

News Release: ARC Broward Establishes Nationally Acclaimed Early Childhood Program "Parents As Teachers" - April 2002

ARC Broward is proud to announce the opening of its newest children's program, Parents as Teachers (PAT). This voluntary program, which is free to parents of newborn through five-years old children with special needs, provides parents with the information and support they need to give their child the best possible start in life. PAT is based on the philosophy that parents are their children's first and most influential teachers.

Parents as Teachers programs includes personal visits by a professionally trained child development specialist, free developmental screenings, group meetings on a wide variety of child rearing topics, and help finding any other resources beyond the scope of the PAT Program. Additional services including respite care, mental health counseling and in-home behavioral services, will also be available at no cost to families with demonstrated need and who are enrolled in the PAT program. "The goal is to help parents learn new ways to foster their child's language and intellectual growth, curiosity, and social skills," said Debbie Rudnicki, Parents as Teachers Coordinator at ARC Broward.

PAT has received numerous national awards for its effective approach. The success of the program, which started in Missouri in 1981, has enabled expansion to more the 2,200 programs in 49 states, the District of Columbia, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Canada, Japan, West Indies, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Independent studies of the program have revealed that participating families have greater involvement in their children's development and significantly lower risks of child abuse. The Children's Services Council, the organization funding this program at ARC Broward, has targeted reduction of occurrences of child maltreatment, abuse and neglect, as its key funding priority for this project.

"Children don't come with a set of instructions," said Rudnicki. Regardless of education or income level, most parents find issues like discipline, sleep patterns and communicating with their children somewhat bewildering," she says. "We're here to offer alternatives, brainstorm solutions and help parents provide the stimulation necessary for these children in those crucial early years."

All PAT activities are free to eligible families wishing to participate. To learn more about the PAT program or how to enroll, call Debbie Rudnicki at (954) 577- 4162 or (954) 746-9400 extension 4162.