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Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2010

Early Head Start center in Gaithersburg expands

Stimulus funding nearly doubles early education programs in upcounty

by Danielle E. Gaines | Staff Writer



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At Discovery Station in Gaithersburg, some students are too young to sit up on their own. Toddlers play with blocks and paint at tables and chairs don't reach their teachers' knees.

The children bouncing around the brightly decorated classrooms are in the Early Head Start program at Family Services, a nonprofit that promotes health and well-being at home and in the community. Early Head Start is a federal program that helps low-income families with children younger than 27 months old gain access to early education and child care. Services are available for free to families that meet income eligibility requirements. The federal government provides 80 percent of the funding and the local providers must raise a 20 percent match.

Family Services raised more than \$10.2 million in revenue in 2009. About one third of the money came from government grants, half of the revenue was from fees for services.

Part of the government funding was \$1.77 million in federal stimulus funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expand Early Head Start in upper Montgomery County. That expansion project nearly doubles the number of children served at programs in Gaithersburg, Derwood and Olney from 75 to 147. At Discovery Station in Gaithersburg, 28 children receive services.

Other families receive weekly in-home visits by Early Head Start workers, said Monica Ortiz, Early Head Start program manager for Family Services.

The center opened in May, but was showcased to the public for the first time last week at a ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Tin Nguyen/The Gazette
 Saru Nithyanandam, director of Early Head Start's Discovery Station Child Development Center, instructs her 2-year-old pupils. (From left) Sandy Kumson, Loren Rivas, Madani Bah, Paco Misniowski and Jess Sackey. The center is expanding its enrollment to 147 low-income children at home as well as the center.



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Sonia Fernandez, a 17-year-old Gaithersburg mother, starting bringing her 9-month-old daughter, Jaslene, to the center in June. Fernandez said the Early Head Start program made it easier for her to go to school while Jaslene is treated to songs, books and painting projects during the day.

"It sets her up for school and for life and helps her interact with the other kids," said Fernandez, a student at Gaithersburg High School.

Teachers at Discovery Station plan developmentally appropriate lessons for newborns to 3 year olds. Activities for infants

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