

Reporting Period: 08/19/2013 - 06/07/2014

Program Description

Hispanic Unity of Florida's (HUF) Unity 4Kids (U4K) Preschool is a licensed, certified early childhood education center. It prepares low-income children from immigrant families to be lifelong learners, providing them with the tools to be ready to learn upon entering school. It also creates and sustains accessible, effective childcare for low-income families. Through U4K, more than 20 children gain literacy, receptive and expressive language skills every year necessary for academic success. It also expands their general knowledge, vocabulary and comprehension skills through rich language experiences at school and at home. Additionally, more than 30 parents are coached to become active partners in their child's education by engaging in literacy activities, and empowering those parents to be their child's first teachers. Furthermore, all of these families benefit from this access to affordable childcare.

Program Outcomes and Accomplishments

During the 2013-14 School Year, U4K served 28 families which included 28 children and 51 parents. U4K was successful in operating its four components: (1) Family Literacy Events; (2) Parent Education Sessions; (3) Lending Library; and (4) Parent/Teacher Conferences. The goals of the program were accomplished. The following is a brief synopsis of the events that took place during this school year:

Family Literacy Events

U4K held six Family Events this school year. These events demonstrated how reading can expand a family's horizons. Also, it provided access to books for those with limited access. During each Family Literacy Event, parents and children had the opportunity to share activities that helped to build early literacy skills, as well as creating bonding experiences between parents and children. Researches demonstrate that a child's ability to read and write begins to develop long before entering Kindergarten. Infancy through age eight is the most important time in a child's early literacy development. Then is when they learn and develop the skills needed to be successful in school and later in life. Research also shows that children arriving at kindergarten with the following early literacy skills are more likely to be successful in learning to read and write:

- Vocabulary Development -- Knowing the names of things
- Narrative Skills -- Being able to describe things, events, and tell stories
- Letter Knowledge -- Understanding that each letter is unique and has a name and sound

- Print Awareness -- Experience with different forms of print; knowledge of how to handle books and how to follow words across a page
- Print Motivation -- Interest in and enjoyment from books
- Phonological Awareness -- Ability to hear and play with the small sounds that make up words

U4K Family Literacy Events had a participation of 82% (23 out of 28) of families were served this school year (Target 70%). All the Language-building activities provided in each event, helped children to build the skills needed to become better readers.

Parent Education Sessions

Parents scheduled quarterly meetings with the Preschool Director to receive coaching and information related to their children's behavior and academic development. The Preschool Director provided parenting booklets and individual coaching sessions to 100% (28 out of 28) of the families.

Recently, in May 2014, U4K, in collaboration with The Children Reading Foundation, held a Parenting Class Session on the Hispanic Unity premises. As a result, 80% of the parents (16 out of 20) had successful participation in the Parenting Classes (Target 70%). The event was divided into two sessions. First, the parents attended to the Parenting session. Then the children participated with their parents in the parent and child together session. Parents learned different kinds of strategies of how to read to their children, how to motivate their children to read and how to make the time together meaningful. Parents and children enjoyed interactive activities and a delicious dinner sponsored by the Reading Foundation of Broward County.

As result of the program's high parental involvement, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) held a Fitness Fundraising Event. This event raised \$377. Also, The PTA decided to have an I-PAD Raffle. This fundraising effort raised \$2,505. The cost of the I-PAD was \$539.10, leaving a total gain of \$2,342.90. These funds will be used to pay for Summer Camp activities that are not currently covered by grants. The PTA is also helping U4K staff by sharing with the rest of U4K parents the importance of the parental involvement. They are building a community among parents and encouraging them to become advocates for their children.

Lending Library

U4K Lending Library is comprised of 250 books (180 in English and 70 in Spanish). Parents stopped by the office every other day to pick up new books from The Lending Library. Children learned to love the sound of language before they even noticed the existence of printed words on a page. Reading books aloud to children stimulates their

imagination and expands their understanding of the world. It helps them develop language and listening skills and prepares them to understand the written word. When the rhythm and melody of language become a part of a child's life, learning to read will be as natural as learning to walk and talk. Reading at school and at home will help children to identify sounds and letters. They demonstrate emergent writing skills, such as printing from left-to-right, distinguishing between uppercase and lowercase letters, and writing their own names. U4K Lending Library provided an activity card with each book. The activity card served as guide that helped parents on what to do with each book. During this school year, a group of volunteers helped to create these activity cards for all of the books that had been donated.

U4K Staff used motivational strategies to promote reading habits at home. Some of the strategies included one-on-one coaching session with parents, and incentives such as educational toys and gift cards. A bulletin board was created to monitor the number of books that each family read each month. Top readers were posted on the bulletin board to motivate and encourage families to read with their children daily. By the end of this school year, 75% (21 out of 28) of the parents were reading to their children 5 times per week.

Parent Teacher Conferences

Parents successfully participated in the Parent Teacher Conferences offered during this school year and 100% (28 out of 28) of the parents attended. During each conference, families shared their children's performances at school. Also, they reviewed the results of the assessments with U4K staff and discussed the action plan to help each child in areas of development. These Conferences made parents realize their role in their children's education. U4K made a total of 2 referrals to The Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System (FDLRS) and Parenting Coaching Program of Family Central. All of these referrals were made as children were showing the need for professional and individual support by the results of the assessments. Also, one of the students started receiving speech and occupational therapies with KID SPOT in Hollywood, FL. Each organization was able to address the needs of the children referred by U4K Program. They started working on a weekly therapy session at their facilities, at home and at school. U4K assisted several families succeed by the end of school years 2012-2014.

Additional Program Accomplishments during the 2012-13 School Year

By the end of the school year, 93% (26 out of 28) of the children demonstrated gains in communication, personal-social problem solving, and fine and gross motor skills as determined through by The Ages and Stages Assessment Tools (ASAT). The students who did not demonstrate gains (2 out of 28, 7%) participated in the program for 3 months or less. The ASAT measured communication, problem solving, social/personal, fine and

gross motor skills areas of children development. Also, the Assessment involved parents in the evaluation process. As part of the assessment, parents took home a set of questions about their child's communications, fine and gross motor skills, family medical history and behaviors at home. Parent responses were incorporated with teacher observations to determine each child's progress and gains in each developmental area. Program staff facilitated ongoing experiential activities rich in language to reinforce each area of development such as nursery rhymes. These nursery rhymes activities make learning math, reading and science skills fun for preschoolers. Children loved practicing their nursery rhymes such as "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary", "Mary Had a Little Lamb", "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and other familiar rhymes. Then the children created crafts to go along with the classic rhymes and chants. When children are creating these related crafts, not only reinforces hand-eye coordination, but it lets the child use his or her imagination and creative expression. The finished product raises a child's self-esteem and gives him or her feeling of accomplishment. Children learned number words, new vocabulary, counting and other skills that are crucial to their skills development.

Additionally, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) students received their VPK Pre and Post Assessments and 100% (11 out of 11) of the children demonstrated gains in the Phonological Awareness, Print Knowledge, Oral Language/Vocabulary and Math areas.

Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) Program

In August 2013, U4K was approved for the fourth year as a VPK provider. As a VPK provider, U4K was able to receive funding from the state for each 4 year old child enrolled in the preschool. VPK funds are a revenue source for the program that generates approximately \$25,000 per year.

Unity 4 Kids-VPK Graduation Ceremony

On June 7th, 2014, 11 of our preschoolers participated in our fourth Graduation class. The children, who have spent, in some cases two years with us, have accomplished the following:

- Created a caring community of learners: Children learned respect for others, respect for shared space, being a part of a group, social interaction and problem solving, values such as empathy, friendship and responsibility. These were achieved through: classroom job responsibilities, teacher role modeling, group and individual classroom activities.
- Language Development: Children increased their vocabulary and acquired phonological awareness; oral language and print knowledge which allow them to recognize letter as well of the sounds of the letters and have begun to recognize

words. They developed a love of reading books with their parents and by themselves. These were achieved through: stories, circle time activities, free play, encouragement and language use from teachers, singing songs, writing center activities, oral presentations of drawings/stories, reciting children's rhymes and finger plays, acting out stories and performing puppet shows, and Family Literacy Events.

- Discovery: Children asked questions, they were exploring the world and using all five senses. These were achieved through: art, sensory bins, block play, outdoor play, sand box, and cooking and science activities.
- Confidence and Positive Self-Esteem: Children experienced the sense of worth, sense of belonging, making choices and decisions, sense of independence and control in projects (encouragement of open-handed projects that are self-designed and constructed). These were achieved through: specific words of recognition from teachers, choice of activities during free play, sharing thoughts and ideas at circle time, actively participating in singing and dance classes, independent use of art and building type materials.
- Large and Small Motor Development: Children were exercising muscles in legs, arm, hands and back. These were achieved through: art/drawing tables, play dough, outdoor play, dance class, large motor skill equipment, finger plays at circle time, cooking and science activities
- Cognitive/Academic Development: Children recognized letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case letters), the sounds of the letters for pre-reading skills development, their own name, numerals 1 through 100, counting by 1's, 5's and 10's, increase in counting, sorting, matching, shapes, colors and patterns, storytelling and drawing, introduction to the idea of self-portraits, ability to write first and last name and also small words, ability to draw stick figures to represent people. These were achieved through: circle time, small and large group activities including, games, songs, rhymes, felt board activities, art, calendar activities, thematic books, etc.
- Self-Help Skills: Children were able to pick up their own coats and other articles of clothing. These were achieved through: encouragement and assistance from teachers, modeling peers who are skilled at it, dress up in dramatic area, practice and praise, parental support at home.

- Personal Awareness: Children learned their first and last names, how old he/she was, their birth dates, addresses and phone numbers. These were achieved through peer and teacher interactions and conversations and parental support at home.

Licensing

During the School year 2013-14, Child Care Licensing, The Fire Department and The Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department of the new Permitting, Licensing and Consumer Protection Division of Broward County, executed their quarterly and annual Site Visits. U4K met all of the expectations according with each Site Visit Report. Each Inspection's Reports of each organization was designated as In Compliance. The record keeping files were well maintained. The child/teacher ratio and the arrangements of the mats had appropriate measurements during nap-time. Fire Inspections, were reviewed along with the Fire Drill, lock down and tornado drill records. The temperatures in the refrigerator and in the food warmer were set appropriately. The hot water in the adult bathroom was also a correct temperature. These inspections determine the program's compliance with State and County Safety Regulations and allow the program to annually renew its license.

Unity 4Kids Distinctiveness:

- Unity 4Kids Preschool Program is a Broward County Quality Rating and Improvement System from the Early Learning Coalition and Child Care Licensing 5-Star School. U4K offers the highest standards on Learning Environment, Professional Qualifications, Ratio-Group Sizes, Curriculum, Family Engagement and Program Administration.
- U4K Preschool is a Family Central Positive Behavioral Support Program (PBS) certified School. As PBS Provider, the school is equipped to understand children's emotion; and implement problem-solving strategies to address challenging behavior in children. Also, Unity 4Kids has served as a model for other preschools in the County, for Family Central and Children Services Council (CSC) as a role model for The Children Trust of Miami Dade and for other coaches who are starting working in the PBS Program.
- U4K Preschool Program provides unique benefits to families. In addition to all of the services provided by U4K in the academic and parental involvement areas, program participants have easy access to a variety of services as Hispanic Unity member such as:
 - ✓ English and Citizenship classes
 - ✓ Access to public benefits and primary health care
 - ✓ Financial Literacy classes and Free Tax preparation
 - ✓ Career Coaches
 - ✓ Legal assistance (Foreclosure, Basic legal aid, Immigration assistance)

The most significant challenge during this school year is the lack of funding which would allow the continuation of providing scholarships to many families in need of an affordable and quality early childhood educational program. Also, the lack of funding makes it difficult for U4K to expand into a bigger location in order to provide our services to many other families of the community in need. Currently, there are 40 families in the waiting list.

Partnerships

U4K received an extraordinary collaboration from Family Central. U4K participated in the Business & Leadership series chaired by Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz. This event was sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank and Florida Power and Light, in partnership with Family Central at Nova Southeastern University. The Preschool Director learned the importance of having a business plan in the organization and the importance of reviewing that business plan on a regular basis. The series started in January, 2014 and ended by a Graduation Ceremony on May 31, 2014, in the Broward Convention Center. The Preschool Director created a U4K Business Plan model in order to be used for the program's expansion.

Also, The Children Reading Foundation facilitated Parenting workshops and Family Literacy Event. Parents learned different kind of strategies of how to read to their children, how to motivate their children to read and how to make the time together meaningful. Parents and children enjoyed interactive activities and a delicious dinner sponsored by the Reading Foundation of Broward County.

Furthermore, the program partnered with the Fire Department of Broward County in Hollywood, FL, Home Depot, Sunshine Pediatrics Dentistry and other partners who are committed to the mission of our organization and are generously giving their time at U4K Summer Camp. Also, The B'nai Aviv Kehilla Club donated their time to read to each U4K family at the October 2013 Family Event. During these Family Event's activities, the children are always exposed to a literacy-enriched environment which allowed them to increase their vocabulary.

Success Story

Laura is a very cheerful 5 year old girl. Her mother works in a travel agency and her father works in a restaurant. Both of her parents are from Colombia. When Laura began in U4K two years ago, Laura cried every day because she missed her parents. Laura spoke only Spanish. Her parents talk to her in Spanish only. U4K teachers started helping her to integrate and be part of all classroom activities. Just after a couple of weeks, Laura

began to participate in the activities. She started to share with her new friends, saying her new English words and stopped crying.

Laura's parents were part of the PTA and participated in all of the Family Events, parent workshops. They have also helped raise funds for summer Camp activities. Laura's parents were referred by HUF to an organization to process their residence. They also processed their tax forms at Hispanic Unity. Laura is the only child of her home. Her parents are very involved in the education of their daughter.

Laura just graduated from U4K-VPK class. She was the student selected to read in front of the whole audience in the Graduation Ceremony. Laura can read, write her name, add, draw, rhyme and knows some compound words. Laura learned new vocabulary words during her tenure in U4K. She took books weekly from the U4K Lending Library. She is ready for her new successful path that awaits her in elementary school. Laura's parents are proud and happy for the achievements of their daughter. They say they are witnesses of the progress her daughter accomplished during her time in the U4K Program. They are very grateful for having the opportunity to have her daughter in such a high quality early childhood program and for all the support received from Hispanic Unity.

