

Sheltering Arms Early Education & Family Centers

WEBSITE: www.shelteringarmsforkids.com

Brief description (short background-history-philosophy-best practices):

Since 1888, Sheltering Arms Early Education & Family Centers have prepared children for school and strengthened families and communities. About 2,300 children, ages 0-5, and their families are served each day in 17 neighborhood centers in 7 metro Atlanta counties. Beginning in 1999 and continuing through 2004, eight Sheltering Arms Centers were constructed through a partnership with Smart Start, the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation and Early Learning Property Management. Sheltering Arms East Lake Village opened in 2001. Three things set Sheltering Arms apart:

All children, regardless of income. By uniquely braiding Head Start, Georgia Pre-K, and income-based scholarships supported through United Way and fundraising, Sheltering Arms makes quality early childhood education available to all, regardless of income. Parents who are employed, pursuing employment, or enrolled in job training or school are given priority for enrollment.

Best practices & Benchmarks. Sheltering Arms is one of 25 programs in the nation to be named a Head Start Program of Excellence. It has consistently met NAEYC accreditation standards since they were established in the 1980s. Sheltering Arms is a research partner and best practices model for The Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families approach, which engages child care programs in preventing child abuse and neglect. In 2007, on average, every Sheltering Arms child met or exceeded 92% of the developmental milestones for his or her age.

Comprehensive services. Sheltering Arms offers more than a strong early learning program. Our whole child, family-centered approach addresses each child's health, nutrition, and social/ emotional development, and builds on assets to create strong, stable families with the resources to support their children. Partnerships with nonprofits, schools, and government create safety nets and opportunity in underserved communities.

Specific curricula used:

Sheltering Arms' developmentally-appropriate curriculum is rooted in 121 years of early learning experience and the most current research on best practices. The individualized curriculum is rooted in Piaget's theory of how children learn and think in an enriched sensory environment, is guided by brain research, and is reflective of Erickson's stages of emotional growth and Vygotsky's study of the impact of family and culture on children's learning. The curriculum provides children with an environment that stimulates learning and encourages exploration, problem solving, and self-expression through hands-on activities. It is approved for Georgia Pre-K programs and includes a comprehensive system of parent involvement, ongoing developmental and health assessments, a balance of child selected and teacher facilitated activities, lesson planning, teachable moments, and teacher training. Sheltering Arms East Lake and three other Sheltering Arms Centers partner with Early Reading First, a federally funded professional development initiative in partnership with Smart Start; the program is designed to enhance the early language, literacy and pre-reading development of young children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are grounded in scientifically-based reading research.

NOTE: Statistical information below is an aggregate of all Sheltering Arms locations:

Classrooms by age group: Infant - 23 Toddler - 49 Threes - 37 Fours - 44
Fives ** School-age ** Mixed ages** ***Sheltering Arms serves app. 500 children ages 5-8 each year in its summer camp and after-school programs. They are housed in classrooms that are part of the Georgia Pre-K program during the school day/school year.*

Classrooms by type: Pre-K – 38* Head Start – 30* Early Head Start - 30 Other: - 55

**14 classrooms have braided PreK and Head Start funding*

Other:

Sheltering Arms Georgia Training Institute provides professional development and credentialing to more than 2700 early childhood and family support workers from throughout the Southeast each year, including Sheltering Arms staff. Further, there are 35 Sheltering Arms staff members pursuing higher degrees or credentials in early care and education who have received tuition assistance from Bright from the Start's SCHOLARSHIPS program so far in FY09.

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Parent involvement program / parent requirements (if any):

Each center's Parent Leadership Organization--similar to a PTA--meets monthly, evaluating center operations, planning events and fundraisers, offering opportunities for leadership and camaraderie, and providing information on parenting and resources. Family Support Coordinators provide resources and referral, and help families strengthen parenting skills and plan for their future. All Pro Dads groups help fathers to be informed, involved caregivers.

Teacher qualifications:

Minimum education:
Minimum experience:
Other requirements:
screen

Teachers

A.A. in Early Childhood Education
1 year experience
Background check/drug screen

Assistants

CDA Credential
NA
Background check/drug

Funding sources and percentages:

Tuition 21% Federal 40% State 18% Foundation grants 6%
Fund raising/specify type/events: 12% / United Way, individual gifts, special events
Other: 3% / Georgia Training Institute income, space rental