

**GETTING ON WITH THEIR LIVES ; 25 KIDS READY TO MOVE
INTO THE MAINSTREAM**

CHRIS ALLEN. South Florida Sun - Sentinel. Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Aug 4, 2002. pg. 3

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The Graduating Class of 2002 wore bright blue caps and gowns as they paraded to Pomp and Circumstance on graduation night.

The 25 special needs preschoolers from ARC Broward enjoyed the attention of family, friends and dignitaries attending the ceremony in June.

"Most of these children have been with us since they were newborns," explained Keith Muniz of marketing and development at the nonprofit social-service agency in Sunrise.

"We provide early service and in-home parent training for newborns with special needs who are at risk for developing a disability," he said.

"The whole process, from day one to graduation, is to prepare these children to enter into mainstream classrooms in the public school setting."

Muniz said graduation "is a very emotional moment, for not only the staff, but for the families, because they see the progress their children have made during the last five years."

The students presented a musical performance before proceeding, one by one, to receive their diploma from Maria Raia Filsaime, coordinator of children's services at ARC, and Jane Mareno, an exceptional student educational specialist.

The benefits of mixing children with and without special needs are many.

"Our students develop more peer interactions and relationships with each other," Muniz said. "It teaches diversity to the children, that we are not all the same, but that all are accepted."

ARC Broward is located at 10250 NW 53rd St. Call 954-746-9400.

[Illustration]

PHOTO; Caption: (color) EMOTIONAL CEREMONY: Teacher David Morgenstern coaches his charges, including, from left front, Jalen Robinson, Jessica Rivera and Victoria Morello; from left rear, Sabrina Cordona, Stephen Rathy and Faith Clear.

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