



Janesville family advocate Erin Heiman, center, chats with Crystal Davis and her daughters, Aidryana, left, and Kaydence, right, at the September Early Head Start socialization session in Beloit. The Davises are from Janesville.

Childhood initiatives could boost early learning

By Shelly Birkelo

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BELOIT

LaMikka James loves Head Start.

"It's helped me to appreciate family so much more," the 35-year-old Beloit woman said.

Her 6-year-old twin boys were enrolled in Head Start for two years and learned manners, teamwork and communication skills that prepared them for school, she said.

Through Head Start, one of the twins was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder.

"Head Start gave him foundations that helped him learn. Had he not gone to Head Start, his kindergarten year would have been horrible," James said.

Her 10-month-old foster son is in the Early Head Start program that brings a family advocate into her home every week. The advocate evaluates the toddler for learning development issues, keeps track of weight and immunizations and offers advice, James said.

The advocate told James that because her foster son already has so many teeth, she should be brushing them with fluoride-free toothpaste.

"I thought regular toothpaste for kids was OK. But that could have potentially made him sick. It's just all those little things," James said.

"It's someone here to help,



Susana Hernandez of UW-Rock County's Project AHEAD gives a presentation on going back to school to parents gathered at the Beloit Head Start offices for a socialization session.

and that's empowering to know."

James' toddler is one of 503 children enrolled in Rock-Walworth Comprehensive Family Services Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which could get a significant boost from several early childhood initiatives under consideration in Washington, D.C.

Nationally, more than \$8 billion could go to Head Start and Early Head Start, \$3 billion for child care and development block grant funding plus another \$300 million for competitive early learning challenge grants, as reported by a Wisconsin Head Start As-

sociation summary.

New Head Start funding would sustain \$720,000 in federal stimulus money Head Start of Rock and Walworth Counties received in December 2009. That extra money doubled the Early Head Start program to serve 60 additional families and brought Early Head Start services to Walworth County for the first time.

Census data show a jump in the percentage of families with young children in poverty in Janesville, Rock County and the region. Despite doubling the program size, 25 eligible families are on a waiting list, said Connie Robers, executive director of the local Head Start.

Current Head Start stimulus funding expires in September 2011, Robers said.

If funding is renewed, the expanded program could continue.

If it isn't, "we would no longer be able to serve those 60 extra children," she said.

The proposed funding also would provide additional dollars for subsidized child care and support the YoungStar initiative intended to improve the quality of child care funded by Wisconsin Shares, Robers said.

"We know there's a tremendous need for Early Head Start services," Robers said, "because the eligible disadvantaged population Head Start serves has steadily gone up."



Photos by Bill Olmsted/bolmsted@gazettextra.com

With his 1-year-old son, Luis Jr., on his lap, Luis Garduno looks over a brochure from the Rock County Health Department during a socialization session for the Early Head Start program in Beloit.

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Band to offer pre-party before concert Nov. 20

JANESVILLE

The band White Ghost Shivers will hold a concert pre-party from 5-7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 20, at The Speakeasy, 19 N. High St., before its 7:30 p.m. concert at the Janesville Performing Arts Center, 408 S. Main St.

The band is part vaudeville, part 1930s dance hall jazz.

All ticket-holders are invited to the pre-party, which features food and two drink tickets or The Speakeasy Bootlegger's Punch for \$20.

The concert is made possible through a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the 2010-11 JPAC season sponsor, American Family In-

urance.

Tickets are \$23 for adults and free for students. To buy tickets, call JPAC at (608) 758-0297.

For more information, call Jeremy Slemenda at (512) 373-5257, visit whiteghostshivers.com or e-mail jeremy@whiteghostshivers.com.

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