

# HEAD START COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT 2008-2011

## Introduction

### Introduction

#### Program

Lauderdale County Head Start began offering services in the summer of 1965. It operated under Community Action for many years, and was transferred to Florence City Schools in 1996. Lauderdale County Head Start serves 203 children in ten classrooms, and an additional 3 – 9 in a classroom for Head Start children operated by Riverbend Mental Health within the Head Start Handy site. Nine of the classrooms (including the Riverbend classroom) are located at Handy School in West Florence, and two classrooms are located at Weeden School in East Florence.

The mission of LCHS is to provide an age-appropriate program for pre-school children. The intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of children are met in a caring environment by a staff that is actively involved in continuing education to enhance the program. The parents and the community are welcomed and are encouraged to become and remain actively involved in program planning.

Lauderdale County is the most Northwest county in the state of Alabama. It is bounded on the north by the Tennessee counties of Hardin, Wayne, Lawrence and Giles, and on the east by Limestone County, Alabama. The Tennessee River forms the southern boundary between Lauderdale County and the Alabama counties of Colbert and Lawrence. The western boundary is Tishomingo County, Mississippi. Florence is equidistant between Nashville on the North, Atlanta on the East, Birmingham to the South, and Memphis to the West.

Florence is part of a four city metropolitan area divided by a river (Muscle Shoals, Tuscumbia, Sheffield, in Colbert County, and Florence in Lauderdale County) whose combined population is 134,000. The metropolitan area is located in the northwest corner of the state of Alabama, which is located in the southeastern United States. Lauderdale County Head Start provides services to any child within Lauderdale County. Transportation has been provided within Florence City, and parents also transport children from Lauderdale County to the program.

#### Use of Community Assessment

Lauderdale County Head Start uses its community assessment to determine where in its service area classrooms should be located, what services should be offered, and what needs the families have that must be addressed. It is also used to identify needs that can be met by partnering with other organizations, identifying areas of the program that might be strengthened by seeking other grants, and what the program's overall goals and objectives should be.

The program gathers data on an on-going basis, in cooperation with the Preschool Disabilities Program, Even Start, and Riverbend Mental Health. As data is gathered it is shared with the Policy Council and the Board. The Community Assessment compiles the gathered data, and is discussed with the Policy Council and the Board of Education. Priorities for services are determined by the Policy Council.

#### Area

##### 1. Location of agency

Lauderdale County Head Start is located in the historically black section of town in the historically black elementary school. This school is identified with W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues, is named after him, and is built on the site of his birth. The school therefore is a center of community pride and identified with a strong role model. The program at Handy School serves 163 children, 66% black, 5% Hispanic, 24% white, and 4% multi-racial.

A second Head Start site, with two classrooms and 40 children, is at Weeden School in East Florence, which provides access to Head Start on two sides of the city. This second site has several Hispanic families, who comprise about 10% of the Head Start enrollments at that site.

A majority of the participants in Head Start come from the surrounding low income housing areas (Carver Homes for the Handy site, Cherry Hill Homes for the Weeden site). Families from outside the city bring their children in to the program primarily for special needs, such as dual enrollment in Head Start and Special Education.

## 2. Range of direct services provided

Lauderdale County Head Start provides services to low income families and families of at risk children. Family services include social service referrals for homeless, educational, ESL, Special Education, family violence, parenting education, health and dental, and other needed family services. Educational services are provided to three and four year old children as part of the services to families.

## 3. Range of services available

Lauderdale County Head Start is co-located with Florence City Schools Preschool Special Education and Even Start. Services available within the program building include GED training, ESL training, speech and special education. The school system provides services to the homeless, additional ESL services, parenting assistance through the "Parent Project" for families with school age children, and access to additional social services as needed. Florence City Schools has a partnership agreement with Riverbend Center for Mental Health and provides access to mental health counselors in all of the system schools, including Head Start.

## 4. Geographic features that impact service delivery

Section One: Demographic Information

### 1. Demographic data about families

### **2. Estimated number of Head Start eligible children**

According to the 2005 census data, Lauderdale County had 5,147 children under the age of five years. The poverty rate is 57%, and the number of children in poverty would be 2,933. Of that number approximately 956 to 1,170 would be eligible for three and four year old classes at Head Start.

### **3. Estimated number of Head Start available children**

36 served by state funded prek

186 three and four year olds estimated served by child care vouchers

# of three and four year old children available for Head Start = 734 to 948

## **Demographic Information – Geographic Location**

### **4. Where families are located**

Lauderdale County Head Start is headquartered in Census Tract 103 in West Florence, which has three public housing developments. The population of Head Start eligible three and four year old children in that tract is presently 43, all African American.

Weeden Head Start Center is located in East Florence near a fourth public housing project that has 26 Head Start eligible three and four year old children, 17 of whom are white and 8 African American.

Section 8 housing, which is spread out over the city, has a total of 152 Head Start eligible children. 56 of these families live in North Florence which is currently unserved by its own Head Start unit. 7 additional families live in the county in Section 8 housing.

At present (2004-05) Florence City School system has the following numbers of kindergarten children receiving free and reduced price lunches in various areas of the city:

School	Area of Florence	Free lunch	Reduced lunch	Head Start classrooms
Forest Hills	North	67	12	0
Harlan	North	58	9	0
Weeden	East	85	3	2

Of the 210 children served free lunches in kindergarten, approximately 67% attended Head Start. Positive geographical aspects of the service include the proximity of Head Start services to the majority of families served, a city with many parks and recreational opportunities, the proximity of the Boys and Girls Clubs to the Head Start sites, and the Handy Recreation Center which is next door to the Handy School. Housing is affordable and plentiful, and public housing is attractive and of good quality.

##### **5. How geography impacts services and operations**

Lauderdale County has two school systems, Florence City Schools and Lauderdale County Schools. Head Start is operated by Florence City Schools but accepts children from the county as well. Transportation into the city is limited, as no public transportation exists outside the city limits. Many families are not able to access Head Start services within the city for that reason.

In Lauderdale County (outside Florence City) of families with children under 5 years of age 20.4% are below the poverty level. Of those families that are female headed, single parent 57.1% are below the poverty level. *Source: US Census figures*

Lauderdale County has two geographic areas of high poverty. One is in the Waterloo area, in the extreme West of the county, and the other is in the Cloverdale area, in the northern end of the county. The free lunch population in the county school system indicates the need:

Lauderdale County

Cloverdale	57.7%
Waterloo	60.89%

*Source: Lauderdale School Systems*

##### **6. Demographic Information – Racial and ethnic composition**

Of the 85,898 total population of Lauderdale County 77,138, or 88.4% are white, 8,241 or 9.8% black, 953, or .3% are Native American, and .4% Asian, according to the latest figures of the Chamber of Commerce. The Hispanic population is a growing, but still negligible, part of the population of the area, although the counties to the south of Lauderdale have increasingly large numbers. The Hispanic population under age 18, according to the latest figures from Kids Count, are 303 in Lauderdale County, with 112 of those under age 5. The program has begun recruiting efforts within that population, and is preparing itself with materials in Spanish and with translator services from the Board of Education.

##### **7. Numbers of racial and/or ethnic groups in the service area**

The area around the primary Head Start site, Handy School, is almost entirely African American. The population in East Florence, near Weeden School (the other Head Start site) has a primarily white and increasingly Hispanic population. There are a few families from India who operate motels, and several of their children have attended Head Start over the years. There are few other ethnic groups in the area. The University of North Alabama does have a large foreign student population, but few of these have children. Of the ones who do have children do send them to Head Start. This year we have one from Sri Lanka and one from Nepal.

##### **8. Information on primary languages spoken in service area**

The majority language is English. Of the ten to twelve Hispanic families served by Head Start most need assistance with English.

#### **Section Two: Other Child Care Programs**

### Who child care providers are

Alabama has one of the highest quality state funded PreK programs with the lowest number of children enrolled among the states providing PreK. These programs enroll only four year olds. Lauderdale County has two PreK sites with full funding and one with partial funding. The two with full funding are at the University and far out in the county. The one with partial funding is in the city. All three charge tuition, up to \$25 / week.

Alabama also has preschools operated by the special education departments of school systems. Four of these exist in the county system, and charge up to \$54 / week for five days of enrollment for typically developing peers. Special needs students attend free of cost for the days of their IEP.

There are only 2 family day care homes and two family group homes in Lauderdale County, and 13 licensed centers that are supervised by the Department of Human Resources. An additional five centers are church based, and are therefore licensed but are not required to meet state minimum standards and are not supervised by the state, and therefore have no quality control.

Type	Ages 3 - 4	Ages 0 - 3	Accept Subsidy?	Average Price
Riverbend Mental Health preschool		0	Medicaid	Free
State funded PreK (3 sites)	54	0	No	\$25 / week
Family day care homes (2 sites)	2	5	Yes	
Family group homes (2sites)	5	19	Yes	
Licensed child care centers (13 sites)	192	137	11 sites	

Lauderdale County has two Alabama state funded PreK classrooms, one located at the Central community in the elementary school and one located at the University of North Alabama in Florence. Central is not located within the area of highest need (Cloverdale) identified by Head Start. The program at the University does not serve any Head Start eligible children at present.

Child care centers are primarily located within the city. In the areas of need outside the city, Cloverdale and Waterloo, there are no child care centers.

#### 9. The prevalence of unlicensed care

### **Section Three: Children with Disabilities**

Estimated number of three and four year old children with disabilities

Florence City:

Lauderdale County:

### **Types of disabilities represented in the area**

Most children served by Preschool Special Education have delayed development or speech impairment.

North Alabama has one of the highest incidences of autism per capita within the United States, and it is typical to find several cases of autism within the city and county preschool populations each year.

### **Resources available to children with disabilities and their families**

Within City School system: The Florence City School system provides Special Education services to all children ages 3 – 5 within the borders of the school system. The program is co-located with Handy School to provide maximum access for families to Head Start services. Services are also provided at Weeden school on an as-needed basis for preschool children enrolled in Head Start.

Within County System: The Lauderdale County School system provides Special Education Preschools at five locations within the county to allow easy access for families that have children with disabilities. The Preschools provide a program that includes typically developing peers.

Alabama Rehab Works  
 Pat Byrnes and Associates, Inc. ( OT)  
 United Cerebral Palsy Center  
 Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind  
 Scope 310  
 Children's Rehabilitation Services  
 Easter Seals  
 ARC of the Shoals  
 Helen Keller Memorial Hospital  
 Riverbend Center for Mental Health  
 Rolling Riders  
 Therapeutic Programs Northwest  
 Florence City Schools  
 Lauderdale County Schools

### **Section Four: Needs of children and families as defined by data**

#### 1. Education

Of the 57 two parent families served in 2006-07 19% had two working parents and 63% had one working parent. 17% of the families had both parents unemployed.

Of the 148 single parent families, 54% were employed.

These figures can be related directly to education. Of the 205 total families served over the course of the year 31% of the parents had not completed high school. 45% of the families had completed only high school. 23% of the families had completed an Associate degree or some college.

#### 2. Social Services

35% of the Head Start families served over the course of the year needed emergency assistance with food, clothing, or shelter. 4% needed assistance with domestic violence issues.

40% needed parenting education and 9% needed marriage education services. Only 1.9% needed assistance with child abuse referrals and only 1 person needed assistance with child support.

## 2. Literacy

According to the Alabama Adult Education and Family Literacy Plan (1999-2004) the Alabama economy is expected to provide an estimated 321,000 new jobs by 2006. A significant number of the fastest growing occupations will require a bachelor's degree and many of the remaining fields will demand education beyond the secondary level. The November 1996 issue of Financial World ranked Alabama forty-sixth nationally for the ability to provide an educated labor supply. In 1997 the Alabama Industry and Manufacturers Association polled over 4,000 industries in the state to find out what their chief executives thought were their top five problems. An educated, trained work force led the list.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, compiled and reported by the Center for Demographic and Cultural Research, Auburn University at Montgomery, November 1998, indicates that in Lauderdale County, the one county of the five in Northwest Alabama with the most population, the one four year college, and the best employment opportunities, the percent of adults in Literacy Level 1 was still 19%. The total enrollment in the Florence City Adult Education program from July 1, 1997 to June 30, 1998 was 2,055.

## 3. Health

Child health issues were reported as a concern by 72% of Alabama's counties, as recorded in the County Needs Assessment of the Alabama Children's Policy Council book for 2005-06. The major concern in this area for Lauderdale County was the need for parenting skills and education. The Children's Policy Council for Lauderdale recommended a multi-agency effort to compel parents to participate in parenting education.

In 2004-05 about 10% of the children in the Head Start program were considered obese. Over the long term this will increase the children's risk of developing diabetes and other complications of obesity.

## 4. Dental

The Alabama CHIPS program covers dental care for low income children. The Lauderdale County area has a number of dentists who accept Medicaid and access to dental care is not an issue for the children served by this program.

## 5. Transportation

Transportation is a problem throughout Alabama and comes up at every venue that addresses the needs of low income families. In practice, however, LCHS has had very few instances of parents unable to get their children to school. Even with gas prices that seem very high attendance figures have not indicated an impact on rates of child attendance at the program.

## 6. Nutrition

Regionally, the South is home to nine of the 10 states with the highest rates of obesity. The southern region is also home to nine out of 10 states with the highest rates of diabetes and hypertension, two major health problems often related to obesity. According to a report by Trust for America's Health (2006) Alabama has adult obesity rates of 28.7 percent, ranking it the 2nd heaviest in the nation. Alabama ranks 5th in the nation for adult diabetes levels, at 8.9 percent, and ranks 3rd for rates of hypertension at 32.0 percent.

## 7. Mental Health

Lauderdale County has a mental health center (Riverbend Center for Mental Health) located in Florence. This is one of only four counties in the state that has a mental health center with specialized preschool services for preschool children. Head Start partners with Riverbend to provide services to Head Start children.

### **Section Five: Needs of children and families as defined by families and Community**

#### **Partners**

#### **Needs of Families as Identified by themselves:**

The families are surveyed every year to determine their felt needs. For the 2007-08 school year the needs expressed by the families were:

#### Employment issues

- 58 indicated paying bills as a problem
- 28 identified low wages as a problem
- 23 indicated unemployment as a problem

#### Health issues

- 21 indicated Mental Health issues as a problem
- 10 indicated physical health as a problem

Food was an issue for 9 families, and clothing an issue for an additional 16.

Only 8 indicated housing as an issue.

Personal safety and violent family members hardly registered, at one each, and there was no identification of drug or alcohol abuse as family problems.

#### **Needs of Families as Identified by other community partners**

Other community partners are surveyed yearly to determine the needs of community families as perceived by the other services that work with them. The results of this year's survey indicates that parenting skills, mental health issues, and education/literacy are perceived as needs in the community.

One major need is transportation. This is a state of Alabama need, and comes up in every discussion of the needs of Alabama families

Another major need, for the Hispanic community in particular, is access to health care. Head Start cooperates with the local Health Clinic, run by the Florence Housing Authority and available to any working adult without insurance

Lauderdale County is blessed with sufficient dentists, particularly pediatric dentists, and sufficient CHIPS insurance to provide services to the children it serves. The adult parent population, however, is in need particularly of dental care. The program has discussed ways to enlist the cooperation of local dentists to address emergency services for this need.

Obesity is another health issue that needs to be addressed. In 2004-05 23 of the Head Start children were considered obese, which is about 11%. In cooperation with the school lunch program of Florence City Schools, the menu and available snacks for adults need to be reviewed and revised in light of current findings on the life long effects of obesity.

A third major need is for accessible services, particularly for screenings and immunizations. Lauderdale County Health Department is located on the edge of the county, far from the metropolitan center or the location of low income housing. Families without transportation can have great difficulty accessing the services of the health department. One reason for a family resource center would be to enable those families to have access to the services that they need within a reasonable distance. Head

Start has also worked on providing an immunization clinic with the cooperation of the Health Department, and this may come to fruition in the near future.

A fourth major need is for access to parenting education services in the area of parenting skills and personal health and safety in addition to the services provided by Riverbend.

A fifth major need is for affordable child care for low income families. Because of state cutbacks in funding for child care services, affordable child care is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

A sixth major need is for Head Start services to extend into the county. Waterloo area, which was highlighted above, is a pocket of poverty within Lauderdale County, and could benefit from a Head Start classroom. Cloverdale also has a low income population that could benefit from Head Start services.

A seventh major need is for a strong father involvement program. 68% of the children in Head Start are from single parent families. Research indicates that children who have both parents involved in their lives are statistically more likely to do well academically, graduate from high school, and be successful in establishing families of their own.

### **Planning and Delivery of Services to Children**

#### Children's Policy Council

By law, each county in Alabama has a Children's Policy Council, organized under the Family Court Judge, that is responsible for gathering information, planning for child welfare program improvements, and reporting the needs of children and families to the Alabama legislature. Lauderdale County Head Start is represented on the Policy Council and participates in needs assessments of that body. Head Start utilizes the yearly report of the Lauderdale Children's Policy Council in considering and planning its own services.

#### Kidstuff

Alabama Kidstuff is the umbrella organization for the early childhood programs that report to the Children's Policy Councils. The local Kidstuff organization is housed at Handy School in cooperation with the Lauderdale County Head Start center. Even Start, Alabama state funded PreK units, local day care centers, and health care and social service providers are all represented on the Kidstuff board. This group meets four times yearly to discuss the needs of local families and children, plan activities together, and cooperate across county borders. It conducts a yearly needs assessment, with which Head Start cooperates and uses to complement and inform its own needs assessment.

#### Family Resource Center

It is expected that within a year there will be a functioning Family Resource Center. Lauderdale County Head Start is an important part of the planning for this center. It is expected that the Family Resource Center would provide access to health screenings, immunizations, food stamp applications, Safeplace counseling, among other needed social services for the population that Head Start serves.

#### Child Care Management Agency

Lauderdale County Head Start cooperates with the Child Care Management Agency to provide extended day and summer services to Head Start families.

### **Need for Extended Day Child Care Services**

As noted in much of the material above, Alabama's families have increasing needs, due to the Federal demands for 30 hours per week of work to qualify for benefits, the percentage of single parent families, the relationship of single parenting to poverty, and of poverty to the incidence of family disfunction and school failure. These needs, combined with Alabama's declining commitment to providing funding for child care, means increased family need for high quality, full day, full year, child care services.

## **Section Six: Community Resources**

Under Alabama State law every county in the state has a Children's Policy Council that operates under the family court judge and includes all agencies that serve

children. The CPC meets quarterly, and the early childhood committee does as well. The health and economic welfare committees meet monthly. Head Start is represented on the early childhood, health, and economic welfare committees.

The early childhood committee (Northwest Alabama Smart Start) coordinates the day care, prek, head start, even start, and preschool mental health activities. The health committee coordinates school readiness screenings for children who do not attend Head Start.

Each committee, under state law, must conduct a needs assessment yearly to identify the three most important issues in each area for the coming year. Head Start cooperates with the action items identified by each committee yearly.

Lauderdale County also has a new Family Success Center which has begun programming for parent education and coordinating healthy marriage/relationship training. Head Start provides Fatherhood involvement and healthy marriage workshops under the auspices of the Family Success Center.

The Alabama Extension Service provides the award winning “Parenting 101” programming twice yearly to Head Start parents, which includes nutrition, economic education, parenting, and relationship information.

Lauderdale County Head Start has cooperative agreements with additional agencies that serve families and children. Among these are Safe Place, Reading is Fundamental, Even Start, Best Start (for pregnant parents), and Women Infants and Children.

Lauderdale County is served by one hospital and one state health clinic, with two additional hospitals within 10 miles. There is also a clinic for the low income working population located within two blocks of Handy School. Infants and Children’s Clinic serves most of the Head Start children and is located within a mile of Handy School. The large majority of the Head Start children are on Medicaid. The CHIPS program (AllKids) is available to families that make too much money to qualify for Medicaid. Both programs cover dental needs. Lauderdale County Head Start has doctors and dentists who will accept referrals in cases of need if children do not qualify for insurance, and the Florence Kiwanis Clubs provide funding to Head Start to cover costs for those children.

Riverbend Center for Mental Health is located a few blocks from Handy School and runs a mental health preschool for children with mental health needs. Head Start has a cooperative program with Riverbend that allows children ready and qualified for Head Start to transition in to Handy School and receive Head Start services. The program provides parenting education and weekly therapy for families.

Florence has a SafePlace program in place, and Head Start cooperates with Safe Place on programs for parents as well as services to families that have or are experiencing family violence.

Grocery stores are available and accessible to the families that are served in the city. The majority of the children are served by WIC, and Lauderdale County has a partnership agreement with that program to assist in tracking and counseling families with overweight children.

The Florence City School system has a number of support services for Head Start including the Social Workers who assist with the homeless, English as a Second

Language coordinators, the Parent Project program to provide parenting education, and preschool special education.

There is a transportation program available through the North Alabama Council of Local governments that provides low cost transportation to people who do not have their own cars. Head Start has utilized their services on occasion to assist parents in getting their children to school on a temporary basis.

The community has a large organization comprised of 50+ churches that cooperate on a Healthy Marriage initiative. Head Start is represented on their board and in their committees and functions there to inform the consortium of the needs of Head Start families as well as coordinating activities. The initiative is a major strength for our area.

### **Section Seven: Analysis of Data**

1. Our population is becoming more diverse.
2. There is a high need for family assistance with child care
3. The area population with disabilities is well served
4. There is a high need for adult education and literacy training
5. Obesity is a state and local issue
6. The area population with mental health needs is well served
7. There is a need for parenting education
8. Health services need to be made more accessible for families
9. Marriage and fatherhood education need to be made available for families.

### **Section Eight: Management Decisions**

1. Location of Centers
  - LCHS will extend its services into the northern part of the city as resources become available.
  - LCHS will continue to provide services in the eastern and western part of Florence City (Handy Head Start and Weeden Head Start)
  - LCHS will explore ways to partner with the County school system to provide Head Start services to low income families that are outside Florence City.
  - LCHS will continue its partnership with Kilby Child Development Center to provide services to low income families enrolled at the University.
2. Selection Criteria
  - LCHS will continue to monitor the preschool population to ensure that it is identifying the needs of the children and adjusting its selection criteria accordingly.
  - LCHS will add a criteria of need for those low income families that are taking advantage of educational opportunities for the adults in the family.
3. Services Provided:
  - LCHS will provide services to increased numbers of three year olds as the state funded PreK provides more services to the four year old population.

4. Services Linked

- LCHS will strive to link its services with the state funded PreK and Special Education preschools in Lauderdale County to ensure that all low-income children who have a need for those services and desire to take advantage of them will have full funding for those services.

5. Hours of Operation

- LCHS will increase hours of operation to meet state standards for PreK as funds are made available.

6. Days of Operation

- LCHS will increase days of operation to 180 class days for four year old classes to meet state standards for PreK as funds are made available.

Info for next: Florence Muscle Shoals MSA ranked #337 out of 366 metropolitan areas in POLICOM's latest economic strength rankings (Source: Times Daily, 6/4/2009)