablets or smartphones). Focus Groups, in the past held in person, were held on Zoom.

During this period, we made progress in other areas. We up-dated our phone/internet system and changed how our network is handled. At Darden Center, all cameras and DVRs were replaced, resulting in clearer video and audio. The system is used for security and can be used to assist with staff training. Staff started looking at measures we need to and can take to protect our network and the data we enter.

For the second year due to COVID, we did not have a SEACCA management training class the second week in December. These trainings have been foundational in improving staff's management skills and the ability of this staff group to understand one another's strengths and weakness and thus to be able to work more smoothly and effectively. Staff used the "found" time to review/revise procedures and got a good start on a big project.

In early to mid-January we had to close all three centers for a short time due to COVID. We had too many staff (and children) positive for or exposed to COVID to be able to run the centers.

The Early/Head Start FA2 Federal monitoring review was held the week of February 14. With the exception of one reviewer to do classroom observations, most of the review was virtual. Staff shared data using their computer screens.

Because we follow what the CDC and our local Health Department recommend, staff updated our COVID procedures to match the shorter periods persons must be out after a positive COVID test or exposure to someone COVID-positive to match the revised CDC guidelines. If we again close classrooms, the time closed will be shorter; we hope it is sufficient. A shortened time away certainly is better for children and staff.

It looks like the coming year will be another year full of challenges.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

The Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc., (ACHR), was incorporated in Montgomery in 1954 as a statewide organization, providing advocacy for basic rights for all. It 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 (ACAH), 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). ACHR also offers low-income housing at 11 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, is an integral part of the agency's overall programs. 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 based 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 Center in Opelika is the largest center, with seven HS classrooms and ten 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 in Opelika includes Burton House, home base to many of our Family Engagement Advocates and the Darden on the Hill area. 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 our 66 home-based infants, toddlers and pregnant women/teens served by the home visitors in Lee County.

The Frankie B. King Center in Auburn houses the ACHR Main Office which 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 22 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

Our grant year runs from March to February. Now that we have EHS and the HS duration grant which provides a longer year for some of our classrooms, each of which runs well over 200 class days, the school year for many of our children runs from July to June. For non-duration HS children the year runs from mid-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 (PIR), which are also based on the school year (in this report July or August 2021 into June of 2022). By working within school years, we can provide unduplicated information.

During the school year, as reported on the 2021-22 PIR, we served 320 (53 over our funded enrollment of 267). Head Start children. We served 171 EHS children (counting drops) and 24 pregnant women, a total of 195, three over our funded enrollment of 192. Home Visitors visited each home-based parent and child once a week. Depending on COVID rates and parent preferences some visits were porch visits, some were in-home visits, and some occurred virtually. The Home Visitor together with the parent provided the full array of EHS services. During most of this time, socialization visits were suspended. Socialization events cautiously started again in the Spring of 2022.

According to the community needs assessment, among programs available, including our classrooms and Home Visit program (EHS only), Pre-K classes in Lee (this period 25) and Russell Counties (27) and child care centers accepting vouchers, most of the need for preschool services was met in Russell County and all but about 9% of the need in Lee County. According to the community needs assessment, most of the need for care for children 0-3in Russell County, but only about 57% of infants and toddlers in Lee County.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Health

For health, like last year, was a very challenging year. Parents continued to be 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.

Because of the efforts of our staff, the vast majority of health screenings were completed on time (within the 45-day requirement). These health screenings include: hearing, vision, growth assessment, speech, developmental (ASQ) assessments, and nutrition. These screenings are also part of the child's "well child check-up" or "physical" completed at the pediatrician's office, but

as health staff do them in-house (with the help of nursing students when able given COVID considerations) they do count as a “well child check-up”.

During the period from July 2021 to June 2022, 57% of the Head were up-to-date on preventive and primary care – less than usual. All HS children and EHS center-based children were up-to-date on immunizations. Only 43% of children were up-to-date on dental care with 95% of children having a dental home. Of the 45 needing treatment, 100% received treatment.

Though 87% of the EHS children had access to care, only 46% of our EHS children were up-to-date on age-appropriate preventative care and 46% on preventative dental care (with the continuing of COVID variants it was difficult to get parents to make and keep appointments). Overall 88% of EHS children had up-to-date immunizations. Of our EHS pregnant moms, 96% had health insurance and accessed care.

Family Engagement- Transforming Lives

For a second year, COVID required us to be creative in our service delivery. We incorporated changes to be able to accommodate families during the pandemic. These changes included implementing porch visits instead of home visits when case management required us to visit families in the home and utilizing Zoom sessions to make contact with families to discuss goals, barriers, and accomplishments. It also included creating a full calendar of weekly Parenting Classes around the topics of budgeting, ACE’s, Conscious Discipline, Parental Support, and the use of other community resources including Domestic Violence Intervention Center, Family Resource Center, Dad’s League, and Lee County Literacy Coalition.



To help families cope as we began planning for a post-pandemic world, Family Engagement Advocates participated in training focused on Trauma Informed practices, care, and response in addition to topics used in our day-to-day case management like housing, budgeting, parenting, and self-sufficiency.

In addition to adjusting the ways that we provided services to our families, there was a need to adjust the ways that we recruit for our program in the communities we serve. Again, this year, we focused on ways to recruit that did not involve direct contact with families. This included leaving flyers and applications in public areas so families would have access to information about Early/Head Start in places they normally frequent, creating yard signs so families can see our information as they drive by, and strengthening relationships with existing community resources so that they can provide information about our programs to families that they serve. Our Family Engagement Team also worked hard on increasing the overall appeal of our recruitment table by adding table runners, hand sanitizer, key chains, business cards, pop-up signs, note pads, and pens all with our agency logo, name, and contact information.

The mission of the Family Engagement staff is to empower individuals and families to transform

their lives and strengthen their communities by addressing the social determinants of health through a trauma-informed care lens.

Our programs span the five pillars of the social determinants of health: economic stability, education, health & healthcare, neighborhood support, and social & community engagement. Family Engagement connects with other programs and services ACHR provides. We journey with our families ensuring they are ready for school, create social and community connections, become financially stable, focus on their mental health, and have neighborhood support, as well as creating access to support services for our rural communities.

Early Head Start and Head Start empowers families as their child's first teacher and focuses on encouraging families to be engaged in their children's learning. Our centers also connect our families to other Family Service programs. Such as helping the family reach their financial goals with free financial counseling, connecting them to workforce development opportunities, and offering parenting classes to build strong relationships. To ensure long-term support and success, our family engagement advocates focus on the whole family. Staff offer families links to services from our community partners to help meet all goals of the individuals within the family.

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 and life. 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 resource visitors and field trips and how much fun they can have in the process. Usually, 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 continued during 2021-22, 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 in spite of COVID.

The RAGS 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 increase math skills or self-regulation. Doing that is similar to some of our field trips – which have included visits to grocery stores. Of course, the

parent can't provide the "behind the scenes" portion that happens on many field trips to a store. Even so, the store can be a place for learning. The same child who was bored and crying can be enlisted to help find a can of green peas for dinner or 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 several visits, these "adventures" make a difference in a child's skills including those needed for school readiness. And parents can also point out fruits or vegetables that they don't normally purchase, talk about them and maybe even purchase one (a persimmon, a kumquat) to try. During this year, 50% of Head Start parents and 47% of Early Head Start Parents participated with their children in the RAGS program at least some of the time. While this is good, it is not good enough for our children. Research shows that parents engaging regularly with their children in a positive manner can increase their child's school readiness. Our staff will work this coming year to encourage parent participation.

In addition to RAGS, this year, through a small grant, we began offering all program families a parenting program called *Ready4K* that is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF). In this program, parents receive three texts per week based on their child's age and a specific learning area. The three short texts, sent on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays offer parents information on a learning item, give tips for supportive activities that match the information, and lastly offer gentle suggestions for parents to augment the activity to continue assisting with their child's learning in the current learning domain for the week. Parents who answered surveys from *Ready4K* indicated they participated with their child in at least one activity per week, experienced an increase in confidence to support their children's learning, and found *Ready4K* texts helpful.

Teachers and Home Based Parent Educators make frequent observations of children and enter the observation into each child's Child Observation Record (COR) to track each child's progress toward school readiness goals and to know when to help a child stretch for the next level. In addition, classroom staff focuses on children's social skills and self-regulation in an effort to have the children ready to enter 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 with 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. As with most employers in all fields, a general shortage of workers exists. Workers are also demanding higher salaries and having difficulty with the rising costs of their share of health benefits. Many applicants for teaching positions turn down our job offers due to insufficient salaries. 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.

Shortages of staff caused the closure of one HS classroom at Darden and two EHS classrooms at Edelman Center. Staff shortages made it impossible to open Darden’s five new EHS classrooms as planned.

School Readiness Report: Analysis of Child Outcomes 2021-22



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 assessments 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. The COR Advantage is organized around eight 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 Dev.	Physical Development & Health
Creative Arts	Mathematics	Language, Literacy & Communication
Science & Technology	Social Studies	

Group Data after Period After Period 3

Period 3 ended in May 2022 for King/Edelman regular HS children. It ended in June for Darden and Edelman children in the HS “duration” program (longer year) and all of Early Head Start.

Period 3 data indicates 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 children who are “typically-developing” with children who have special needs.

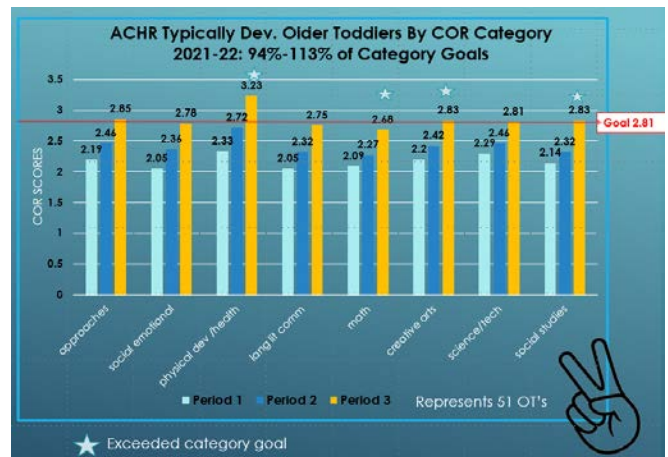
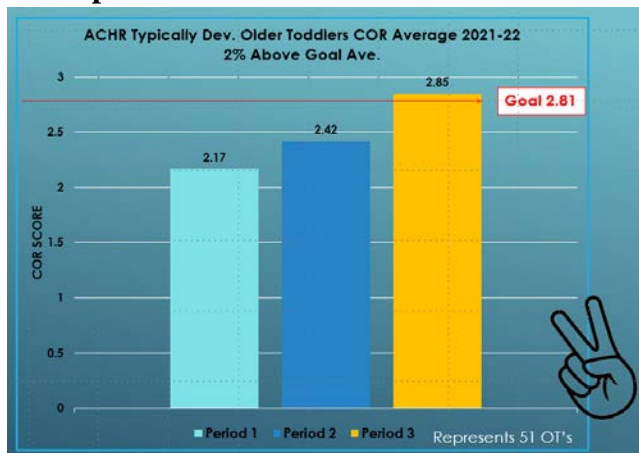
Older Toddler Group 2021-22:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically Developing children grew from 2.42 in period two to 2.85 in period three, a score increase of 17.7% (Special Needs: [4 ch.] went from 1.83 in

period two to 2.0 in period three, a score increase of 9.3%). The final COR Average of 2.85 for typically developing Older Toddlers is 102% or 2% over our goal average.

- Highest Category Scores for typically developing children (after *Physical Development and Health*, which always score high) was *Social Studies* 2.83 out of 2.5, or 13% over its goal and *Creative Arts* 2.83 out of 2.75, or 3%% over its goal.
- The lowest Category: *Language, Literacy & Communication* 2.75 out of 2.93, or 94% to its goal. The other five categories were between 99% -108% or 8% over its goal.
- The Highest single item for its goal was item *HH. History* at 2.86/2 or 43% above its goal.
- The lowest single item was *U: Measurement* which was 87% to goal or 2.62/3

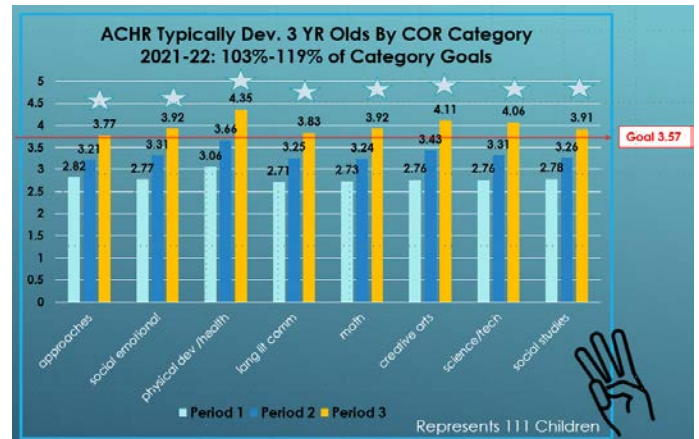
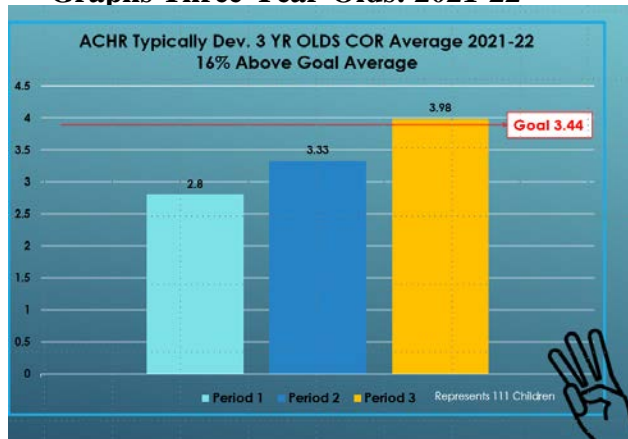
Graphs Older Toddlers: 2021-22



Three-Year-Old Group 2021-22:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically-developing children grew from 3.33 in period two to 3.98 in period three, a score increase of 15.7% (Special Needs [17 ch.] went from 2.71 in period two to 3.49 in period three, a score increase of 28.8%).
- 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 *Science/Technology* with a score of 3.5 out of 3.1, or 19% above its goal.
- The lowest single item was *Item N: Phonological Awareness* at a score of 3.46 out of 4, or 87% to its goal.

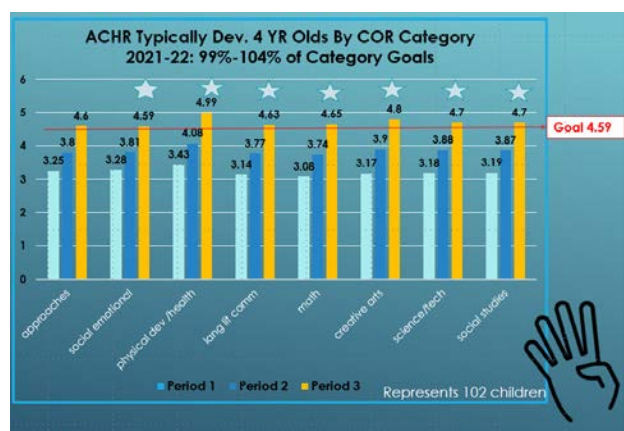
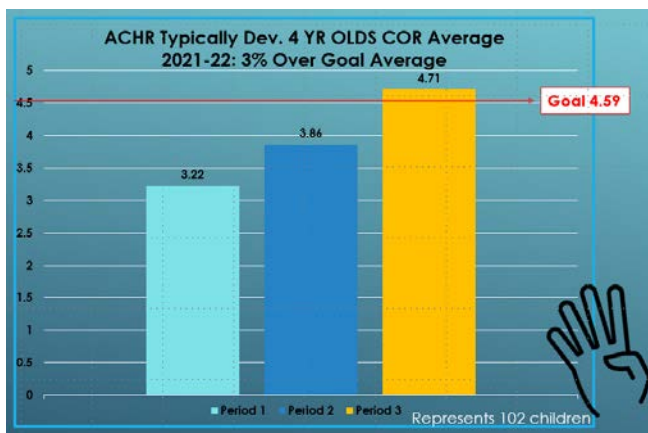
Graphs Three-Year-Olds: 2021-22



Four-Year-Old Group 2021-22:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically Developing 4 year-old children grew from 3.86 in period two to 4.71 in period three, an increase of 22% (Special Needs [14 ch.] went from 2.96 to 3.41, an increase in score of 15.2%). The final COR Average of 4.71 for typically developing 4 yr. olds was 3% over the goal of 4.59.
- Typically developing four-year-olds were over their goals in 7 of 8 categories. For typically developing children, the highest category was *Physical Development and Health* at 4.64 out of 4 or 16% over its goal. Lowest Category was: *Approaches to Learning* with a score of 4.6 out of its goal of 4.67, or 99% to goal.
- 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 children with disabilities. The score average difference between typically developing children and those with disabilities was 3.41 verses 4.71 or an average of 27% 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:
 - 18 uppercase letters
 - 15.5 lower case letters
 - 13 letter sounds
 - 12 numerals between 0-25
 - 8 shapes (down 20% from 9 in 2018-19 data)
 - 10 colors (down 7% from 10 in 2018-19 data)
 - 64% could write their first name and 20% could write both their first and last names

Graphs Four-Year-Old Group



School Readiness Conclusions from 2021-2022:

Baseline data was typical of previous years. At the mid-point the Head Start children's gains were similar to non-COVID years. Overall scores at the mid-point were also typical for older toddlers and three and four-year-old groups in comparison to non-COVID years.

After the end of period three, typically developing children in all age groups exceeded our school readiness goal average. In spite of staffing issues, the center Educators (directors), teaching staff, coaches/mentor teacher and others worked tirelessly to provide children with high quality teaching, learning, and safety.

Skills tracking logs of children going on to kindergarten in fall of 2022 showed an overall increase in knowledge of alphabet letters, letter sounds, numerals, shapes and colors in comparison to the high COVID years. It is clear that young children make more gains when they are in the classroom setting verses a virtual setting.

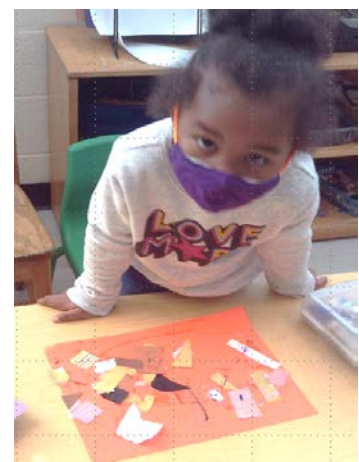
Child attendance was low across the year in all age groups. The average attendance of 4-5 year-olds was 72%. Causes of absenteeism included COVID, flu, family illnesses, loss of some transportation at Edelman center, and changes in classroom staffing.

Children's ability to write their first names decreased this year. In the previous three years, the average number of 4-5 year-olds who could write their first names was 80% and up to 50% could write their last names. This year the number of children writing their first names dropped to 64% and last names dropped to 20%. Possible causes of this was instability of classrooms due to poor child attendance and teacher/teacher assistant shortages. Children spent time in other teacher's classrooms when teachers were absent. Lack of consistency can have a negative effect on children's emotional state and learning. We are striving to find solutions to our teacher/other staff shortages. At this time, low salaries are a primary reason we lose classroom staff and have difficulty recruiting new staff.

In addition to the overall COR data for the program, child outcome data of various groups is reviewed, including comparing centers. King Center's typically developing 4 year-old children started an average of 20% lower than Darden. After the mid-point, King's 4 year-olds had narrowed the gap to 14 % lower than Darden. After the third tie-period, King remained behind Darden by only 5%. The difference between King and Darden/Edelman was a little more than usual but King's trajectory was upward through all periods and in the end was not significantly lower than the other centers. Indeed, as previously stated, all age groups exceeded our school readiness goals.

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.



ACHR Head Start hero wears her mask!

- 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. These children score generally as high or higher on the COR than the typical age groupings. This year, our Spanish speaking DLLs scored higher on average than the English-speaking students. While this group was only eight children, it shows that these children likely were already speaking some English prior to their HS experience. In previous years, there have been groups of Spanish speaking DLLs who scored somewhat lower than their English-speaking peers because they spoke little English upon entry.
- Children with special needs: Scores among these children varied with the severity and type of disability (e.g. Down Syndrome, Autism, developmental delay, speech/language). 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 43% or 1.02. points lower than their typically developing peers did. The three-year-olds with special needs scored 13% .49 of a point lower than their typically developing peers. In the four-year-old group, the children scored 32% or 1.31 lower than their typically developing peers. Each child with an IEP/IFSP has his/her own benchmarks established in their personalized plan overseen by the public school (3-5 year. olds) or Early Intervention (0-up to 3 yrs.). ACHR helps each child move from wherever he/she starts towards their benchmarks and school readiness goals.

The preschool children continued to have fewer issues with mask wearing than we expected 😊. Families continued to participate in COVID screenings at doors of the buses and at center doors and followed COVID center sign-in/out procedures. ACHR continued to use new ways of working with parents by phone and virtual parent teacher conferences, family engagement contacts, and parent meetings.

The COR Advantage observations, computer logging and daily lesson planning are a huge piece of classroom staff's work and take a great deal of time. In 2021-22, additional online COR training and COR reliability testing was provided to classroom staff/home visitors. Moving forward this training will be available to all new staff.

The dedication and hard work of veteran/new ACHR teachers and Parent Home Educators in 2021-22 was commendable. The ACHR Education Team is proud of the classroom and home visit 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.

Programs include the **Emergency Services Program**. The program offers designed community programs from the Community Services Block Grant and

other sources. It distributes the LIHEAP, ABC Trust, SPIRE Dollar Help Programs (each of which assists in various ways with energy assistance), EFSP through Lee Russell Council of Governments (shelter) and HUD and NeighborWorks Certified housing counseling services. The Emergency Services programs have eligibility criteria, including an income guideline that varies by program.

The Emergency Services staff have designed and implemented the Outreach Program; a program for clients who are 75 years of age or older or who have a disability that makes it difficult to get to one of our sites. During periods between times of intensive energy assistance intake, staff obtains the required information to pre-certify these clients yearly. When the cooling or heating program begins, letters are mailed to pre-certified clients informing them of program availability. The office will also mail out “Thinking of You” and “Holiday Wishes” cards. Clients have been appreciative of this program that has helped seniors/disabled citizens maintain independent living. We offer 300 slots in the Outreach Program. Each of those clients receives assistance through our heating and cooling programs. We are sad to report that as of the end of February 2021, we had only 242 seniors in our outreach program because of considerable attrition due to deaths among our seniors during COVID. Staff is working through our waiting list.



App. Staff also captured its services and outcomes through its Content Management System (CMS) FACSPRO.

The Emergency Services Program has several COVID Funded Programs some of which will continue until October 30, 2022. Between September 2020 to March 1, 2022, staff allocated over 4 million dollars into the Lee County Community and assisted over 15,000 households. Staff created various safe ways to assist clients during COVID; online, secure drop boxes so clients could leave documentation for staff to review, drive-thru, and the option to upload documents through the LITT Lite

App. During the pandemic, Tabitha Perry, the CSBG Administrative Assistant/Emergency Services Coordinator received her HUD Certification and maintained her ROMA Implementer and Trainer Certifications.

ACHR’s LIFE Program (Learning Information about Food and Exercise) began in 2014 through CSBG funds, because of a 10% uptick 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 Dietician 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 a low-impact aerobic exercise program at Darden, Edelman, and King Centers. During this year, in-person classes were suspended but she continued to offer individual exercise counseling. On the LIFE Facebook page linked to our ACHR Facebook page, the RD shares diet tips and nutrition advice periodically. She recorded a few healthy eating and cooking videos that were uploaded onto ACHR's YouTube channel.

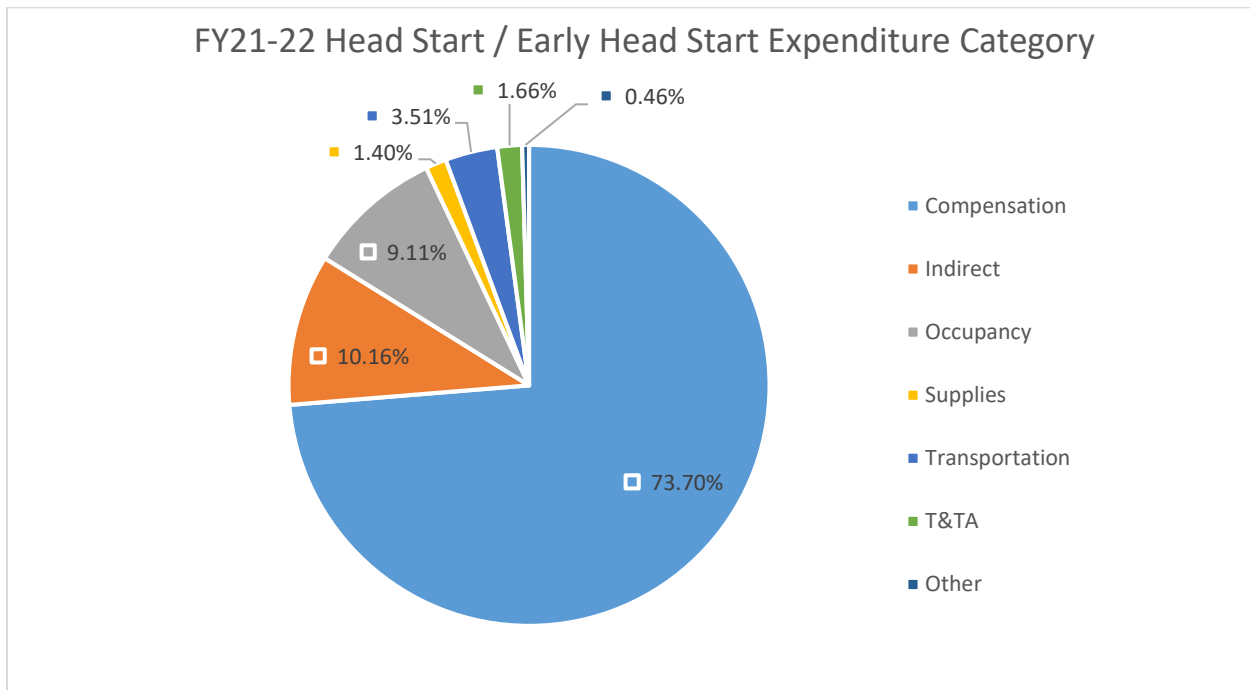
Other programs ACHR administers designed to assist families living with low incomes in Lee County and, in some cases, in other areas of Alabama, include:

- **Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACAH)**, currently focuses on the community garden at the King Center in Lee County. Normally the gardens in Lee County are worked in collaboration with several churches and with youth involvement. We have gardens at King Center that the Head Start children are involved in. Those were a collaborative effort of the Department of Horticulture at Auburn University and Dr. Josh Weaver. Due to ongoing pandemic issues, the garden was prepared and some harvest was yielded for clients to harvest, but there were no opportunities for the Head Start children to plant as planned. We have seeds and soil to be able to plant when children and parents can participate.
- **Child & Adult Care Food Program for Family Day Care Homes** continues to provide training and reimbursement for licensed daycare home facilities for qualified meals meeting standards. We had 25 daycare 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.
- **Certified Community Housing Development Organization** has 11 low-income housing complexes in eight counties. Efforts in this area during this period include the rehabilitation of Alfred Radney Apartments, renamed High Pine, in Roanoke.
- **Weatherization** - assesses and then contracts to weatherize homes (including mobile homes) for homeowners who qualify. The program continued to be suspended during part of this period because our staff member who assesses and reassesses and contractors would have had to be in the homes to do their work. Even so, during the last part of the Fiscal year ending February 2022 and slightly thereafter, 13 homes were weatherized.
- **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program** is a free service that offers tax assistance to participants through IRS online software. ACHR staff and two volunteers received advanced training and testing. They served 202 individuals and families during this period while maintaining COVID precautions through the use of distancing, virtual, and drop-off. Persons were served in Lee and Russell and Tallapoosa Counties. We partner with Alabama Asset Builders Coalition to provide additional financial literacy education materials and referrals to other partner sponsors, credit unions, etc., for those who are unbanked.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION/FUNDING

Head Start/Early Head Start

The Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc., receives funding from Health and Human Services in the amount of \$8,986,544 to fund its Head Start (\$4,748,737) and Early Head Start (\$4,237,807) programs providing 75% of agency operating budget. The pie chart below shows the percentages of expenditures per category for the HS/EHS programs.



Funding For Other Programs

Other programs including Child Nutrition and Emergency Services for Low Income Families grants ~\$3M from Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and other state and local charitable organizations providing 25% of agency operating budget.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs granted \$589K to provide meals and support for children through Child & Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) and Family Day Care Homes (FDCH).

Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) provides assistance for low-income individuals and families below 125% of the federally established poverty level to achieve self-sufficiency by obtaining employment, education, a suitable living environment and emergency assistance with health, nutrition and housing, etc. granted over \$400K. Other low-income emergency services providing heat and cooling assistance for clients totaled \$1.6M from the LIHEAP grant.

The Alabama Weatherization Assistance and Department of Energy program reduces energy costs for low-income households, particularly for the elderly, people with

disabilities and families with children of applicants below 200% of the federally established poverty level by improving the energy efficiency of their homes while ensuring their health and safety funded over \$200K.

Alabama Charitable Trust Funds \$42K were used to assist clients who were not eligible for LIHEAP funding or who needed additional assistance. Along with the State of Alabama General Fund \$12K, Housing counseling for clients \$10K (HUD) and FEMA \$10K for emergency housing needs. 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 children of mothers who were working or in school when centers were able to be open. ACHR anticipates our agency budget and expenditure in all grant areas for the coming year to be similar to the past year.

Audit Results

An outsourced Certified Public Accountant is currently conducting an audit on ACHR programs for the 2021-22 year. 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 the 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 though 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 from the community who come to our centers to provide assistance in various ways; in pre-COVID we usually had more than 700 community and parent volunteers. When we returned to on-site classes in October of 2020, the staff decided that to limit exposure to COVID it was not wise to have anyone in our centers or classrooms that was not staff or parents taking children to/from a classroom; no side stops and temp checks etc., at the door. That limitation continued though the FY March 2021 – February 2022.

We are appreciative of the more than 200 parents who provided documentation, 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 this year in helping our classroom staff help their children learn. We are also appreciative of the few businesses that have been 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. We look forward to the time when we can return to a mode when our children can benefit from many talented, caring volunteers and when businesses are again flourishing and able to share.