



SC Child Care

ABC Special Needs Program Provides Opportunities for Children with Differing Needs

In a typical child care center, in a cheery room adorned with cutouts of brightly colored autumn leaves, a group of four-year-olds work intently on watercolor paintings. A little girl in a wheelchair sits at the end of the table using an enlarged paintbrush that makes it easier for her to grip. She proudly adds the finishing touches to her Halloween pumpkin as her classmates do the same.

While there is nothing remarkable about such a scene, ten years ago, it may not have been observed in child care settings throughout South Carolina. Yet since 1994, a federally funded grant has opened up opportunities for children with different needs and abilities and developmental delays who need child care services. The Advocates for Better Care (ABC) Special Needs Program is managed by the Center for Disability Resources at the University of South Carolina, School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics. Through the ABC Child Care Voucher Program, vouchers are provided to low income families to finance day care services for children with special needs, birth through 18 years of age. Families must meet certain eligibility requirements and a small co-payment is required on their part. Contact your local SC Department of Social Services office for more information on the vouchers.

“Our philosophy is that ALL children participate to the maximum possible,” said Dr. Gay Clement-Atkinson, Program Director for the ABC Special Needs Program. It often takes only a simple modification for a child with a different need to participate in an activity. *“In today’s world, you can buy a lot of expensive equipment and materials, but there really is no need. We do an awful lot of make it ourselves, modify it ourselves, enlarge it ourselves,”* said Clement-Atkinson.

The ABC staff has learned that a lack of information is usually the biggest stumbling block with day care center personnel. People have fear and uncertainty about things that are unknown to them. There are a lot of myths about disabilities. An integral part of the ABC Special Needs Program involves preparing child care educators to work with children with differing needs and abilities and addressing their concerns

upfront. When a new child with a differing need will be attending a child care center, an ABC staff member visits the center beforehand. They talk to the child’s teacher, parents, and the director, look at the curriculum, and provide a pre-service training for the staff. A follow-up visit is provided within two weeks of acceptance by the center and technical assistance visits are offered as needed, i.e., curriculum adjustments, age-appropriate activities, modification of equipment and toys, etc.

Children at child care centers are also included in the education process. *“Many times children might be uncomfortable or confused about or with the child with different needs and may not want to include that child. We really work on social inclusion so that the newcomer is accepted by everyone,”* states Sherry Frazier, M.R.C., ABC Special Needs Program Medical Consultant.



The ABC Special Needs Program accepts referrals for pre- and in-service training, consultations, and technical assistance from child care providers, parents, educators, faith communities, service providers, and other state agencies and community programs. Onsite visits are provided at no cost for consultation related to a specific child with different needs; technical assistance related to the material, equipment, or site for serving a child with different needs; or training for the staff related to the different abilities of the child.

Model Site Program

In addition to providing onsite visits in response to referrals, the ABC Special Needs Program has instituted a Model Program. This five-year Model Program (initiated in 2005) selects four child care centers each year from rural, urban, faith-based and home centers statewide, to serve as models for other centers to visit.

Each of the four original sites was agreeable to serving as a model for other centers that currently serve or willing to serve children with differing needs and abilities. These centers consented to work with the Program for one year to serve as observation/consultation sites for other child care providers, lab/field placement sites for students studying child care in the technical college system, and through collaboration; they worked with the ABC Special Needs staff in providing focused, interactive, quality inclusive care for **ALL** children in their programs. The ABC Special Needs Program staff provided technical assistance (TA), consultation, and/or training and materials to the four model sites in the areas of:

- Program Administration
- Guidance
- Growth & Development
- Curriculum
- Health & Safety
- Special Needs
- Professional Development
- Observation
- And any other areas identified by providers
- Behavior
- ASQ/Portfolio
- Inclusion
- Cerebral Palsy
- Seizures
- After School Activities
- Asthma
- Nutrition

All trainings conducted by the ABC Special Needs Program are approved through the Center for Child Care Career Development (CCCCD). The ABC Special Needs Program offers training in disability and disability-related issues (for a list of trainings, see the ABC Special Needs Program Training/Classes List).

In addition, model sites worked on:

- building/developing inclusive playground areas;
- training staff on problem-solving parent/professional issues with various behavior concerns;
- adapting assistive devices for the child to use during time spent at day care;
- identifying and supporting parents through utilization of observation tools; and
- collaborating with other centers through orientation on their center practices.

Each site identified areas where the ABC Special Needs Program assisted in helping in maintenance or improvement to either their program goals or operations.

We are very proud and appreciative of our Model Program's commitment to excellence and dedication to the care and education of young children in inclusive settings in South Carolina. Each site has agreed to remain a model for the ABC Special Needs Program to demonstrate and



orient other programs in their quest of achieving quality, inclusive care for children. Please contact the center you would like to visit and set up an appointment. At the conclusion of this five-year program, there will be 20 child care centers, geographically located throughout the state, serving as models to others within the state. The ABC Special Needs Program is continually working to improving the quality of care for children with differing needs.

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