



ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year March 1, 2022-February 28, 2023

FROM THE CEO

During this period, The Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR) has gone through many of changes. The agency is still dealing with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic while having a complete change in leadership. This was an unusually busy period for the ACHR Board. We are appreciative of their leadership during this period of transition.

ACHR's CEO, Nancy Spears, retired due to health reasons. As a former ACHR Board member, she helped write the grant for the first Head Start summer program in 1965 and then became ACHR's Head Start Director. The ACHR Board supported her in traveling frequently on behalf of ACHR and Head Start. She helped form both the National Head Start Association (NHSA) and Head Start itself in addition to guiding Head Start at ACHR. When ACHR began running programs in addition to Head Start, she was named Programs Director and worked closely with Jerry Roden Jr, ACHR's Executive Director. As Programs Director, after Mr. Roden's death in 2006 the board asked her to become ACHR's CEO.

After Ms. Spears retired due to health concerns, the ACHR Board implemented its succession plan. They decided the positions of CEO and Head Start Director should be separate, so first searched for a CEO and then for a Head Start Director. Our Fiscal Coordinator, Dianne Kent, also retired during this period, and a search began for that position. The members of the ACHR Board solicited and reviewed applications for these three key positions, directed staff in revising the job descriptions, interviewed, and involved the Policy Council and the Regional Office in the process. On August 11, 2022, Region IV confirmed the Board and Policy Council selections for the three new key positions for the agency; CEO (Tina Evans), CFO (Felicia Johnson), and Head Start Director (Shatavia, Holmes).

Additionally, like recent years, this year has been a year of uncertainty and challenges. Because both the CEO and the Fiscal Coordinator had been ill on and off for a long period of time, the new key staff, in addition to learning about programs and regulations new to some of them, had to catch up work that had work that had fallen behind.

Also, in addition to the key staff just discussed, Sue Williams, Early Childhood Coordinator, and Karen Lusk, Trainer, retired during this period. Both had been at ACHR more than 20 years, had earned and held several training certifications and were integral to our Early/Head Start programs.

Staffing shortages remained a top concern along with having competitive wages for employees. Employee's health and wellness has been another top concern. Keeping our environments clean with the least risk of transmission illness has been a primary focus to keep staff and children well and keep classrooms open. These challenges brought frequent temporary changes in bus routes and classroom staff, and thus continuity of care was a challenge.

For Head Start and Early Head Start, there were areas of programmatic concerns identified in the Focus Area 2 Review. Areas of concern included health and safety (facilities maintenance), governance, and fiscal. Upon notification of these findings a quality improvement plan and a corrective action plan were developed. These plans included updates to the facilities, training for our Board of Directors and Policy Council and updates to our fiscal policies and procedures. Numerous meetings were held with our Program Manager at the Regional Office and the Training and Technical Assistance Team that assisted and supported our new Early/Head Start team with our Quality Improvement Plan, and our Corrective Action Plan. Both were submitted on time, in November 2022. All areas of deficiencies and non-compliance were deemed corrected by the Office Head Start.

This has also been a year of restructuring. Michael Perry was hired as the new Health and Safety Director and Chris Thompson was hired as the Human Resource Director. Both have focused on urgent agency matters that required their attention. The Health and Safety Director has focused on the roof and gutter issues at the King Center, painting the Darden Gym as part of the lead remediation and catching-up on work orders for each of the centers. Additional mold testing in the upstairs office area at King Center was conducted to ensure safety. We obtained bids for carpet enzyme cleaning to be done at the King Center to address mold related issues in the central office carpet at King Center. We also implemented preventative maintenance process to stay current on building maintenance.

Our Human Resource Director focused on background checks, hiring, onboarding, and exiting processes for staff. The ACHR Organization chart was revised along with updates to policies which were submitted to the Policy Council, approved, and are now being submitted to the ACHR Board for review and approval. In addition to the job descriptions that have been revised; the HR Director plans to review and as needed revise many more in the coming months.

Three full days of virtual ChildPlus training were held in January with a variety of Head Start staff attending all or parts of the training. The trainer helped staff set up for the roll over to next year, clean up some concerns with in-kind, set up for next year's PIR, hone the security system, learn to use the report system more effectively and more effectively use the live report system.

Staff revised fiscal policies and submitted them for board/PC approval to allow a hiring bonus until September and staff bonuses as funds were available to try to be more competitive with other day cares and local business.

Head Start and Early Head Start year 5, Continuation Grant 23-24 was submitted on time December 1, last day along with required documents such as the completed Self-Assessment/Improvement Plan.

During the months of November and December, we worked with an organization called SWA Connect, LLC to provide more internet accessibility to low-income families. We provided 2000 tablets to families who qualified.

In January 2023, we began having weekly Director's meetings. We have updated and strengthened internal controls, and worked with our auditor, Erin Jones on the annual audits that are due.

In February 2023, ACHR received a letter from the Office of Head Start indicating that the agency was placed in Re-Competition status. The Board of Directors and Policy Council were notified immediately.

Meetings were also held with Adkins Roberts (Attorney) and Fred Bennett about the status of ACHR's housing complexes and projects and essential documents that needed to be signed and submitted.

The CEO has attended ACHR Board meetings Community Action Partnership of Lee County Board meetings, Community Action Association of Alabama Board Meetings, staff meetings, department meetings, disabilities meetings, agency consultants meetings, and renewal meetings for agency insurance policies.

ACHR contracted with Purpose Project, Georgia Quality for trainings/assessments and we contracted with Non-Profit Connections, for on-going training, community needs assessment and assistance with writing the re-compete grant. As part of this process, a new ongoing monitoring tool was developed and implemented.

We provided staff with two bonuses and held a Fall Festival for E/HS families and staff and an agency wide holiday party to boost staff morale. Lastly, we have worked to provide more transparency to staff regarding retirement benefits by having the retirement consultant train leadership about the plan so that they can educate staff on the retirement benefits.

If those highlights of our year described above were not enough, though the bid was accepted in the prior fiscal year, the cutover and transition from our old phone and Internet provider also happened during this period, providing connectivity for all of our facilities and for our two largest facilities fiber optic connections and an additional back up connection. All phones were replaced, and training provided and the problem we were having with Caller ID was resolved.

We are stronger as a community than when we try to stand alone. I am pleased to note that for this period ACHR's community partner list included 114 local, regional, state and a few national partnerships. These partners are sources of referrals, groups we can refer clients to, sources of information, of training and so much more. Our staff has been working to strengthen these relationships on behalf of our ACHR family.

In short, this period has been one of change, transition, challenge, catching up work, re-envisioning and implementing systems, readjustment and learning. I am appreciative of the efforts, hard work and dedication of our staff, Policy Council and Board during this period.

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 (EHS) in both counties since 1998. In addition to HS and EHS,

ACHR administers other programs, including: the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) that provides meals for Early/Head Start children and the Family Day Care Homes (FDCH) program that provides funds for meals to licensed daycare home providers in multiple counties), housing counseling (also multiple counties), VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance in two counties), and the Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACAH). ACHR also offers low-income housing at 11 housing complexes (three for seniors) with 522 apartments in eight 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. Because of the innovative thinking of one of our now retired staff, ACHR's EHS classrooms are innovative in that each room serves children ages six weeks to three years (eight children with two teachers). This model helps parent and teacher build strong bonds on behalf of the child and greatly reduces the number of transitions the child must make. Staff in both the EHS classroom program and in the EHS home based program provide EHS families with suggestions to 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 (108 children) and ten EHS classrooms (80 infants and toddlers), 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. We are appreciative of the City of Opelika for helping make our wraparound care affordable for parents.



An ACHR Head Start Classroom

The Darden campus in Opelika includes Burton House, home base for many of our Family Services Advocates and the Darden on the Hill area. The Hill area houses the Sunshine Shop where staff accept, store and display donated goods for easy, no cost access by HS/EHS families and others on referral through partner agencies such as the Department of Human Resources. There is a building with office space for EHS home visitors and a socialization area for our 77 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 that provides space for administrative, fiscal, secretarial, and other agency support functions, and eight Head Start classrooms serving 108 children and families in Auburn and Eastern Lee County. There are offices for other services including energy assistance, housing counseling, and Weatherization for Lee County, as well as tax assistance.

The Marian Wright Edelman Center, located in Hurtsboro in Russell County, houses three HS classrooms (51 preschoolers) and three EHS classrooms (24 infants and toddlers), as well as offices and socialization space for home visitors for 11 EHS infants, children and/or pregnant women.

In addition to these centers, there are auxiliary facilities, such as a garage to house and service agency buses that transport Head Start children who live outside the two-mile radius, a van for the wraparound school aged children at Darden to deliver to and/or pick them up from schools in Opelika as well as other vehicles.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

Numbers Funded/Served

Our funded 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 periods. We base the data in this section on the school year for the child assessment information and use health data from the Early/Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) for the school year (in this report from July or August 2022 into June of 2023). By working within school years, we can provide unduplicated information.

During the school year, as reported on the 2022-23 PIR, we served 304 children (counting children who dropped) throughout the year, in our Head Start program (37 more than our funded enrollment of 267). The 18 classrooms were open five days a week. In Early Head Start, we served 203 EHS infants and toddlers (counting children who dropped) and 28 pregnant women (39 more than our funded enrollment of 192). The 13 classrooms, which housed 104 infants and toddlers, were open five days a week. Home Visitors visited each home-based parent and child for an hour and a half once a week. The Home Visitors in our Home-Based Program together with the parent provide the full array of EHS services. Home Visitors provide socialization events twice a month at Darden Center in Lee County and at Edelman Center in Russell County, in addition to at various locations such as the library, park, etc.

According to the Community Needs Assessment, among programs available, including our classrooms and EHS Home Visit program, Pre-K classes in Lee (this period 27) and Russell Counties (29) and child care centers accepting vouchers, about 10% of preschool children in poverty lack care in Russell County as do about 10-15% of those in Lee County. According to the community needs assessment, at least 10% of infants and toddlers in poverty 0-3 in Russell County lack care, as do about 57% of infants and toddlers in Lee County.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Health

For health, like last year, this 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 their children into the office for screening and follow-up, some did not remember to get documentation of the visit. Before COVID, if that happened, when our staff sent a copy of the parent's release form for the child, the office staff would send our staff the needed documentation. Post-COVID, the offices tell us they will get to us when able and recommend that the parents go to the office and request. Many parents do not do so.

The health screenings include hearing, vision, growth assessment, speech, developmental (ASQ) assessments, and nutrition. Despite the efforts of our staff, the majority children did not have all health screenings complete within the 45-day requirement. Some of these screenings are part of a child's "well child check-up" or "physical" completed at the pediatrician's office. Our team worked tirelessly to ensure parents understood the importance of the required screenings. When it became obvious that parents would not or could not get children to the needed appointments, to ensure that the children received all needed screenings, we partnered with Dr. Liles and Quality of Life. In this way, the required screenings were completed for our children, though as reflected in the data below, after the deadline. In the future, ongoing partnerships will ensure all children receive the preventative wellness screenings and exams per the Head Start Performance Standards.

During the period from July 2022 to June 2023, 56% of the Head Start children were up-to-date on preventive and primary care, which is defined as all screenings completed within 45 days of entry. That percentage is fewer than usual. Some children missed by only one screening element. All HS children and EHS center-based children were up-to-date on immunizations. Only 56% of Head Start children were up-to-date on dental care by the 90 day requirement (many received care after that) with 99% children having a dental home. Of the 77 needing dental treatment, 74 (96%) received treatment. Parents of three children did not get their children to the appointments.

Though 98% of EHS children had access to medical care, only 14% were up-to-date on age-appropriate preventative care within the required time, which is a challenge for infants and toddlers because appointments for well child care are as close together as two months; 53% received dental care (some, of course, are too young). Of EHS infants and toddlers who enrolled even for a short time, 97% had up-to-date immunizations. Of our 28 EHS pregnant moms, 100% had some form of health insurance and accessed health care.

With the continued evolution of COVID variants and COVID in the community, it was difficult to get parents to make and keep appointments. Currently, the numbers of those with serious illness are decreasing. We expect the continued reduction in COVID and severity, will result in a reduction in parent concern, and that as well as our new community partnerships that will improve our numbers next year. However, we realize that like many of us, parents have gotten in the habit of not seeking care, and for their children's sake, we have to work to change habits.

Family Engagement- Transforming Lives

During this school year, we continued to include porch visits and in home visits through case management and utilizing Zoom sessions to make contact with families to discuss goals for the child and family, ways to meet them, barriers, and accomplishments. Staff created 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 the Domestic Violence Intervention Center, the Family Resource Center, Dad's League, and the Lee County Literacy Coalition.



To help families cope as we began planning for a post-pandemic world, Family Services 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 continuing to adjust 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. 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, putting out yard signs so families could see the information as they drive by, posting information on Facebook and our website. Staff also strengthened relationships with community partners and gave them information about our programs to share with families they serve. As they did last year, our Family Services Team worked hard to make our recruitment table appealing 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 Services 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 Services connects with other programs and services ACHR provides. We journey with our families to ensure children leaving Head Start are ready for school, and help the family create social and community connections, increase financial stability, 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 staff connect our families to other programs to help the family reach their financial goals with free financial counseling, connect them to workforce development opportunities, and to parenting classes to build positive relationships with their children. To ensure long-term support and success, our family services advocates focus on the whole family. Staff offer families links to services from our community partners to help meet the 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 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 increase children's knowledge and vocabulary.

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, increase math skills and/or self-regulation. Doing that is similar to some of our field trips – which have included visits to grocery stores. Of course, the parent cannot provide the "behind the scenes" portion that happens on some field trips to stores. Even so, a store can be a place for learning. Parents can learn to enlist a child who was bored and crying 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 such as: "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. Parents also can 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, Head Start parents and 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 more consistent parent participation. During school year 2022-23, we had 327 parent volunteers. Ten parent volunteers volunteered at



more than one site. Their activities, which included participation in the RAGS program, contributed 13,250 hours across all three HS/EHS centers.

In addition to RAGS, this year, through a small grant, we continued to offer 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 offer parents information on a learning item, give tips for supportive activities that match the information, and lastly offer 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 spread 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 continued to include 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 employers in all fields, a general shortage of workers exists. Staff are seeking 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 salaries they consider insufficient. 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 2022-23

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 alignment among 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 2023 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 2022-23:

- Highest Category Scores for typically developing children (after *Physical Development and Health* and *Social Emotional*).
- The lowest Category: *Social Studies for period 2 and period 3*.
- 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

Three-Year-Old Group 2022-23:

- Overall ACHR COR score: Typically-developing children grew from 2.34 in period two to 4.25 in period three, an improvement over last years’ period three score of 3.98
- 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 Emotional* with a score of 4.3 to 5.4 that is an increase of 1.4%.
- The lowest single item was *Item Social Studies*.

Four-Year-Old Group 2022-24:

- Typically developing four-year-olds were over their goals in 7 of 8 categories. For typically developing children, the highest category was *Language & Literacy* at 14% and went to 21% that’s an increase of 7%. Lowest Category was: *Science and Technology*

- Children scored in this group 2.68 in period 1, and ended with 4.25.

School Readiness Conclusions from 2022-2023:

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 was 74%. Causes of absenteeism included RSV, flu, family illnesses, transportation double routing at some centers due to personal family issues, changes in classroom staffing and not being able to find enough staff.

Some classrooms were closed because lack of staff or staff illness so some children were moved to different rooms. That caused a lack of consistency that can have a negative effect on children's emotional state and learning. We are working hard to find solutions to shortages of teachers and other 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 four-year-old children started with scores 2% lower than those at Darden. After the third time period, King children scored 15% higher than children at Darden and 23% higher than Edelman. The difference among King, Darden and Edelman Centers was that King Center had more veteran teachers who know the curriculum and had more continuity in staffing which has a positive effect on children's learning. We are now working to improve continuity of care.

While looking at reports we looked for differences comparing typically developing children verses children with (IEPs/IFSPs), home language, gender, and race.

- The scores between genders were not significant nor was the difference between English speakers and dual language learners (DLLs). Many of our DLL's parents are college-educated foreign students. These children, small in number, score as high as or higher than do other children. This suggests that most of these children likely were speaking some English prior to their experience in HS.

- Special Needs Children: ACHR had 45 Head Start children with IEPs (Individual Education Plans) and 8 Early Head Start children with IFSPs (Individualized Family Service Plans). Scores among these children varied with the severity and type of disability. Each child with an IEP/IFSP has his/her own benchmarks established by the public school (3-5 year-olds) or Early Intervention (0-up to 3 years). ACHR helps each child move from wherever he/she starts toward the child's benchmarks and school readiness goals. By period 3, 22% of the children with disabilities were above the benchmarks for typically developing children.
- Our 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 2022-23, 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.

ACHR PROGRAMS OTHER THAN HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START



ACHR is the designated Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) provider in Lee County. CSBG funds are used to 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 in this area include the Emergency Services Program. The program offers designed community programs from the Community Services Block Grant and other sources. It distributes the ABC (Alabama Business and Charitable) Trust, LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), and SPIRE Dollar Help Programs (each of which assist clients in various ways with energy assistance), EFSP (Emergency Food and Shelter Program) through Lee Russell Council of Governments (shelter) and HUD (Housing and Urban Development) and NeighborWorks Certified Housing Counseling services. The Emergency Services programs have eligibility criteria, including an income guideline that varies by program.

During the 2023 program year, the Emergency Services staff assisted over 3500 households and distributed more than \$1,500,000.00 into the community. Staff captures its services and outcomes through its Content Management System (CMS) FACSPRO as required by ADECA (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs). ADECA is migrating agencies to a new CMS, LITT (Lifting Individuals through Technology). ACHR's Emergency Services program uses an appointment scheduler clients can access at any time the scheduler is open (it closes when all appointments for the month are booked. After staff open the Appointment Scheduler for the next

month, clients are offered the convenience of making an appointment by phone or Internet; LITT allows clients to upload their documentation at their convenience 24/7 before their appointments.

To assure that these services reach the seniors in the community, the Emergency Services staff 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 for them to apply for and receive services. 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 also mails these clients “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 these clients receives assistance through our heating and cooling programs. Sadly, the Outreach Program has lost some of its clients due to deaths or family members placing a client in a nursing home or in residence with other family members. We have maintained 241 Outreach slots with 25 potential Outreach clients to be added this year. This will give us a total of 266 Outreach clients.



Photos of food card distribution.

Besides assisting Outreach clients with utility bills, the Emergency Services staff also assists them in signing up for various programs within the community and the state. This year the Emergency Services staff signed each Outreach client up for the State of Alabama Farmers Market Program, which distributed \$50.00 cards to be used to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from participating Farmers Markets. The Emergency Services staff also distributed \$120.00 food cards to Outreach clients and USDA literature (Healthy Eating for Older Adults), and signed up each client for the Affordable Connectivity Program that offered free internet accessible tablets.

During this period, Tabitha Perry, ACHR’s CSBG Administrative Assistant/Emergency Services Program Coordinator-Housing Counselor, attended trainings and passed tests to be recertified as both a Nationally Certified ROMA Implementer and a Nationally Certified ROMA Trainer, and attained certification as a Certified Community Action Professional. She serves on the advisory committee for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP); this new program assists clients with their water bills.

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:

- **HUD Approved Housing Counseling Program:** ACHR’s nationally recognized HUD Certified Housing Counselor provides individual counseling sessions by appointment. Counseling sessions arrange from Pre-purchase Home Buying Education, Resolving/ Preventing Mortgage Delinquency or Default, Securing or Maintaining Residency in

Rental Housing, Non-Delinquency Post Purchase, and in some instances Homelessness Assistance.

- **Weatherization:** provides assessment of homes owned by persons who meet the income guidelines for need for weatherization (additional caulking, insulation, improved HVAC unit etc.) and, if needed repairs, to reduce monthly power or gas bills. During the 21-22 program year 18 homes were assessed, and repairs and then reassessments performed. Also during the program year, staff realignment occurred due to unforeseen issues, which resulted in onboarding new staff members to carry on the program requirements and negotiations with John Douglas to perform assessments for our agency.

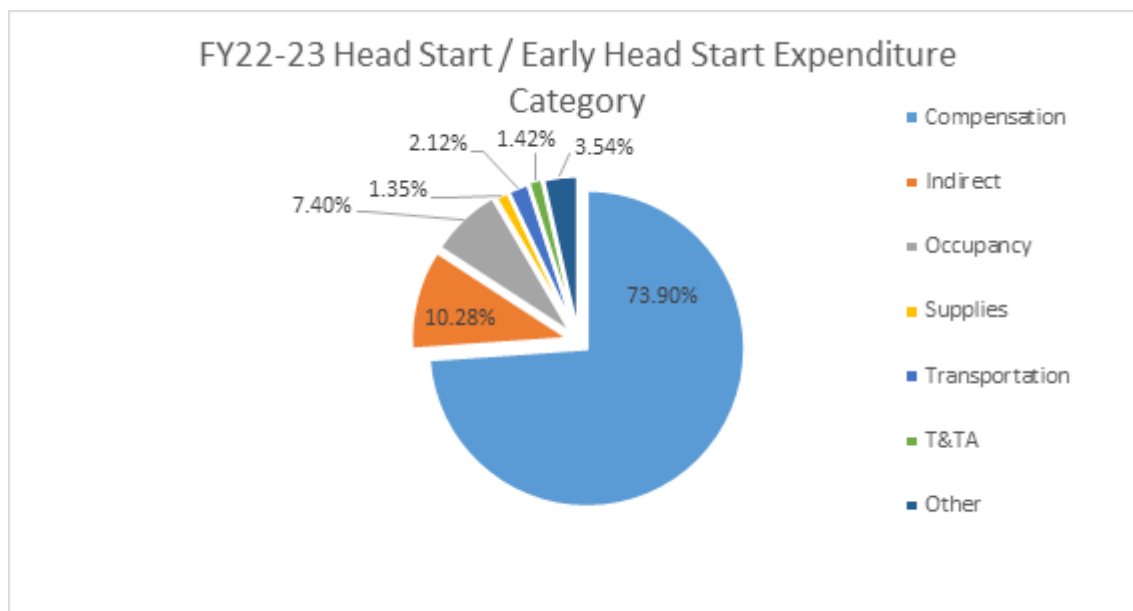
At the end of December 2022, staff was in place to begin evaluating where the program stood with client intake, pending and deferred clients. Assessment of the client waiting list was evaluated to reconcile the list of active clients, non-participating clients, and clients that may have moved during the previous year or otherwise no longer needed the services so that we are ready to continue to assist clients by providing weatherization services.

- **Child Nutrition Program:** provides training and reimbursement for licensed daycare home facilities for qualified meals meeting standards. We had 23 daycare home providers serving approximately 139 children, which includes one home in Tier 2. Many homes closed for a time during the pandemic and some providers have chosen to retire or get out of the business because of stringent requirements imposed by the licensing agency or have opened center based care for a larger number of clients.
- **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program:** offers tax assistance at no cost (including e-file) to participants through IRS online software. ACHR staff and two volunteers received advanced training and testing. They served 180 individuals and families during this period while continuing COVID precautions through distancing, virtual service, and drop-off. Persons were served in Lee, Russell and Tallapoosa Counties. We continue our partnership with Alabama Asset Builders Coalition to provide additional financial literary 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. received funding from Health and Human Services in the amount of \$9.1M to fund its Head Start (\$4.8M) and Early Head Start (\$4.3M) programs providing 67% 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 ~\$4.4M from Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and other state and local charitable organizations providing 33% of agency operating budget.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs granted \$448K to provide meals and support for children through Child & Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) and Family Day Care Homes (FDCH).

The Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), which 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 emergency services programs providing heat and cooling assistance for clients living with low incomes totaled \$2.7M from the LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) grants.

The Alabama Weatherization Assistance and Department of Energy program reduces energy costs for low-income households, particularly for those who are 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; the program provided funds of more than \$449K.

Alabama Business Charitable (ABC) Trust funds through Alabama Power (\$24K) 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 \$14K, Housing counseling for clients \$11K (HUD) and FEMA \$21K 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 expenditures in all grant areas for the coming year to be similar to the past year.

Audit Results

An outsourced Certified Public Accountant conducted an audit on ACHR programs for the Y/E 2021-2022 year. There were no significant findings. The CEO's report discussed the most recent Head Start/Early Head Start review; staff and board responded to the findings, which were accepted, allowing us to remain eligible for the fifth year, the last in the cycle. 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; there were a few, though no significant findings and all have been cleared.

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. Some effects from COVID, limited our resources and a waiver request was applied for with OHS. We are appreciative of the parents who provided documentation, some of it through our RAGS (Reading, Activities, and Growth for Success) program that supports children's school readiness, and 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. New leadership and staff have been trained on obtaining sufficient NFS to meet our goal for in-kind. Teaching Strategies' Ready Roses curriculum was purchased for the new school year providing an additional option for our parents to be involved with their children to assist and support their children's learning as well as to assist ACHR with reaching our goal of \$1.8M.