

November 23, 2015

**The Ben and Myrtle Walking Memorial Trust** gives grant to First Step Family Support Center.

First Step Family Support Center recently received a \$3,000 grant from the **Ben and Myrtle Walking Memorial Trust** to help provide a “Tools of the Mind” Early Learning Academy for three and four old children from low income families. The “Tools of the Mind” curriculum focuses on building young children’s executive function skills that foster self-regulation, inhibitory control, working memory and cognitive flexibility, thus enabling very young children to begin to develop critical thinking skills that are extremely important for school readiness and school success.

*“When children have opportunities to develop executive function and self-regulation skills, individuals and society experience lifelong benefits. These skills are crucial for learning and development. They also enable positive behavior and allow us to make healthy choices for ourselves and our families.” (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University)*

The Early Learning Academy will also focus on addressing the “Word Gap” often experienced by children from low income homes. Research shows that during the first three years of life, a low income child hears on average roughly 30 million fewer total words than his or her more affluent peers. This is known as the “Word Gap” and it can lead to disparities not just in vocabulary size but also in school readiness, long term educational and health outcomes and eventually, earnings.

Parents of the children attending the Early Learning Academy learn along with their children. In parent groups they learn about importance of building a child’s executive function skills and exposing their children to the wonder of words through reading, story-telling and use of descriptive words in everyday life situations.

The “Tools of Mind” curriculum holds promise in regards to being able to strengthen the resiliency of children and families who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences. (ACEs). The Adverse Childhood Study (<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy>) findings suggest that certain adverse childhood experiences are major risk factors for illness and poor quality of health in adults.

First Step would like to thank the **Ben and Myrtle Walking Memorial Trust** for partnering with us in this important work towards child success in school and life. For more information on Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact of these experiences on families, interested individuals can view an interesting video by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris on TED talks at TED.com

For more information about the Early Learning Academy please contact Nita Lynn at First Step Family Support Center, 360 457-8355 or view our website at [www.firststepfamily.org](http://www.firststepfamily.org)