



Our Passion for families shows

By Tabby Brown

The University of Alabama has a rich history of serving, educating and championing children and their families. On the forefront of this effort, the CHES Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) makes a difference in lives every day through outreach programs that strengthen human development across the lifespan and by training tomorrow's leaders in early childhood education and family advocacy.

Reflecting on her association with CHES, graduate and retired HDFS faculty member Dr. Carroll Tingle says, "Even though there has been a lot of evolution in the College, the strong passion for families that was there in 1966, when I was an undergraduate, is here now. Members of the department have always been active professionally and politically. We continue to be influential in setting precedents and securing funding that helps families through our collaborations with governmental agencies and our service in elected offices of associations and boards such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Alabama Association for Young Children, VOICES for Alabama's Children, and the National Board of Child Life Professionals. The passion for making life better for families and children is the catalyst for the amazing things the College is doing today — much of it thanks to Dean Milla Boschung."

In 2005, Dean Boschung donned a hard hat and work boots to oversee construction of a project that pulled together child care, clinical, laboratory and classroom facilities that encompass our efforts to improve the lives of families. The Child Development

Research Center (CDRC) was constructed on property adjacent to the RISE Center, another important component of our HDFS family.

The 64,000-square-foot CDRC facility houses research suites, the Children's Program, Child Development Resources, the Capstone Family Therapy Clinic, the Pediatric Development Research Laboratory and the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Thanks to a recent multimedia technology update, it remains a state-of-the-art facility.

The research-based Children's Program serves as a laboratory school for undergraduate students majoring in early childhood education. It evolved from the Child Development Center and Infant Laboratory, which was first established at UA in 1942. Some of the most well-known child development experts including Margaret Mead and Benjamin Spock visited the lab, which was one of the first child development research centers in the nation. It also became one of the first programs for young children in the state to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This year, the Children's Program received the first five star rating in Alabama from Alabama Quality STARS which rates childcare centers in the state.

Over its history, this area of HDFS experienced a number of other firsts. In the mid-60s, the department became heavily involved with the training of Head Start personnel. CHES continues to train Head Start teachers today, many through an online program that is every bit as vibrant as its on-campus counterpart.



Top Left) The Children's Program Music Garden provides hours of family fun.

(Top Right) Child Life Specialist students gain practical experience in area hospitals.

(Bottom) Baby TALK provides developmentally appropriate activities for parents and their children.



In 1970, the department received a federal grant to create the Model Day Care Center (MDCC) designed to serve disadvantaged infants and children. Taking a holistic approach, the center was one of the first in the country to provide transportation, in-house health services, parent education and a full-time nutritionist for children from 6 weeks through 6 years old.

Over the years, it became obvious to members of the department and experts throughout the country that you can't reach the child without reaching the family. For that reason, HDFS programs have come to include much more than early childhood education.

Child Development Resources (CDR) assists families across the state of Alabama to provide a safe, loving, and enriching life for their children. It is west, central Alabama's resource for information about the well-being of young children. CDR provides training for professional child care providers, offers child care resource and referral information, and conducts parenting education and support programming. It also works to increase the availability, affordability and quality of child care for families in Bibb, Choctaw, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Marengo, Marion, Perry, Pickens, Sumter and Tuscaloosa counties.

The Capstone Family Therapy Clinic provides members of the community help in resolving personal problems and trains graduate students specializing in marriage and family therapy. The Clinic offers psychotherapy for individuals, couples and families, conducted by marriage and family therapy master's level graduate students-in-training. These students are educated and closely supervised by faculty who are licensed marriage and family therapists. Providers

work to clarify issues, explore options and find solutions to problems.

The Pediatric Development Research Laboratory conducts research of interest to faculty and students that is focused on children's development from birth to 18 years of age. It features a social interaction room to study interactions, such as those between family members (e.g., mother and infant), among peers and friends, and between adults and children. A separate infant testing laboratory is set up to study infant perception and memory of inter-modal stimuli (e.g., audio-visual events or visual-tactile objects). Observation booths allow for unobtrusive observation and recording of interactions and infant performance. The lab also has a physical and biochemical room for tracking children's growth. Ongoing studies include prenatal and maternal depression effects on infant development, preschool children's temperament and cortisol levels during social interactions, and moral and language development.

The RISE Center opened in 1974 to enrich the lives of infants and preschoolers with and without special needs. In 1994, it moved to its current facility — the Stallings Center which was named after Alabama football coach Gene Stallings and is located adjacent to the CDRC. The RISE model is a unique blend of early childhood education, child development and integrated therapy. The purpose of the program is to optimally prepare children for their next educational environment, and to provide support to families.

Apart from the outreach services each of these programs offers families, they also provide research opportunities to enrich faculty classrooms and hands-on training to prepare students in human development and family studies for work beyond graduation.

According to Dr. Robert Laird, HDFS department chair, "HDFS is about finding ways to help children, families and relationships thrive. Our curricula and coursework will not only prepare students to be successful in their professional roles, but it will also enable students to be better parents, partners, friends, and more generally, better human beings." ■ ■ ■