

# Health & Well-Being @ ISSUE

a publication of the rapides foundation winter 2000

FOCUS: HEALTHY CHILDREN

## The Earlier, the Better

### A Mandate for Early Intervention for Children's Health

*"Recent findings on early brain and child development indicate that the physical and chemical structure of the brain -- and thus, its future capacity for learning and for positive social development -- are influenced significantly by the environment and experiences of a child during the first few years after birth."*

*The American Academy of Pediatrics*

Research and experience tell us that early childhood, especially from birth to age three, is a critical developmental time.

When children get a good start during those three years, with proper healthcare, nutrition, stimulation and a safe and caring home environment, their chances for growing into healthy, productive adults are greatly enhanced.

Yet there are factors which work against healthy beginnings for children -- factors that include low birthweight, poverty, limited access to healthcare and young or single parents.

Based upon findings from an extensive study conducted by Tulane University of the 11-parish, Rapides Foundation service area of central Louisiana, we know our community exhibits some of these risk factors. We have high percentages of teen births, low birthweight babies, lax prenatal care and lagging immunization rates.

With this compelling information, the Rapides Foundation developed its Healthy Children Initiative, a plan to encourage and support early intervention programs that help

give our children the healthy start they need. The Foundation is assisting a number of promising programs throughout our area, many of which are already producing desired outcomes.

In Rapides Parish, a program at a local childcare center is providing health screenings and helping at-risk children get immunizations on time. In Allen Parish, a home visiting program is allowing nurses to visit and counsel young mothers. In Winn Parish, a child health advocacy program is aimed at improving the health status of preschoolers.

All these programs, while different in scope and content, are addressing the challenge of enhancing child and maternal health in central Louisiana. This challenge is certainly not exclusive to our area, and there are myriad early intervention programs in place throughout the United States. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, private foundations such as the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and many state health departments are engaged in these efforts. Some of the strategies used in these programs are prenatal and early childhood home visitation, pediatric office/neonatal clinic education sessions for new parents, health screening and referral services and establishing "medical homes" for children with limited access to healthcare.

Throughout this newsletter, you'll discover innovative early childhood intervention programs being used here at home by several Rapides Foundation grant recipients. By providing funding and technical assistance, the Foundation is working to make a difference, to act as a catalyst for change, so all our children will have the opportunity for a healthy future.

# Working Towards The Future.

## The Rapides Foundation Local Workforce Development Grants Program Kickoff/Workshop

Thursday March 23, 2000

The Rapides Foundation is starting a new economic development grant program this year with the goal of helping private companies and organizations create more higher paying jobs within the Central Louisiana economy.

Activities funded by the Foundation must directly involve at least two manufacturers, healthcare organizations or service companies that compete in markets outside the Cenla

region or sell directly to customers who do so, according to the Foundation.

"The grant program requires firms and organizations to work together because it is the Foundation's belief that encouraging alliances is a quick and efficient way for Cenla companies to become more competitive in national and international markets," said Greg Nesbitt, the Foundation's Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

On March 23rd, the Foundation will host a workshop for grant applicants at the Louisiana Convention Centre in Alexandria where the guidelines will be discussed. There will also be presentations from individuals who have successfully completed the types of efforts the Rapides Foundation would like to support. For registration information, contact Flora Keys at the Foundation. The deadline to submit preliminary proposals is April 14.

### FOCUS: EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## JANUARY NETWORKING FORUM ENHANCES EDUCATION INITIATIVE PROGRAMS

Close to 300 educators involved in the Education Initiative met in January for a full day of training and development to enhance and support their projects.

91 schools are currently participating in the Foundation's Education initiative aimed at providing teachers and principals with the resources needed to upgrade the skills of the teaching corps and to improve the environment for teaching and learning. 49 schools received grants in Cycle 1 and another 42 schools are readying their proposals for April submission in Cycle 2.

Schools accepted under Cycle 1 are eligible to receive additional grants of up to \$25,000 during each of the next four years. Schools accepted under Cycle 2 will have similar opportunities.

*Alma Hills, the San Diego, California teacher of the year, addresses close to 300 educators at the Foundation's Education Networking Forum in January.*



**B.E.S.T. - Building Early Strength Together**

# Nurse Home Visitors Offer Care and Training in Allen Parish

A high rate of teen pregnancies and limited access to prenatal care in Allen Parish has prompted the birth of a new health service there. Called B.E.S.T., the program was developed by the Office of Public Health Region V Allen Parish Health Unit, with grant assistance from the Rapides Foundation.

B.E.S.T. stands for “Building Early Strength Together,” explained Diane Flowers, R.N., who helped originate and coordinate the program at the health unit. It is a nurse visitation program for at-risk, first-time mothers to help them avoid premature delivery, develop good parenting skills and promote the health of their babies. The program provides two full-time nurses who visit expectant mothers from early in their pregnancies through their child’s second birthday.

“Our nurses help these women access early prenatal care,” said Ms. Flowers, “and later help steer them through some of the obstacles they face to continue their education or get a job.” It is an intensive program, she added, and the nurses maintain a relatively small caseload of between 20 and 25 mothers because of the time involved with each client. Clients staying through the course of the program will receive over 60 visits from their nurse.

During the brief time the B.E.S.T. program has been in operation, she said, clients have been very receptive and interested in participating. The nurses, who have received extensive training in conducting the program, act as a resource and friend to the expectant mothers. When making home visits, they bring educational and personal care items to the mothers, and counsel them about what they need to do before and after their babies are born.

The nurses are headquartered at the Allen Parish Health Unit in Oakdale, but they serve clients throughout the parish. Most of their client referrals, said Ms. Flowers, come from the health unit, before the mothers ever see a doctor. Local doctors are aware of the program, she added, and the B.E.S.T. nurses often help their clients arrange for the physician care they need.

The Rapides Foundation is helping the new visitation program with a grant of \$250,000 for 27 months, under its Healthy Children Initiative.



*B.E.S.T. is a nurse visitation program for at-risk, first-time mothers to help them avoid premature delivery, develop good parenting skills and promote the health of their babies.*

The Rapides Foundation is a philanthropic organization that provides grants to organizations throughout an 11 parish service area that share the foundation’s mission to improve the health and well-being of Central Louisiana.



**The Rapides Foundation**

[www.rapidesfoundation.org](http://www.rapidesfoundation.org)



# Therapy Tailor- Made for Children

A three-year, \$75,000 grant from the Rapides Foundation is helping Pediatric Therapy Center conduct an intensive identification/screening program for children ages 0 to three who may be experiencing developmental delay.

The first few years of life are critical for a child with developmental dysfunction. Whether it's a premature infant who has feeding problems, an autistic child who has trouble tolerating his everyday environment, or a child afflicted with the muscular weakness of cerebral palsy, early identification and intervention are important.

That's why the therapists at Alexandria's Pediatric Therapy Center are working hard to get the word out about their services tailored exclusively to children in Central Louisiana.

"If you're really going to make major changes, you need to get in there early," said Stacey Debevec, an occupational therapist and the Center's executive director. She and her staff of therapists see more than 100 children each week, and more than half the clients are under the age of three. They provide physical, occupational and speech therapy services for a variety of diagnoses, as well as screening, family support and education and specialized intervention and treatments.

The only not-for-profit center of its kind in the area, Pediatric Therapy Center was organized in 1997 by three pediatric therapists who saw a need to improve and coordinate the provision of such services locally, explained Mary Swiggum, a physical therapist and one of the Center's founders.

A three-year, \$75,000 grant from the Rapides Foundation is helping Pediatric Therapy Center conduct an intensive identification/screening program for children

ages 0 to three who may be experiencing developmental delay. They are working with private physicians, health and social service agencies and childcare providers to implement an aggressive screening protocol and referral process.

At the Center, therapists work one-on-one with each child, using assistive devices and techniques as needed. A "playground" inside one building is tailor-made for therapy and fun. For example, suspended equipment helps a child experience activity in a controlled environment; large balls and carpeted crawl spaces are used to address touch, movement and coordination issues.

"The results can be phenomenal," said Ms. Swiggum. "If you can get in there and get parents to work with them, you can often see big differences in a month's time," she said. "We try to stress family education and involvement."

The Center has been awarded another grant from the Foundation, a three-year \$155,000 award, to implement intervention programs for 0 to three year-olds who are at-risk for developmental dysfunction, but who do not yet have a medical diagnosis and are not eligible for subsidized treatment. The grant also will be used for education and training for parents and childcare providers.

Services are available at no cost to the family for children under three years of age. The Center gets its funding from a combination of state and federal funds, private insurers, fund-raisers and other grants.

If you're  
going to  
make  
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there early.

*Stacey Debevec,  
Executive Director  
Pediatric Therapy Center*

# Grant Update:

The Rapides Foundation Grants from October-December 1999\*

<b>Ballet Alexandria</b> - Planning and organizational development.	\$7,700 1 yr
<b>Central Louisiana Storytellers Association</b> - Conference for educators on integrating storytelling techniques into curriculum.	7,500 1 yr
<b>City of Pineville</b> - Telephone calling system to check on isolated older adults.	5,751 1 yr
<b>City of Pineville</b> - Matching grant for purchase of portable Automatic External Defibrillator systems for use by Fire Department first responders.	10,000 1 yr
<b>Hessmer Little League</b> - Matching funds for community volunteer project to renovate recreation area.	6,000 1 yr
<b>Kisatchie Legal Services</b> - Matching funds to purchase teleconferencing equipment to enhance services for victims of domestic violence.	7,307 1 yr
<b>LaSalle Association for the Developmentally Disabled</b> - Training and marketing funds to improve agency's relationships with employers.	8,000 1 yr
<b>Natchitoches-Northwestern Symphony</b> - Organizational and programmatic development funding.	10,000 1 yr
<b>North Centrala Head Start</b> - Pilot arts education program for Grant Parish Head Start children using Louisiana College and Pineville High School instructors.	10,000 1 yr
<b>Rapides Minority Development Corporation</b> - Matching funds for technical assistance in developing affordable housing in South Alexandria.	10,000 1 yr
<b>Renaissance Home</b> - Matching funds for a volunteer construction effort to build a classroom on the grounds of the facility.	7,500 1 yr
<b>United Hands Youth Center</b> - Start-up operating funds for this drop-in center for adolescents in unincorporated Concordia Parish.	5,660 1 yr

\*Multi-year Initiative and Responsive grants were not scheduled for consideration during the 4th quarter.

## FOCUS: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### Community Development Initiative Coming Soon

The Rapides Foundation's Community Development Initiative will officially get underway July 2000. Based on information collected from more than 160 Cenla residents, the Initiative will include a variety of training programs as well as technical assistance, grants, and information sharing. Three programs are slated to start in mid-2000: Leadership Development for a Healthy Cenla; Community Builders Training, and Alexandria Nonprofit Management Seminars.

Watch for the Foundation's April Newsletter for more details on these and other community development activities in Central Louisiana.



# New Partnership Helps New Parents

*Three nonprofit agencies in Rapides Parish team up to offer education, encouragement and support to help new parents.*

The Alexandria offices of Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana, Volunteers of America and Steps to Success have joined hands in a unique partnership that teaches parenting skills, offers resource information and conducts home visits for new parents. The Rapides Foundation acted as a catalyst for this collaboration, and is providing funding of \$500,000 for five years.

The First Steps program is conducted by the Alexandria office of Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana. Foundation funding allowed this agency to establish a regional office in Alexandria, and to coordinate the hospital-based First Steps program for new parents. This program trains volunteers to visit parents, particularly teens and first-time moms and dads, in the hospital immediately after the birth of their babies, explained Wendy Roy, central regional director. "We have the perfect opportunity, while they are in the hospital, to give these moms the information and support they need," she said.

The volunteers offer educational materials that deal with everything from infant safety and feeding tips to how to survive

the "baby blues," colic and crying. Follow up phone calls are made at two weeks, three months and six months to check on families after they go home.

"Our goal is to help provide education and support to reduce parents' stress levels, with basic information and friendly guidance," added Ms. Roy. The First Steps program's volunteers, working in both CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini and Rapides Regional hospitals, have visited about 500 new moms since May 1999, she said. The First Steps program had previously been a project of the Alexandria Junior League under the guidance of Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana.

Evelyn Cass is the VOA parenting specialist who conducts the home visits after getting referrals from First Steps. "We schedule an initial visit, do an assessment of the parents' strengths and needs, and then arrange weekly meetings that last about an hour and a half each," she explained. Ms. Cass spends about 20 hours with each client over a five to six month period.

Augmenting both the in-hospital First Steps program and the home visitation component is Steps to Success, which helps facilitate access to support services for early (0-3 years) childhood. Parents can call Steps to Success to get referrals to appropriate agencies or simply to get answers to questions relating to childcare.

"Every new parent needs support," said Jennifer McDowell, regional coordinator of the Steps to Success program. Her agency is developing a data bank of community resources for parents and children in central Louisiana; this will allow McDowell to maintain a comprehensive list of available services, and to identify gaps and duplications that may exist.



*This collaborative effort provides volunteers offering educational materials that deal with everything from infant safety and feeding tips to how to survive the "baby blues," colic and crying.*

## Region VI Office of Public Health and Hope Development Center

# Healthcare at Hope Development Center

A unique partnership between the Rapides Parish Health Unit and a local childcare center is delivering healthcare and early intervention to 150 at-risk children and training the people who work with them.

A three-year, \$82,280 grant from the Rapides Foundation is providing the funds to support a part-time nurse at Hope Development Center in Alexandria. Working from a cheerful examining room and office suite, clinical nurse specialist Debbie Smith dispenses immunizations and health screenings for children there, as well as training for the workers who regularly care for them.

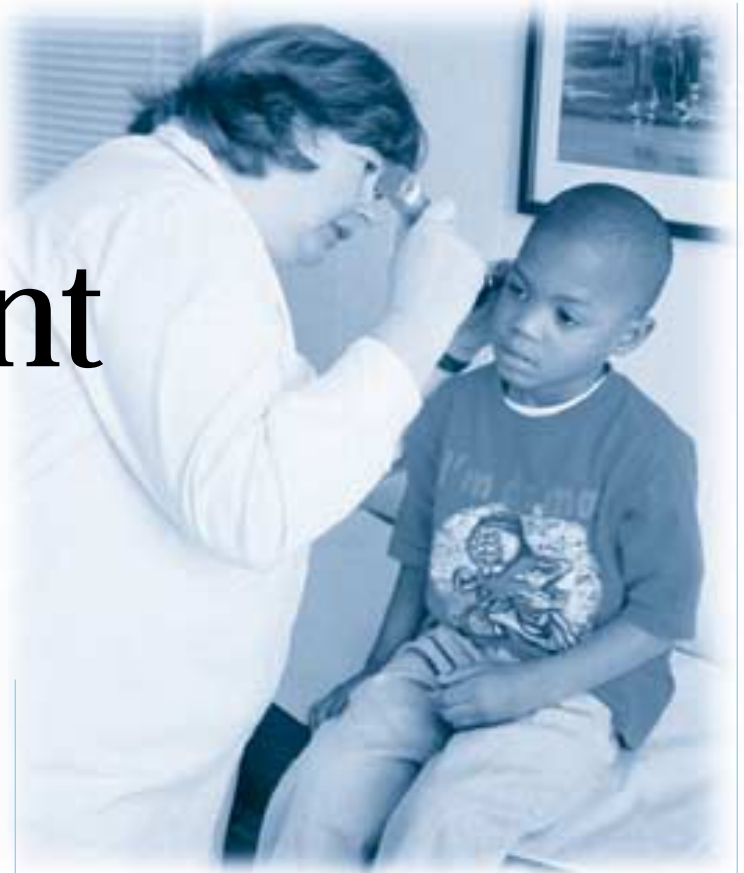
Since November, “Nurse Debbie,” as she is known, has been developing a rapport with the children, their families and the Center’s staff. “A lot of these children don’t have much contact at all with a healthcare provider,” she said. “This program gets them familiar with a nurse in a different context.”

She tailors her office time, which average about 20 hours a week, to fit the schedules of the families the center serves. “This is like a satellite health unit for this neighborhood,” explained Mrs. Smith.

In addition, the program at Hope Development Center aims to enhance children’s health by delivering training to childcare workers there, teaching them how to identify problems and seek appropriate solutions. That component of the program aligns with the Office of Public Health’s statewide effort, called CINCH (Consultant in Childcare Health), that links public health nurses with people who take care of children in childcare centers. Nurses offer education to workers about issues such as disease, safety, nutrition, behavioral and developmental topics and immunizations.

**Our goal is to reach children who are not receiving the healthcare services they need.**

*Jane Smart,  
Regional Nurse Manager  
Region VI Office of Public Health*



*Nurse Debbie Smith dispenses immunizations and health screenings for children at Hope Development Center, as well as training for the workers who regularly care for them.*

Establishing a “medical home” -- a place for primary care -- for each child is another desired outcome of the health program at Hope Development Center, said Mrs. Jane Smart, Regional Nurse Manager for Region VI. When appropriate, Nurse Debbie helps arrange for Medicaid or LaCHIP enrollment for children and makes referrals to affordable primary care, specialty care and therapy services. Families may also apply for and receive WIC vouchers at the Center’s clinic, part of the government-sponsored nutritional program for women and children.

All these services are aimed at removing obstacles to healthcare for very young, at-risk children, and boosting their chances for a healthy start in life, goals which tie into the Rapides Foundation’s “Healthy Children” initiative. While there is considerable interest nationally in pairing public health nurses with childcare centers, the Alexandria program’s structure is unique in Louisiana. It may become a model for other such collaborations.

“We hope to be able to take the information we have learned in this program at Hope Development Center and reproduce this throughout Central Louisiana,” said Mrs. Smart.



## R E S O U R C E S

# Downloadable Resources Now Available On The Web

The Rapides Foundation's website provides comprehensive grant program information as well as workshop dates and application deadlines. You can also download everything from annual reports to newsletters and grant application cover pages.

Just click on the Resources section of the Foundation's home page and you can access information like a summary of the Foundation's Community Assessment of Central Louisiana. Or click on the Grants section and download guidelines for Initiative and Responsive Grant Programs. The internet is a convenient way to share information with organizations throughout the Foundation's 11 parish service area.



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