

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS



CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM & COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY





ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year March 1, 2023 - February 28, 2024

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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), and VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance in six counties). ACHR also offers low-income housing at 10 housing complexes (three for seniors) with 512 apartments in eight counties. ACHR is the designated Community Services Block Grant program provider for Lee County.

The annual report share highlights, successes, and important information with the community, alongside required financial reporting. ACHR will make our annual report available electronically and paper. One key advantage of electronic (or PDF) is the ability to share the annual report quickly. ACHR will upload our annual report to our website, where it can be easily accessed by the public. Our program will also share our annual report via email with the Board of Directors and key partners. Paper versions have advantages too. They are easy to hand to potential partner/donor as a way of introduction or an interested family at a recruiting event. However these multiples ways to share our annual report, makes it easily accessible to the public.

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





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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.

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 a home visitor 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.

FROM THE CEO

During this period, The Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR) has gone through many changes. Additionally, like recent years, this year has been a year of uncertainty and challenges. Some of the changes included the complete change in leadership, a new organizational structure, and updated job descriptions along with adding several new members to Governing Board. This was an unusually busy period for the ACHR Board. We are appreciative of their leadership during this period of transition.

In February 2023, ACHR received a letter from the Office of Head Start indicating that the agency was placed in (DRS) Re-Competition status. The Board of Directors and Policy Council were notified immediately. On March 1st, 2023, an emergency meeting was held with all staff to discuss the critical condition the agency is currently in. Staff was informed that new expectations and additional training activities should be expected in the coming months to insure full compliance with Performance Standards.

During the months of March and April 2023, we had numerous meetings with consultants who supported our efforts towards full compliance. We worked with Nonprofit Connections for fiscal support and ongoing monitoring training, the Community Needs Assessment, and grant writing



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support. We collaborated with the Purpose Project that provides ongoing support and training for our children with special needs and behavioral challenges. We also worked with Georgia Quality Consultants that completed our CLASS assessment, monitoring and feedback. We also engaged a new dietician to approve our menus to assure that we continue to provide healthy meals to the children in our program.

Collaborative meetings were held with ADECA regarding our Weatherization program and a plan outlined for administering services to families in need for the next grant year.

ACHR continued to focus on resolving concerns related to Head Start's Focus Area 2 audit findings. We created and implemented a preventative maintenance process and internal monitoring plan. As part of the maintenance process, we monitored the new roof repairs and exterior gutter system at the King Center to ensure the water intrusion issues were resolved. In addition, mold testing in the upstairs office were completed in March 2023 to ensure safety of the offices upstairs in King Center.

The CEO visited each center frequently throughout the year. The CEO attended CAP-LC Board meetings, CAAA Board Meetings, Policy Council meetings, staff meetings, department meetings, health, education and disabilities meetings, agency consultants meetings, and pre-renewal meetings for the health insurance policy for staff. Additionally, numerous meetings were held with our Program Manager at the Regional Office and with the Training and Technical Assistance team, which assisted and supported our team with writing our Quality Improvement Plan and our Corrective Action Plan.

As part of the new organizational structure we hired a new Education Coordinator/Assistant Head Start Director. He was instrumental in re-engaging partnerships and MOAs (Memorandum of Agreements). These partnerships included Quality of Life to provide health care screenings and Dr. Lyle's office for dental screenings.

The month of May, the CEO and CFO met with Adkins Roberts and Kristine Hanson to move forward with the Garden Greene property transfer of limited partner interest from Enterprise to Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc. The first of three separate financial audits was completed and presented to the Board of Directors, the Community Action Partnership of Lee County (CAP-LC) and Policy Council. Other meetings that took place included meetings with John Douglas to kick off weatherization grants, PayScale implementation for wage comparability, and a new MOU (Memoranda of Understanding) partnership agreement and training with the Food Bank.

We increased our cyber security by implementing a Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and hosted a comprehensive week-long pre-service training for all staff. Pre-Service included speakers about our new curriculum, Creative Curriculum from Teaching Strategies, component area training for all Early/Head Start areas, Human Resources, updates on policies, facilities, In-Kind (NFS or Non-Federal Share), Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance, and our retirement plan.



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Another exciting opportunity was being able to give bonuses to staff and additionally a rate of pay adjustment took place for the lowest paid employees to make their hourly rate more competitive.

The agency Self-Assessment (SA) training took place, followed by the completion of the Self-Assessment document. Each team met and completed the data. This document and the related Improvement plan as well as the Annual Report for the agency were finalized.

Other accomplishments included collaborations with representatives from Pre-K, sponsoring a Community Resource Fair, and seeing that several new AC units were installed at Darden after the existing units failed.

Kris Rowe, Executive Director of the Community Action Association of Alabama (CAAA), met with the CEO at the King Center to complete an orientation to CAAA, to discuss the re-comp status of the Head Start program and he completed a training with CEO and weatherization staff. We were excited to welcome eight new board members.

A retirement meeting was held in October to discuss the current status of the plan. The CEO, CFO, HR Director, and Administrative Coordinator attended along with Tenise Owens, Stacey McCann, and board members, Virginia Transue, Rick Ebbinghouse and Board Chair Robert Torbert. No changes were made in the plan. Information was gathered and questions asked about suggestions for changes that could be made to sustain the plan and employee benefits.

During November, we received an Under Enrollment Letter from the Office of Head Start stating that we have until November 10, 2024 to achieve at least 97 percent enrollment and maintain that enrollment for six months. The letter stated that if the agency cannot achieve these things, there will be a reduction in funding. The agency had been maintaining an average of 80% enrollment since COVID. The primary cause of under enrollment has been our inability to hire and maintain enough qualified classroom and home based staff resulting in inability to open some classrooms and home based units. In Lee County, during this fiscal year, the unemployment rate was low (1.6 to 3.1%) and competition for qualified staff was keen, so over all staffing shortages have been a top concern throughout the year.

We explored and implemented hiring incentives, staff wellness days, a therapeutic employee assistance program, increased wages, and increased training and support for staff to reduce staff turnover but being fully staffed remains a challenge and a priority. Another top priority is keeping our environments clean and safe. Quality improvement has been our goal so ensuring we have a solid preventative maintenance plan was and is a priority. In December, we submitted a Continuation grant to carry E/HS through June of 2024. We also completed and uploaded the Re-Competition grant for a 5-year period. It included support letters from the House of Representatives, the Mayor of Opelika, along with community agencies like Southern Union, Domestic Violence Center, Focus First, Auburn City Schools, Opelika City Schools, Quality of Life, and Beyond Expectations, etc. We rounded out 2023 with an all staff holiday party. This



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year has been busy and brought many challenges that we faced with positivity and a solution focused mindset.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

NUMBERS FUNDED/SERVED

Our funded grant year runs from March to February. Typically, the annual report is based on the data in this section for 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 2023 into June of 2024). By working within school years, we can provide unduplicated information.

During the school year, as reported on the 2023-24 PIR, we served 279 children (counting children who dropped) throughout the year, in our Head Start program (12 more than our funded enrollment of 267). In Early Head Start, we served 170 EHS children (counting children who dropped) and 28 pregnant women (9 more than our funded enrollment of 161). Home Visitors visited each home-based parent and child once a week. The Home Visitors in our Home-Based Program together with the parent provide the full array of EHS services. Socialization events are conducted every two weeks at the Darden and various locations in Russell County such as the library, park, and etc.

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 26) and Russell Counties (30) 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 children in poverty 0-3 in Russell County need 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 children into the office for screening and follow-up, some did not get documentation of the visit. Normally, if that happens when staff call, having sent a copy of the parent's release form for the child, the pediatric office staff will give the needed documentation. During this period, the doctors' offices, community



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partnerships, and parents have been more collaborative in receiving the documentation needed to meet the OHS requirements.

With the efforts of our staff, the number of health screenings increased this school compared to the previous school year. Health screenings include (45-day requirements): hearing, vision, growth assessment, speech, developmental assessments, and nutrition. Some of these screenings are part of the 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.

To ensure we met the Head Start Performance Standards, we partnered with Dr. Liles and Quality of Life to provide some of the required screenings: 40 screenings were completed. Our ongoing partnerships will help ensure all children receive the preventative wellness screenings and exams per the Head Start Performance Standards.



During the period from July 2023 to June 2024, 173 of the 284 Head Start children were up-to-date on preventive and primary care, which means all screenings were completed within the 45 days. Some missed being in the count by only one screening element. Three Hundred thirty three of 362 EHS and HS children were up-to-date on immunizations. Two hundred sixty two Early and Head Start children had a dental home. Only 258 Head Start children were up-to-date on dental care by the 90 day requirement (many received care after that) with 309/370 children having a dental home. Of the 46 children needing treatment, 43 received treatment. Overall 202 of 203 of EHS children who enrolled had up-to-date immunizations. Of our EHS pregnant moms, 20 had health insurance and access to care.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT- TRANSFORMING LIVES

During this school year, we increased our in-home visits through case management and utilizing Zoom sessions to make contact with families to discuss goals, obstacles, 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.

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 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. 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



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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. 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. This was also evident in ACHR's 2nd annual Community Resource Fair in October at all centers. This was a community fair with food, fun, games, and music for the entire family. There were vendors with nutrition, health, literacy, domestic violence and educational resources. This community fair encompassed hundreds of community stakeholders. 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, create social and community connections, help the family 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 and futures. Our centers also connect our families to other programs, such as programs that can help the family reach their financial goals with free financial counseling, workforce development opportunities, and offering parenting classes to build strong relationships. To ensure long-term support and success, our family service 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.



This year we obtained a grant to offer the Born Ready University Program, a free parenting series for 4 Saturdays addressing child development, school readiness, health & safety environment, and social emotional at our Darden Center and our Edelman Center. The program's purpose is to empower parents through interesting sessions earning them \$25 gift cards, free meals and childcare for ages 0-5. This program serviced a total of 40 families in the two counties.



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EDUCATION - PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL

This year we implemented the use of Creative Curriculum, the leading research-based whole child early childhood curriculum developed in partnership with educators. Those who developed this curriculum believe that all children deserve a nurturing, engaging, and high quality-learning environment. The curriculum is designed to support children’s unique needs throughout the curriculum, social emotional and professional development. This research-based curriculum approach is developmentally appropriate and is tailored for children ages birth through five years.

In addition to implementing the use of Creative Curriculum, the agency held its very first inclusive pre-service week at First Baptist Church in Opelika, AL. The staff was able to attend breakout sessions that would enhance their professional development. It was a great experience that helped staff to become more knowledgeable and effective as we kicked off the new school year.

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. We encourage parents to do much of 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 for two weeks.



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



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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, 246 Head Start parents and Early Head Start Parents participated with their children in the RAGS program at least some of the time generating a total of \$37,826.82 in addition to helping their children. 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 consistent parent participation. During the school year 23-24, we had a total of 555 parent volunteers. This constituted for a total of 6,046.76 hours and \$699,892.86 in-kind 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 *Ready Rosie*. In this program parents receive weekly videos based on their child’s age and a specific learning area. These weekly videos help teachers and families connect learning in the classroom and at home. These videos are in English and Spanish aligned with intentional teaching experiences and objectives for development and learning. Ready Rosie builds powerful family partnerships. Parents who watched the videos and did the activities with their child experienced an increase in confidence to support their children’s learning, and found Ready Rosie 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 continued to include retaining and recruiting classroom staff. Reasons for resignations included family illness, personal 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. This year we were able to increase our salaries allowing us to recruit and retain a few more employees. 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.



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SCHOOL READINESS REPORT: ANALYSIS OF CHILD OUTCOMES 2023-24

As per Head Start requirements, ACHR tracks children’s development and progress toward school readiness goals. ACHR uses Checkpoints from *Teaching Strategies* to document ongoing assessments of Early Head Start and Head Start children. Teachers and Parent Educators (home visitors) gather and score observations using the Teaching Strategy online tool. The tool covers birth through the end of kindergarten

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.

Check Points (Teaching Strategies):

Social Emotional	Physical	Language	Cognitive	Literacy
Mathematics	Spanish Language	Spanish Literacy		

Older Toddler Group 2023-24:

- The highest category scores for typically developing children were Language for periods 1 and 2 and Physical for period 3.
- The lowest category scores were Literacy for period 1 and mathematics for periods 2 and 3.
- Overall growth in social emotional showed an increase of 16.20%; physical 38.61%; cognitive .73%; literacy 21.45%, and mathematics 24.36%.

Three-Year-Old Group 2023-24:

- The highest category scores for typically developing children were Literacy for period 1, Mathematics for period 2, and Physical for period 3.
- The lowest category scores were in Language for periods 1, 2, and 3.
- Overall growth in social emotional showed an increase of 19.10%; physical 42.81%; cognitive .67%; literacy 18.63%, and mathematics 32.82%.

Four-Year-Old Group 2023-24:

- The highest category scores for typically developing children was Literacy for periods 1 and 3 and Physical for period 2.
- The lowest category was Language for period 1 and Mathematics for periods 2 and 3.
- Overall growth in social emotional was an increase of 25.20%; physical 49.23%; cognitive 2.5%; literacy 21.78%, and mathematics 32.82%.

SCHOOL READINESS CONCLUSIONS FROM 2023-2024:



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Baseline data, Midpoint and Overall scores were typical of previous 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 2023 showed an overall increase in knowledge of alphabet letters, letter sounds, numerals, shapes and colors.

Child attendance was low across the year in all age groups. The average attendance of 3-5 year-olds was 88%. Causes of absenteeism included 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 3-5 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 75% and last names increased to 40%. 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.

Child outcome data of various groups is reviewed, including comparing centers. King Center’s typically developing 4 year-old children started an average of 14% lower than Darden. After the mid-point, King’s 4 year-olds had narrowed the gap to 10% 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.



Areas	HOME LANGUAGE: ENGLISH	HOME LANGUAGE: SPANISH	GENDER: MALE	GENDER: FEMALE	ISP/IFSP	BENCH-MARKS
Approach to Learning	BELOW: 43%	BELOW: 49%	BELOW: 41%	BELOW: 37%	BELOW: 86%	BELOW: 39%



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	MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 23%	MEETING: 45% ABOVE: 6%	MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 20%	MEETING: 40% ABOVE: 22%	MEETING: 13% ABOVE: 1%	MEETING: 34% ABOVE: 21%
Social & Emotional Development	BELOW: 44% MEETING: 38% ABOVE: 16%	BELOW: 70% MEETING: 26% ABOVE: 4%	BELOW: 46% MEETING: 35% ABOVE: 19%	BELOW: 43% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 20%	BELOW: 90% MEETING: 10% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 45% MEETING: 36% ABOVE: 16%
Physical Development & Health	BELOW: 47% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 17%	BELOW: 65% MEETING: 30% ABOVE: 5%	BELOW: 44% MEETING: 42% ABOVE: 14%	BELOW: 42% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 19%	BELOW: 86% MEETING: 11% ABOVE: 3%	BELOW: 46% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 17%
Language, Literacy, & Communication	BELOW: 39% MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 18%	BELOW: 54% MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 3%	BELOW: 41% MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 16%	BELOW: 37% MEETING: 44% ABOVE: 19%	BELOW: 81% MEETING: 19% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 39% MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 17%
Mathematics	BELOW: 40% MEETING: 28% ABOVE: 19%	BELOW: 57% MEETING: 40% ABOVE: 3%	BELOW: 41% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 18%	BELOW: 39% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 20%	BELOW: 82% MEETING: 17% ABOVE: 1%	BELOW: 40% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 19%
Creative Arts	BELOW: 44% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 17%	BELOW: 69% MEETING: 30% ABOVE: 2%	BELOW: 48% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 15%	BELOW: 42% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 17%	BELOW: 83% MEETING: 17% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 45% MEETING: 38% ABOVE: 16%
Science & Technology	BELOW: 32% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 18%	BELOW: 56% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 7%	BELOW: 36% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 27%	BELOW: 31% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 28%	BELOW: 73% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 33% MEETING: 40% ABOVE: 27%
Social Studies	BELOW: 31% MEETING: 43% ABOVE: 27%	BELOW: 57% MEETING: 37% ABOVE: 6%	BELOW: 35% MEETING: 40% ABOVE: 25%	BELOW: 29% MEETING: 44% ABOVE: 27%	BELOW: 74% MEETING: 26% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 32% MEETING: 42% ABOVE: 26%



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TOTAL AVERAGES	BELOW: 40% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 21%	BELOW: 60% MEETING: 36% ABOVE: 4%	BELOW: 42% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 19%	BELOW: 38% MEETING: 41% ABOVE: 21%	BELOW: 82% MEETING: 19% ABOVE: 0%	BELOW: 40% MEETING: 39% ABOVE: 21%
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- There is no significant difference in the scores between genders and races.
- There is no significant difference between English speakers and the overall Dual Language learning (DLL) group. Many DLL’s parents are college-educated foreign students. These children score generally as high or higher on the on checkpoints for Teaching Strategies 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. We have implemented more dual language books, teaching tools, activities and environmental print in our classroom to incorporate these children’s native language
- 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 40% lower than their typically developing peers did. 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.
- ACHR continued to use new ways of working with parents by phone. We have progressively implemented in person parent teacher conferences, and family engagement contacts. We have continued to have some parent meetings virtually but look forward to increasing in person parent meetings.

ACHR ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS



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

EMERGENCY SERVICES PROGRAM



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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 assists 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. From March 2023 to February 2024, the Emergency Services staff assisted over 5129 households and distributed more than \$1,673,000.00 to households and therefore 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 it 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The scheduler closes when all appointments for the month are booked and reopens the last week of each month to allow appointments to be made for the following 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 host workshops, and obtain 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.



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The Emergency Services staff attended the Community Action Association of Alabama (CAAA) Conference. They are pictured with Sophia Bracy Harris (acclaimed women's equality and civil rights advocate). Ms. Harris started her career with ACHR as a work-study student assisting families in purchasing federally subsidized homes. She went on to become the co-founder of the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL).



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Emergency services staff participated in ACHR's 2nd Annual Community Resource Festival. While giving out goodie bags to the children, staff were able to share with the community that they were available to assist households with lights, water, and gas bills. Our Emergency Services Program Coordinator/Housing Counselor, received recertification as both a Nationally Certified ROMA Implementer and Trainer. The

Coordinator also maintains certification as a Certified Community Action Professional, HUD Certified Housing Counselor and serves on the advisory committee for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). This new program assists clients with water utilities. Staff expended over \$233,750 assisting over 700 households. Information about other programs ACHR administers designed to assist families living with low incomes in Lee County and in some cases, in other areas of Alabama. HUD certification provides individual counseling sessions arranging 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.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE PROGRAM (CACFP)

CACFP provides annual training to staff, and to home providers along with updates on program requirements set by USDA for reimbursement for meals to licensed family and group daycare home facilities for qualified meals meeting standards. We service 23 daycare home providers serving approximately 170 children. CACFP's year runs from October 1 to September 30. For the 12-month period covering October 2022 to September 2023, \$151,556 was reimbursed for meal service payments to home providers. Many homes close annually from June to August due to school closures at the end of May and resume participation prior to the end of the contract agreement ending on September 30.

Because they cause significant costs, stringent licensing requirements imposed by the Department of Human Resources (licensing agency), have significantly reduced the number of homes providers that open and/or who continue to care for children in the home. The reduction in the number of daycare homes has had a serious impact on the ability of some parents, many living with low incomes, to work. During the same period we received administrative reimbursement expenses of \$37,853.

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA)

VITA provides tax assistance at no cost (including e-file) to participants through IRS provided online software. ACHR provides staff and volunteers who receive advanced training and testing from the IRS to prepare returns and encourage taxpayers to submit electronically.



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We continued our partnership with the Alabama Asset Builders Coalition (AABC) to provide additional financial literacy education materials and referrals to other partner sponsors, credit unions, etc., for those who are unbanked. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, the AABC provides funding to purchase supplies and offset costs, offers a stipend to the Site Coordinator and travel costs to and from the site for volunteers. There must be at least two persons involved in each tax return, one to do the return and one to review the entries and verify that they are correct. The program meets guidance from the IRS and reporting requirements. The grant period for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program covers five months. Staff and volunteers begin training in early January and must take and pass tests before beginning in late January to prepare the number of returns agreed on with AABC beginning and ending on April 30. We report invoices of expenses for the award no later than May 31 to as per agreement.

Because the fiscal year ends in February and this program runs from January-May, the information in this report is for work done in 2024 for tax year 2023. During this period, we provided tax counseling, limited financial education such as information about withholding, both federal and state, along with tax preparation to more than 180 clients. We also did extension requests and amended returns. We encouraged and referred clients who are not with a banking institution, credit union, etc. to open accounts to expedite and receive refunds securely. We provided services to clients in Lee, Russell, Chambers, Coosa, and Tallapoosa counties and this year added Bullock County to our area served. In addition to helping clients report their taxes, we are pleased to share that we have had clients who opened saving accounts and began to plan for life events upon receipt of refunds then saved to cover life events.

SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SCSEP)

SCSEP a partnership through Alabama State Employment Services, Easter Seals and Goodwill, Inc. SCSEP pays participants and provides training and job skills to seniors seeking employment. We have an agreement with SCSEP be a Host Agency for the training and employment of senior citizens through this program. SCSEP offers ACHR participants who might be a good fit with the agency with no guarantee that there will be participants available and no guarantee to the participant that the position they train in at an agency will be offered to them at the end of the period. ACHR provides training, supervision and accountability of participants through evaluation of progress as requested by SCSEP. This is been a successful program for ACHR. During the past few years we have hired several participants after one year of training, which is the limit of time at a site before being hired by the Host or released. This fiscal year we had one participant.

WEATHERIZATION

The weatherization program provides assessments and energy-related upgrades of homes owned by individuals who meet income guidelines set forth by ADECA (Alabama Department of



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Community Affairs), DOE (Department of Energy) and other federal programs associated with weatherization. The repairs and improvements reduce monthly electric and gas utility costs for homes whose owners have the challenges of living with low incomes. The program also assists in creating a safer and more stable living situation for individuals who participate in the program. During fiscal year 2023-24 we did the following:

- Contracted with John Douglas to perform all assessments and energy audits.
- Selected homes to weatherize using a points system based on data entered into the state data program.
- Assessed sealed bids for 28 homes from contractors who had attended the required CEU classes to maintain their weatherization credentials.
- Completed 20 homes weatherized by the two contractors who won the bids.
- Projected the completion of 40 homes under the program standards but due to unforeseen increases in material and labor costs, and for 8 homes contractor health issues that arose during the repair process, the program was unable to reach that goal.
- Completed successfully a required third party audit of the 2018-2021 fiscal years conducted by the Apple Energy Group utilized by ADECA.
- Continued to do client intake when potential clients call in for information regarding this much needed program for use in the next fiscal year.

During fiscal year 2024-25, our goal is to expand our client base to better serve those in the rural areas of Lee County and to expand our contractor base.

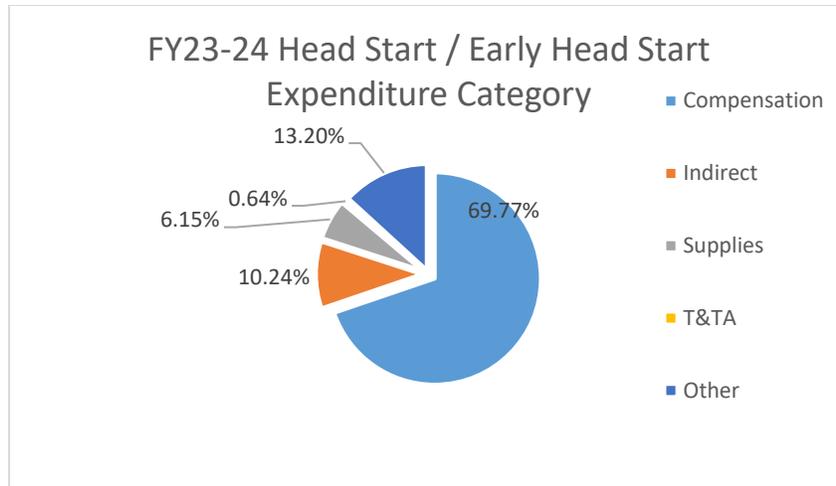
FINANCIAL INFORMATION/FUNDING

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START

The Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc. received funding from Health and Human Services in the amount of \$9.7M to fund our Head Start (\$5.1M) and Early Head Start (\$4.6M) programs providing 71% of agency operating budget. The chart below shows the percentage of expenditures per category for the HS/EHS programs.



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FUNDING FROM ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Other programs overlapping throughout the fiscal year included Child Nutrition, Emergency Services for Low Income Families grants from Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and other state and local charitable organizations in the amount ~\$4.0M providing 29% of agency operating budget.

The U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Program grant \$447K 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 \$423K. Other emergency services programs providing heat and cooling assistance for clients living with low incomes totaled \$2.2M from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHAEP) 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 \$546K.

Alabama Business Charitable (ABC) Trust funds through Alabama Power (\$ K) 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 \$33K, Housing counseling for clients \$2K (HUD) and FEMA \$7K for emergency housing needs. The City of Opelika provided \$22K to assist with extended day/year care for children of working parents. In combination with funding



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through the state voucher program and parent fees on a sliding scale, the City of Opelika funding donations.

AUDIT RESULTS

An outsourced Certified Public Accountant is conducting an audit on ACHR programs for the Year Ending 2023-2024 year. The audit will be presented by CPA to all agency boards upon completion around November 2024. In addition, various programs including Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will be audited during this year. Any significant findings will be presented and a corrective action plan approved accordingly for compliance.

DONATIONS

Federal requirements state the HS/EHS programs must match federal grant funds on an 80/20 basis. That means that “Non-Federal Share” (NFS) or “in-kind” 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 and Early Head Start services.

Normally we have volunteers from the community who come to our centers to provide assistance in various ways. With limited resources, a waiver will be requested with OHS this funding year. 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 Teaching Strategies’ Ready Roses curriculum as an additional option for our parents to be involved with their children and assisting in our classroom to help staff. We are also appreciative of the 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 of \$1.8M.