Notes from the Director

Families and Schools

Anyway you look at it, research demonstrates that family factors are among the most robust predictors of children’s success in school. Parental educational levels, family commitment to children’s educational goals, active family participation in school activities, family leadership in child-specific educational plans, minimal family conflict, family literacy, family residential stability, caregiver work commitments, and consistency in family relationships are among the factors that are known to be associated with child developmental outcomes. Clearly, supporting families is a key to student success.

The process is interactive. That is, strong schools help to strengthen families. And strong families help to strengthen schools. Together they promote child well-being. Numerous efforts are underway throughout the U.S. to enhance the relationships between families and schools starting at the time of the child’s birth and continuing through graduation. The Institute for Families in Society has long supported initiatives that enhance the family-school relationship.

For further information:

- Families and Schools Together (FAST): www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast/
- Teachers and Families Working Together: www.teachersandfamilies.com/
- Toyota Families in Schools Program: www.famlit.org/ProgramsandInitiatives/SchoolFocusedInitiatives/
- The Rural School and Community Trust: www.ruraledu.org/
- S.C. Dept. of Education website – Parents Information: www.myscschools.com/tracks/parents/
**Spring 2005**

**Publications:**

**Presentations:**


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**Events**

**World TB Day, March 24th**

March 24, 2005 is World TB Day. TB is a disease that has not gone away; it still kills millions of people around the world each year. This 23rd annual recognition is an opportunity for people to learn about tuberculosis (TB). It is also an occasion to honor the people whose efforts are vital to eliminating this disease.

In South Carolina, case rates of TB (TB cases per 100,000 individuals in the population) consistently rank our state among the top 10-12 states annually. Institute researchers Drs. Ana López-De Fede and Muriel Harris are currently working with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to examine the socioeconomic, cultural and political factors that are affecting the prevalence of TB in South Carolina.

World TB Day is a valuable opportunity to educate the public about how TB is spread and how it can be stopped. For more information on TB, please contact the SC Division of TB Control at 803-898-0558 or your local health department.

**Dr. Asher Ben-Arieh speaks on March 30th**

The Institute for Families is Society and the USC College of Social Work are pleased to present Dr. Asher Ben-Arieh, one of the leading international experts on social indicators of child well-being. He will deliver a colloquium presentation, *Where Are the Children? Children’s Role in Measuring and Monitoring their Well-Being*, on Wednesday, March 30, 2005, 3:30pm at the Nursing Building (corner of Pickens/Greene), Rm. 127.

The Institute welcomes all faculty, students and guests to this colloquium. For more information, please contact Renée Gibson at (803) 777-1121 or see the Institute website at http://ifs.sc.edu.

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**Michael Daniel Smith and Alexander Tyler Smith Scholarship**

The Michael Daniel Smith and Alexander Tyler Smith Scholarship is awarded annually by the Institute for Families in Society in memory of the Smith children, who were tragically drowned by their mother, to an undergraduate or graduate student who shows outstanding promise as a helping professional for children and families. It was founded by Atlanta businessman Bob Thomas in response to the events of October 25, 1994; “I felt an overwhelming need to take some positive action towards averting similar disasters in the future,” says Thomas.

In addition to monetary support for tuition, the recipient receives the opportunity to “learn and grow” through involvement in one of the Institute’s many grant-funded projects. The project chosen for this past academic year (2004-2005) was Perceptions of HIV Risk, HIV Testing, and HIV Testing Promotion Strategies among Young Adult Heterosexual African Americans. This is a Center for Disease Control (CDC)-sponsored study conducted in rural Orangeburg, South Carolina. A sister project was also conducted in urban South Philadelphia. Both projects involve focus group interviews with the participation of about 100 youth 18-25 years and individual interviews with service providers.

Shelly-Ann Bowen, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Health Promotion, Education and Behavior, was chosen as the 2004-2005 recipient and has worked under the project’s principle investigator Dr. Muriel Harris. Ms. Bowen’s role on the project has been to support the development of a literature review on the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of HIV/AIDS prevention service providers and participate in the interview process with service providers in the study area. As the project enters the coding and data analysis phase, she also will have the opportunity to assist in that process.

Applications for the 2005-2006 Smith Scholarship and the announcement of the accompanying project will be available on the IFS website by April 1, 2005 at http://ifs.sc.edu. Please share this information with qualified candidates.

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**Highlight**

**Girl Scout Leaders Receive Training on Bullying Prevention.** Institute researcher Dr. Vicki Flerx is providing training on bullying and bullying prevention for troop leaders of the Girl Scout Council of the Congaree Area. In addition she will be working with camp counselors the Congaree Area Girl Scout Camp to implement bullying prevention strategies at summer camp this year.

This work is the result of an effort by the National Girl Scout Council to provide anti-violence education for girl scouts. “It is wonderful to see other youth-serving community organizations join the schools in their effort to reduce bullying among children,” says Dr. Flerx.
BASICSpaces Seeks to Enhance Early Childhood Education From the Ground Up. In January of this year (2005), Institute researcher Dr. Elsbeth Brown received funding from the Mary Black Foundation for an exciting new project in early childhood education. Building Academic Success In Childhood Settings, or BASICSpaces is working closely with Spartanburg County First Steps (SCFS), Spartanburg Technical College (STC) and the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to improve the quality of selected infant and toddler child care environments and increase the competencies, skills and knowledge of the child care providers in Spartanburg County.

Specifically, BASICSpaces is designed to improve the quality of child care spaces struggling with low environmental ratings while strengthening the knowledge and skills of caregivers and families regarding healthy development and supportive environments. BASICSpaces provides expert consultation to enhance child care rooms and provide training related to enhancement strategies. Currently, the project is focusing on eleven infant and toddler rooms in Spartanburg County.

Dr. Brown who, along with co-creator Dr. Linda Hutchinson, has developed this project from proposal to fruition was asked how the project is beginning and how its implementation is different than envisioned in the proposal.

Dr. Brown: The collaboration with other agencies is off to a stronger start than we originally anticipated. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to our effort. SCFS has formed a director’s network, providing ongoing training and support, and STC is working with us to investigate providing college credit for our professional development efforts. The BASICSpaces grant is working mainly with lead teachers to (a) enhance physical environments for infant/toddler aged children, (b) train teachers, and (c) develop training materials for duplication. Because we are working together to make sure that efforts are not duplicated, we are able to share information and allow each point of view to affect the focus.

First Statewide Homelessness Survey Enlightens All. On January 27, 2005, people who work with the homeless and hundreds of volunteers fanned out through communities across the state to locate and document persons experiencing homelessness. On that date, South Carolina conducted its first statewide uniform “count” of homeless persons; both sheltered and unsheltered, over a 12-hour period. This type of organized count has been needed in order to better understand the magnitude and nature of the problem of homelessness in SC.

Since August, an IFS faculty and staff team has worked closely with the state’s homeless coalitions, United Way of the Midlands and state agencies to create a set of survey tools for the effort and to help organize the count day and analysis of survey data.

After the count, tired, cold but gratified volunteers shared stories of their enlightening experiences. Consensus was expressed that any profile of a “typical” homeless person is a myth. Many of the persons they interviewed were rational, educated and had held good jobs, but for a variety of reasons including layoffs, unexpected health expenses, lack of affordable housing, mental illness, domestic violence or other events, they had lost everything.

Because this was the state’s first time conducting such a broad-based count, much was learned that will improve the count in the future. All of the data from the count has not been fully reported and is still being analyzed, but initial figures indicate that at least 2,377 men and women and 378 children under age 18 are living in unsheltered settings across the state. The largest number of homeless persons was documented in Richland, Greenville, Charleston and Horry Counties.

As a public service, IFS developed and contributed the “Surveys of People Experiencing Homelessness” toolkit (consisting of six survey instruments and a training manual) with the hope of reducing homelessness by securing a more accurate understanding of the issue in our state. Final results of the statewide homeless count will be reported in the June issue of the IFS newsletter and more details are available on the Institute website.