

# R E P O R T

*Your United Way of Broome County investment at work*

*September, 2001*

## United Way works with coalition to improve childcare in Broome County

The term childcare can describe an educational program that prepares youngsters for school enrollment and success in later life. It can also describe an environment of custodial care in which no education is attempted. Research has shown that the youngsters who have stimulating and enriching experiences by age 5 will outperform the other children throughout their lives. Otherwise children usually fall behind in school from the earliest grades and many eventually drop out before graduating. These also are a higher percentage of the children needing special education, needing welfare, becoming pregnant as teenagers, and becoming involved in criminal activities.

United Way is working with other local organizations interested in early childhood education to provide upgraded childcare for all area youngsters. The first step is organizing a pilot program at seven childcare centers in Broome County. As part of this program, the Partners for Learning curriculum, a research-based approach, which has been very successful in other communities, will be adopted by the seven child care facilities.

### Program developed by Dr. Craig Ramey in North Carolina

Dr. Craig Ramey in North Carolina developed the Partners for Learning curriculum. The seven principles of this program are: (1) it must begin in the first three years and continue through school age, (2) the more intense and active the participation by the child, the greater the benefits, (3) direct learning experiences, such as program designed specifically for children, are preferred to indirect programs, such as those that support the entire family, (4) comprehensive programs offering breadth and flexibility are more effective than one-dimensional programs, (5) not every child will achieve the same results from being included in the program, (6) the program works best in an environment that maintains positive attitudes and encourages continued

learning, and (7) the program should be individually tailored to each child's cultural situation.

Ramey's studies show that children from families with low resources generally show increasing deficits or delays in their development during the first three years of their life, usually scoring on the low end of the scale measuring general competence, intelligence, and language development. However, children from such families show substantially better progress when they receive high quality early education, responsive parenting, and good health care during the first three years of life. They also show reduced rates of mental retardation and better grade retention.

### Pilot programs serve children from many low-income families

The agencies participating in the pilot program to implement Partners for Learning in Broome County currently are serving a high percentage of children from low-income families. While poverty itself is not an indicator of poor performance, it is usually linked with lack of education, neglect, unsafe environments, and single parenting. The greater the number of these factors that are present, the greater the chance that a child will be an underperformer.

The pilot program in Broome County began with two Broome Community College faculty visiting a Ramey-based child care center in Chicago to observe and learn first hand the practices associated with the Partners for Learning approach. They are now developing the course curriculum that will be used in training about 36 childcare providers at the seven pilot sites. These childcare workers will eventually receive three levels of training, with each level of instruction followed by at least three months of experience applying the principles learned before moving to the next higher level.

The seven pilot child care programs are at All My Children Day Care Center, Bingham-

ton Children's Learning Center, BOCES, two centers operated by the Day Nursery Association, Whitney Point PreSchool and Day Care Center, and the Y's Kids Program at the Binghamton YMCA.

### United Way saw need through look at community problems

How does United Way of Broome County fit into all of this? Through its regular assessment of community problems, United Way saw that children in Broome County were doing worse than others in the state and nation in certain areas. For example, the percentage of area children in special education programs was the highest in New York and well above national averages. The number of children dropping out of school before graduating was also high.

Through its involvement on committees looking at community problems, United Way representatives learned about the success of the Ramey-developed program in improving the lives of children in other communities. Working with other organizations in the community, including Partnership 2000, BOCES, and several local school districts, United Way proposed the adoption of a similar program in Broome County. As part of its Venture and Special Assistance Grant Program, United Way granted \$4,870 in July to the Binghamton Association for the Education of Young Children (which agreed to be the lead organization in this movement) to cover the cost of the educational tools needed to support the pilot program at the seven child care centers.

While only a pilot program currently, the goal is to expand it to allow all children in Broome County to have the opportunity to participate, providing them with a greater opportunity to be successful in their lives.

Your donation to United Way supports many innovative programs such as Partners for Learning. Since United Way keeps its costs low, more than 85 cents of every dollar goes to programs that serve area residents.



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