Dear friends:

We are pleased to share our 2016 annual report with you. It offers insights into our recent accomplishments and future plans. As a division of the UIC Center for Literacy, our mission at FAST Services is to empower and strengthen Head Start families by providing high-quality, research-based learning opportunities. We do this in collaboration with the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, the city’s largest early childcare provider.

FAST offers citywide family engagement programming and referrals to parents and professionals at Head Start and other early childhood education sites. We specialize in adult education and career transition, autism and developmental delays, family services delivery, and parenting education specific to topics of employability, family literacy, financial literacy, and leadership. Among our many accomplishments this year:

• a former Head Start mom was hired in our Adult Education and Career Transition program as an assistant teacher at the FAST location where she strengthened her bi-lingual literacy skills, earned her GED, and served as an AmeriCorps member

• a Head Start dad in one of our Parent Outreach, Dads Reading Daily workshops learned to confidently share a picture book with his daughter right at her preschool and continued to attend special gatherings like “Bring your Dad to School Day” and “Dads and Donuts”

• a family service worker was trained in our Parent Resource program to adapt her communication skills to meet the needs of her site’s parents with low-literacy skills and to connect them to local GED classes using the FAST-Literacy Works Adult Learning Helpline

• a couple in an individualized consultation at one of our RCADD locations received information in Spanish about their child’s recent autism-diagnosis and related IEP and was later assisted with making visual aids to ease his learning transitions.

From December 1, 2015 through November 30, 2016, we worked side-by-side with 3,300+ parents, 300+ youth, and 200+ professionals at eight FAST locations and 200+ early childhood sites. As a literacy-driven organization dedicated to serving Chicago’s under-resourced south, southwest, and west side neighborhoods, we especially developed programming to respond to the learning needs of African-American, Mexican and other Hispanic/Latino families. The report that follows details what we accomplished together.

Sincerely,

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Our Approach

For over 20 years within the Center for Literacy, FAST Services has offered model programs that have proven to be successful in engaging Chicago’s Head Start community. This is largely because we emphasize a dual-generational/family literacy approach, which is based on the premise that parents’ learning outcomes best predict those of their children. In addition to promoting and providing a welcoming environment, this includes:

- addressing parents’ personal goals
- enhancing parents’ abilities to share home-based literacy activities with their children
- providing families with information and resources for upward mobility
- valuing families’ cultural heritage and primary language/s
- viewing families from a strengths-based perspective.

FAST’s approach strengthens the whole family. When parents achieve well-being, get involved in their child’s school, or increase their own language and literacy skills, their children demonstrate higher cognitive abilities and adaptive behaviors, better problem solving skills, and higher rates of graduation.

As such, Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services has commissioned us to partner with their early learning delegate agencies to provide services. We are grateful for the following 37 delegate agencies who represent our 200+ Early Head Start, Head Start, and early learning partner sites. They help make possible what we do.

Partnering Delegate Agencies

- Ada S. McKinley Community Services
- Albany Park Community Center
- Better Boys Foundation
- Carole Robertson Center for Learning
- Catholic Charities
- Centers for New Horizons
- Chicago Child Care Society
- Chicago Commons Association
- Chicago Public Schools
- Chicago Youth Centers
- Chinese American Service League
- Christopher House
- City Colleges of Chicago
- Easter Seals Society of Metropolitan Chicago
- El Hogar del Niño
- El Valor
- Erie Neighborhood House
- Ezzard Charles Nursery Center
- Family Focus

FAST Learning and Support Services

Firman Community Services
Gads Hill Center
Henry Booth House
Howard Area Community Center
It Takes a Village
Judah International
Korean American Community Services
Luther Social Services of Illinois
Mary Crane League
Metropolitan Family Services
New Pisgah
Northwestern University Settlement
Onward Neighborhood House
Salvation Army
SGA Youth and Family Services
Shining Star Youth and Community Services
Trinity United Church of Christ
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago
Partnering with Families

FAST's approach aligns with Head Start’s Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework and its performance standards for Family and Community Engagement Services. The PFCE framework is a guide and planning tool for those involved in delivering and/or receiving comprehensive services for families, and it aims to promote sustained economic and social progress for all stakeholders. Our programming helps parents and professionals develop in key family engagement areas that fulfill the framework’s purpose and FAST’s vision.

Our vision is to break the cycle of poverty and collectively strengthen communities through family learning and support services. As detailed in the PFCE framework, this involves coordinating citywide access to disability services, educational and parent engagement opportunities, and social and other wellness services – especially for families experiencing poverty and trauma. The framework emphasizes that a family’s community has the resources and tools necessary to support family well-being. In this way, there is a mutually-beneficial relationship between the progress of families and communities in which they live.

This intentional collaboration, in which local resources are identified and coordinated by and for families, is referred to as a Family Partnership. Through direct services, coordinated efforts, referral services, and special projects, FAST played a significant role in 2016 in facilitating these relationships and meaningful involvements. Specific accomplishments are highlighted in this report for each of our program areas, in line with FAST’s mission and vision.
484 parents regularly participated in ESL (n=231) and GED (n=253) classes in our Adult Education and Career Transition program, collectively setting and meeting over 3,000 academic goals. 62% of the program’s annual satisfaction survey respondents reported being able to apply what they learned in class to help their community and family members. These Family Partnership gains were directly facilitated by program staff at FAST’s three hub locations in Back of the Yards, Bronzeville, and Garfield Park, and at four satellite sites in the surrounding neighborhoods of Chicago.

For Head Start parents outside of our direct-service scope, our program partnered with Literacy Works in order to launch a citywide Adult Learning Helpline (312-998-READ). The Helpline serves parents and professionals seeking referrals to free adult education classes or tutoring. This provides an important resource for those seeking to advance their learning goals.

Our program’s approach is successful in part because our team members work one-on-one with parents to create individualized education plans. When parents achieve their goals within the FAST program, FAST staff members work with partners to support parents’ transitions to their next phase in their lives. The Adult Education and Career Transition program sets a standard for adult education services in Chicago and plans to transfer this success into building, expanding, and strengthening its employment-related services next year.

3,355 educational goals met by parents
Program Highlights

484 adult learners attended ESL and GED classes

3,355 academic goals were met by adult learners

33,672 instructional hours were provided

76% of adult learners demonstrated a scale-score gain on standardized assessments

43 adult learners completed their GED

85% of adult learners reported a high level of satisfaction with the program
Parent Outreach

Over 2,000 parents attended Parent Outreach workshops at 76 different Chicago Head Start sites last year. The program's employment-readiness, family literacy, and financial literacy workshops were designed to improve parents' capacities to grow as lifelong educators and promote well-being for their families. All lessons included discussions of parents' experiences, an interactive format, recommendations for expansion activities to use at home, and skill-improvement questionnaires. Many lessons included free take-home books, exercises, and materials. In these ways, Parent Outreach successfully put practical learning tools into parents' hands.

An average of 97% of parents reported improving their ability to engage in the everyday learning of their children, strengthen their relationships with their children around learning, and/or pursue their own learning goals after attending workshops. Workshop topics include: Conflict Resolution at Work, Creating Home Literacy Centers, and Envelope Budgeting. Importantly, the Parent Outreach program provided leadership training for the Chicago Citywide Parent Policy Council, supporting the members' abilities to facilitate governance activities at their sites. They were also particularly successful with reaching Head Start fathers through innovative programming and conversation between dads. The Parent Outreach team worked to comprehensively support families by providing the skills-training parents need to succeed.

1,996 parents reported improving skills
Program Highlights

- 76 Head Start sites received employability, family, and financial literacy workshops
- 2,242 total parents served
- 4,182 total workshop attendees
- 242 fathers served through father-focused events
- 87% of parents demonstrated gains on post workshop assessments
- 97% of parents reported learning something new as a result of workshop attendance
- 99% of parents reported workshops met their expectations
- 533 parents and children attended Money Bonanza events as a part of Money Smart week
Parent Resource

After launching in 2016, the Parent Resource program helped to strengthen family service delivery for 87 sites across Chicago by facilitating trainings, site-based consultations, and peer support groups, or “learning circles,” for Head Start professionals. 92% (202 of 220) of family service workers reported increasing their abilities to engage parents in the family-partnership process or enhance their communities of practice as a result of their participation. The Parent Resource team continually helped the family service workers to consider their outcomes in relation to Head Start’s PFCE Framework.

The program’s trainings were designed to maximize family service workers’ abilities to build relationships with parents, help them set and meet goals, and make referrals, especially as related to educational and volunteering opportunities. Nearly 50% (95 of 220) of family service workers also participated in the program’s learning circles or site-based consultations. Learning circles, each consisting of up to eight family service workers and two program facilitators met monthly for six months, focusing on professional efficacy, support, and wellness. Site-based consultations and in-service sessions often focused on the appropriate documentation of service delivery. Though only in its first year, the demand by family service workers for Parent Resource’s services was high and its programming was well-received.

202 professionals reported improving skills
Program Highlights

Launched in January 2016

220 Family Service Workers and other professionals served

37 Family Service Workers participated in peer-support group or “learning circles”

58 individualized site consultations provided

347 total workshop participants

5 intensive in-service trainings developed and provided in response Head Start sites’ needs

92% of participants reported an increase in skills and knowledge
Resource Center for Autism & Developmental Delays

Head Start sites and delegate agencies often have limited resources available to address the needs of children with autism and other developmental delays. The Resource Center for Autism and Developmental Delays (RCADD) helped to provide this support by offering individualized consulting and referrals, resources, and trainings for Head Start programs.

RCADD specialists provided monthly trainings for parents and Head Start professionals. Trainings focused on advocating for children with special needs, using and developing visual supports and learning aids, and understanding autism and other developmental delays. RCADD staff members also managed walk-in services in two Chicago community centers: the King Center on the south side and the Garfield Park Center on the west side. This included lending libraries where adapted children's books, games and toys, DVD's, informational handouts, and parenting books were available at no cost to the Head Start community. Importantly, equipment and materials for creating visual and other learning aids for use in homes, classrooms, and communities were also made available.

Aligned with the PFCE framework, RCADD’s efforts helped parents and professionals to better understand autism and other developmental delays, identify appropriate and research-based practices, foster meaningful relationships with each other, and support the development of nurturing relationships in order to benefit children. In part, RCADD accomplished and expanded these successes with the support of community partners such as The Autism Project of Illinois.

863 individualized consultations provided
Program Highlights

641 unique patrons
863 individualized consultations
405 training participants
3,160 outreach contacts
1,994 resource room visits

88% of training participants demonstrated increased knowledge on pre/post surveys

Integrated the annual ADORE conference into the city’s annual parent conference, hosting workshops specific to caregivers of children with special needs
Youth Outreach

During the summer months, Youth Outreach placed 336 teens in partnering sites to provide literacy and restorative justice programming for young children. Teens were recruited for these programs through Head Start families. Many of them were former Head Start students themselves and/or currently have a sibling enrolled in Head Start in Chicago.

In addition to job-placement and on-going employability and leadership training, teens attended weekly meetings with assigned team leaders to receive additional life-skills training. These meetings provided a forum for teens to interact with peers, share their on-the-job experiences, and obtain feedback and support from peers and staff alike.

Teens in Head Start families in Chicago have a high unemployment rate. This can lead to adverse outcomes both for the teens and their families especially when school is not in session. Teens learn valuable leadership and employability skills through their participation in these programs. Young children benefit from increased literacy activities and families are comprehensively supported.

60 sites served by teen literacy coaches
Program Highlights

60 Head Start sites served

36 wards served

300 teens employed as Teen Literacy Coaches

36 teens employed as Peace Ambassadors

Over 3,500 estimated hours of supplemental literacy instruction provided to Head Start children

91% of teens rated satisfactory or better on performance evaluations

98% of teens reported improving their leadership skills as a result of program participation

100% of sites indicated a willingness to partner with Youth Outreach in the future
Parents served in 51 zip codes

Based on tracking of zip codes from home addresses, FAST determined that parents from 51 of 58 of Chicago’s neighborhoods were served by our programs this year. At least 100 parents were served in each of 24 of the 51 areas, and over 200 parents were consistently served in the highest need areas of the south, southwest, and west sides of Chicago. FAST ensured that learning and support opportunities were targeted to families in neighborhoods where resources have been historically difficult to come by. Our hub sites are located in the Back of the Yards, Bronzeville, and Garfield Park neighborhoods, enabling us to meet and serve low-income parents in the communities where they reside and where they are nearer to the Head Start sites they use.

The lowest numbers of parents served were clustered on the north side of the city, where we do not have hub or satellite direct-service locations. We did, however, provide Parent Outreach workshops to north side Head Start sites and we viewed potential locations for opening an RCADD site on the north side of the city.
FAST supported the Family and Community Partnership efforts of Head Start by providing parents with learning and support services in 78% (39 of 50) Chicago wards. In these cases, FAST staff members traveled to the Head Start sites to provide parents with employment-readiness, family literacy, and financial literacy workshops. Additionally, they provided mini-conferences and special events like Dads Reading Daily, Money Smart Week, and Money Bonanza. They also traveled to sites to provide professionals with individualized consultations and in-service trainings related to family service delivery. Again, we successfully served sites across the city, focusing on the highest needs areas of the south, southwest, and west sides.

HS/EHS Sites Served by Ward

- No sites
- One to three sites
- Four or more sites

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Community Connections

Volunteer and leadership opportunities for parents and community members are an important part of FAST. These opportunities help to dynamically link resources within the University and our service locations, as well as create advancement pathways for Head Start parents and their extended families.

AmeriCorps Project MORE, a partnership with the Corporation for National & Community Service, is one of our key volunteer programs. Each year it supports 20+ AmeriCorps National Service Members, many of whom are recruited from the communities we serve. Members are placed at FAST locations to support parent engagement activities that promote economic opportunity for Head Start parents and, when relevant, to share their own success stories. Activities include: tutoring, facilitating workshops, providing resources, and coordinating service projects for communities in need. In this way, families and communities grow stronger in culturally, linguistically, and socially relevant ways.

FAST Services also partners with Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) to support citywide Head Start enrollment efforts and offer avenues for leadership training and on-going support of parent advocacy efforts. COFI recruits and trains Head Start parents as Parent Ambassadors, who conduct door-knocking campaigns across Chicago to bring the Head Start message directly to prospective families’ doorsteps and to distribute information at citywide neighborhood events. They also work in partnership with FAST’s Adult Education and Career Transition program to take parents through the developmental stages that eventually culminate in their own community organizing efforts.

Moving forward, in addition to continuing to foster such relationships with partners, FAST will also seek ways to ensure that parents’ voices and perspectives are consistently and systematically integrated into programming decisions. This will be a part of FAST’s on-going quality improvement planning and development process.
The Center for Literacy at 25 years

FAST Services is proud to be part of the UIC Center for Literacy, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. Within the university's College of Education, the Center provides leadership locally, nationally, and internationally through research, policy work, evaluation studies and advocacy. We work with children and families to ensure lifelong learning and upward-mobility through improved literacy and family engagement.

The Center understands that a community is not just the sum of its struggles but also the hope of its future. We believe strongly in maintaining long-term partnerships and empowering the communities we serve. In fact, many one-time program participants have gone on to serve and/or become employed full-time with us. We are especially proud of this accomplishment.

Though we have made significant efforts in the fight to improve the lives of the families, communities, and other audiences we serve, we see the past 25 years as just the beginning and look forward to continued progress in the future. Please visit our website at: https://cfl.uic.edu to learn about supporting our efforts!

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Appendices available by following this link or the QR code below:

Appendices include:
- Quarterly reports
- Reporting data
- Sample forms
- Survey results
- Newsletters
- Other pertinent documents
A video highlighting the impact of FAST services is available at: