

AUSTIN *Symposium* EARLY CHILDHOOD

OCTOBER 12, 2013



Austin Coming Together

AUSTIN WEEKLY *news* 

Large, enthused audience turns out for first Early Childhood Symposium

By Loretta A. Ragsdell

More than 130 childcare providers, caregivers, social service professionals, and educators came together on Oct. 12 at Bethel New Life's Amberg Hall, 1140 N. Lamon, for the first annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium.

The symposium was held by the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative, an initiative of Austin Coming Together (ACT), a community-based not-for-profit. The free half-day event featured breakfast, a panel discussion, four workshops, lunch, and an awards ceremony.

The symposium's theme was Social and Emotional Development with a focus on how people can come together to support the social and emotional needs of young children in Austin.

Several vendors including the American Heart Association, SEIU Healthcare Fund, Community Organization and Family Issues (COFI), and The Chicago Children's Museum were on hand disseminating healthful information.

"The symposium's goal was to bring people together, anyone who is an advocate for or works with young children, birth to age eight and their families," said Andrew Born, ACT's director of community planning.

"We wanted to bring them together to provide them with training and some skills building opportunities, giving them information on how to be a better advocate for young children and their families, and coming together to raise awareness on the importance of early childhood and development," he said.

ACT was organized to help Austin community partners develop shared leadership in four areas: early childhood development, youth development, workforce development, and the built environment, which includes planning, housing and economic development.

State Representatives LaShawn Ford and Camille Lilly partnered with ACT to present the symposium. Lilly said, "Early childhood development is the most important time in a child's life, and ultimately that child is going to be a part of our life and our work force, so this kind

of training is important."

Ford said, "It's clearly the mission we should be undertaking. Everyone talks about empowering parents, but this is what this is all about, empowering parents to meet the needs of our young people,"

The representatives were also there to present the prestigious awards to five early childhood professionals and advocates nominated by their peers and coworkers: Gloria Canada, Margaret Johnson, Blanco Trujillo, Barbara McPherson-Adams, and Gloria Harris.

Harris, a grandmother of 21, many of whom now attend Austin schools, said all 11 of her children went to early learning programs.

"I am passionate about early childhood education because I feel every child deserves a good education," Harris said. "Because without an education, there is no success," she added.

In accepting her award, McPherson-Adams said, "The other day I was thinking about whether or not I have been living my life, but now I have this, and I know that I have," she added holding up her diamond clear award.

All four workshops were well attended by enthusiastic and engaged participants. Presenter of the "Maximizing Academic Growth with Social and Emotional Learning Workshop," Dr. Durriyyah Kemp said, "It's been remarkable, I am very very happy, especially with this being the

first one. I think the turnout is great. I think the enthusiasm is great. The level of engagement and participation in my workshop was absolutely wonderful."

Annie Robinson, an eager participant said it was an invaluable experience and that, "this event connected me with resources for (understanding) social emotional skills of children on every level. It also connected me with former classmates and co-workers in the educational field. I'm able to take it back to my community to make sure I do my part to educate our children."

The Monday before the symposium, registration closed with 118 pre-registered and others wait-listed. Of the pre-registrants, 89 showed and others from the wait list and walk-ins were able to attend.

Those who attended were glad to be there.

Sidney Arnold, a home day care owner with his wife Faith said he learned how to focus on the business and educational side of child development. "I learned the importance of using the social emotional development skills of the child which will make me a better child care provider," he said. ACT, now three years old, represents about 30 non-profit organizations and is funded by multiple sources including corporate grants and the annual dues of its membership agencies.

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OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2013	
OCT 30 Wed	Manufacturing Orientation Oct 30 @ 9:00 am - 12:00 pm
	La Follette Park Farmer's Market Oct 30 @ 2:00 pm - 7:00 pm
	Halloween Festival @ 15th St Oct 30 @ 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm
OCT 31 Thu	ACT Check-in Meeting Oct 31 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am
	Zumba Classes @ Austin Community Center Oct 31 @ 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm
NOV 2 Sat	Zumba Class @ Austin Community Center Nov 2 @ 10:00 am - 11:00 am
NOV 4 Mon	Zumba Classes @ Austin Community Center Nov 4 @ 10:00 am - 11:00 am
NOV 5 Tue	Workshop Series - Keys to Success Nov 5 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
	Chicago Police Department Briefing Nov 5 @ 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm



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Left: Jumpstart Volunteers from Dominican University



Right: Tia Ford, Reverend Reginald Bachus, Darnell Shields III



The AEC Symposium planning team Ruth Kimble, Dawn Ferencak, Andrew Born, Darnell Shields, Faith Arnold, Alicia Plomin (not shown)

Life-long advocate Gloria Harris earns Austin Coming Together Early Childhood Symposium Honor

By Loretta A. Ragsdell



Gloria Harris

Gloria D. Harris, a life-long Austin resident, received an award for her community activism and childhood educational advocacy during Austin Coming Together's Early Childhood Symposium on Oct. 12.

Harris, describes herself as a longtime advocate of the pursuit of education as the path for changing your life. As a mother of 11 children, Harris proudly states that all of her children went through Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Now, as a grandmother of 21, she boasts that many of her grandchildren are attending CPS, and that most started in early learning programs.

Since 2003, Harris has worked as an educational ambassador with COFI (Community Organizing and Family

Issues) and POWER-PAC (Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew -- Policy Action Council). As an educational ambassador, between June and October, Harris goes door-to-door, block-by-block in the Austin, Lawndale, and West Garfield Park communities talking to parents about the importance of getting their children involved in early learning programs.

"I'm passionate about it (early learning) because when you do your best, then you will learn that other things in life become important," Harris said. "It's so important to have a child in school instead of out of school. If a child doesn't learn anything, then how can he teach his or her children?" Harris said.

Harris said she believes early learning prevents a lot of dropouts. "It prevents a lot of other things too," she said. "When a child attends early learning programs they are more sociable. They get along better with other children, and they move through the system better."

Harris has been very successful in helping to get children involved in the city's Ready to Learn Program, which is a newer version of Head Start. She also serves on the governor's office's Council for Early Learning.

Harris said when COFI and POWER-PAC learned there weren't any parents on the governor's council they got together and elected her to serve. As a council member, Harris said she participates in talks about the budget, "such as places where the money needs to be, and what programs need to be done."

Harris believes her greatest strength

lies in successfully getting everybody involved in early learning. "My greatest success, I believe is in talking to people about early learning and other programs such as Stepping Out of Poverty and Restorative Justice.

She is thrilled at having worked on and successfully won the effort to restore recess for CPS students. Harris said the campuses were closed as the administration felt they were unsafe, and the students were retained in the building all day. The victory came about when the group conducted a study, which determined that keeping the children in from recess wasn't helping them.

Harris said her love for education came from her parents, "My father went to college, but my mother didn't," she said, but they always stressed the importance of getting an education in order to improve your life. Along with her now deceased husband, Harris instilled the importance of getting an education in her children by keeping a lot of books around the house and encouraging them to read.

Harris said that when she talks directly to parents she tells them the importance of getting their children in and keeping them in school.

"I'd say keep them in school, but don't just send them. Make sure to know what they are doing. Stay on them to do their homework. Get involved with the schools and find out what they are doing in the school," Harris said. "Sometimes the kids are messing up because no one is watching them," she said.

After more than 30 years of being an educational advocate for children, Harris is not slowing down.

"With God's will, I want to keep on helping people," she said. "Successful people need to hang around successful people. Success comes with doing. You cannot move anything by sitting down, but you can move a lot of things if you stand up," she said.



With focus on collaboration, Austin Coming Together connects community

By Loretta A. Ragsdell



Reverend Bachus

Just short of it's third anniversary, Austin Coming Together (ACT) through collaborative efforts, seems to be on target for making significant community improvements in addition to enhancing the educational experiences of Austin's students.

Rev. Reginald Bachus, one of ACT's charter members and current executive director said ACT is trying to develop a systemic approach to making improvements in Austin.

"Starting at early childhood, looking at youth development, and workforce development, which includes ex offenders and those who have made bad choices, at the end of the day, we are looking to make some meaningful changes in Austin," Bachus said.

Bachus said the process of organizing ACT took about nine months with several meetings and several discussions to bring everyone together. An outside facilitator was brought in to work with the group to help them understand and work together to decide what they wanted to accomplish as a group.

"Our ultimate goal," Bachus said, "Is to help create a different story for Austin.

The idea for ACT came about as a result of a conversation held with Michael Ivers, a former president of Goodcity NFP. Bachus, a Kansas native, upon arriving in Austin seven years ago, said he observed that "there were a lot of good organizations, and there was a lot of good going on, but everyone was operating in their own little corner, or their own little silo."

"I said to Mike, I don't see any collaboration, any joint effort or working together

going on here. I said, I think together we can make a difference," Bachus added saying that is what got the "ball rolling".

Bachus strongly believes that, "Austin's many good organizations who are working independently and doing great work can get more accomplished for the community by working together."

In the area of early childhood, Bachus and his staff have worked with ACT member organizations and other partners over the past year to form the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative. This group of leaders, chaired by Ruth Kimble of the Austin Childcare Providers' Network, has come together to develop and sustain a high quality, accessible, and seamless system of supports for young children and their families.

The Collaborative represents a multi-sectoral group of leaders, including childcare providers, caregivers, social

workers, health workers, and educators. Last spring they published and disseminated an early childhood resource directory for the community and decided to continue their work together by planning the first annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium.

The Symposium was meant to bring attention to the importance of the social and emotional development of young children. According to Dr. Durriyyah Kemp of the University of Illinois, "social emotional learning refers to the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors."

Kemp added, "The development of social and emotional skills is a lifelong process that begins in infancy and extends throughout adulthood. When

children develop social and emotional competencies at a young age, they are equipped with foundational skills that will aid in their success throughout school, work, and life."

Kemp and other educators, presented workshops to childcare providers, teachers, parents, caregivers, and other community members centered around social-emotional development. Dr. Kemp's workshop was geared towards helping teachers to understand how easy it is to integrate social emotional learning in what they are doing everyday.

"They do have to change lesson plans. They don't have to change their focus. They don't have to purchase a curriculum," Kemp said. "It's really about cultivating a positive environment. Creating this wonderful community of learners."

The two other workshop presenters, Anne Dempster and Colleen Whittingham were equally excited about the Symposium participants. Of the participants, Demspster said, "They were excited to be there. They had four workshops to choose from, and some of them chose mine, which is always exciting. Whittingham said, "I had four or five men teachers in my workshop, which was new for me."

Bachus, his staff and all of the ACT's members are looking forward to their next initiative with anticipation of achieving an even greater success than that experienced through the Austin Early Childhood Symposium.

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Program offers support, advice for parents *Austin Schools first to have Parent Cafes*

By La Risa Lynch

Parenting isn't always easy and a program underway in Austin aims to give parents advice, resources and just plain ole support in raising children.

Erikson Institute is a graduate school for early childhood development and education. Through its Center for Children and Families, Erikson staff created parent cafes in two Austin schools where parents get together with others parents to share a meal and engage in candid conversations about the challenges of child rearing. The goal is to help parents understand what is developmentally going on with their children.

The cafes are hosted by a facilitator at DePriest Elementary School, 139 S. Parkside Ave. and Channing Childcare, 5701 W. Division St. The cafes are for parents of children age birth to 0-eight. Parents meet once a week at both schools however the Channing's program is open to the public while DePriest is only for parents of whose children attend at the school. Channing's program began in April this year while and DePriest opened a month later. Both schools are the first to offer the program in Austin.

"Parent cafes are a safe, warm, nurturing place where parents can come and talk about any kind of problem they are having with their child on a social and emotional level," said Cassandra Ward, a staff clinician with Erikson Institute's Center for Children and Families.

"It's a way to help parents gain a better understanding for their child and have

empathy for what their child may be experiencing," she said added.

Workshop topics covered at the parent café vary, but often center on behavioral concerns like dealing with tantrums. Most parents dismiss tantrums as kids throwing a fit when they don't get their way. But tantrums are much more than that.

Tantrums, said Ward explained, are children's way of actually trying to communicate with parents because they don't have the words to express how they are feeling. A tantrum could mean that the child is hungry, scared, frustrated, sleepy or distressed, Ward said.

"We help [parents] understand that a tantrum is not a tantrum," Ward said. "There's a reason why a child has a tantrum and it is because they are trying to communicate. As parents we become detectives to try to figure out why this child is having a tantrum so we can address their feelings."

The workshops offer parents techniques to help calm the child or cope with the situation. And sometimes that is as simply as providing children with choices. If kids are throwing a tantrum because they didn't get a toy or candy, parents should offer them something different, Ward said. Providing a choice helps build the child's independence while giving them some control, she said noted.

Another technique is to acknowledge that the child is angry. It teaches the child

to know what anger feels like and how to appropriately respond to it, Ward said. The biggest tip she can offer parents is to stay calm because kids ultimately mirror their parents' behavior.

While these tips seem innate, Ward noted not all parent know this. Adults based their parenting skills on "how they were parented and what they learned as a child," Ward said. "But sSometimes parents would use a response to the child that just makes the situation worse than what it is are interested in learning additional strategies as well."

The key objective to the parent cafes is information. With the right information, parents are able to help their children develop mentally, learn good socialization skills and do well in school, Ward said, adding that it is all about being in tuned with one's children.

"Sometimes there is so much stress going on, so much chaos, so much life going on happening that until [parents] sometimes just don't see things the way [children] are seeing it," she said. "So what we try to do ultimately is get parents to see life through the lens of their child."

Ward hopes to expand the cafes to other Austin schools. The cafes are part of Austin Coming Together efforts to implement a consortium of care to foster early childhood development.

For more information contact Cassandra Ward at (312) 709-0508 or Sara Anderson at (312) 709-0954.

Check in with ACT!



Monthly Meeting

(held the last Thursday of every month)

DATE:

Thursday

Oct. 31, 2013

TIME:

9:30-11:00am

LOCATION:

Austin Community Resource Center, 501 N Central (enter on Race)

PURPOSE:

To check in with ACT members and build community

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on the **2014 Austin Early
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Please visit www.austincomingtogether.org/2014-aec-symposium

The Austin Early Childhood Symposium was organized by the

Austin Early Childhood Collaborative, led by:

State Rep. La Shawn Ford

State Rep. Camille Lilly

Ruth Kimble

Faith Arnold

Luther Poole

Anne Dempster

Dawn Ferencak

Durriyyah Kemp

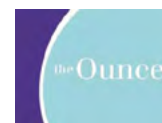
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ACT is supported, in part, by our members and the JP Morgan Chase Foundation