

# River Valley Child Development Services Celebrates 35 Years of Service

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“Throughout the years, this agency has gained a reputation in the state of West Virginia for providing programs that demonstrate best practice in services for children and families.” This was spoken by Dr. Norma Gray, founder and former Executive Director of River Valley Child Development Services, during the agency’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

This year, River Valley Child Development Services celebrates its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary by again reflecting on the roots and branches of its family tree as it continues to grow and provide for West Virginia’s youngest citizens.

River Valley Child Development Services was established in 1971 as the Region III Early Childhood Demonstration Center, a component of a statewide system of regional early childhood centers. The purpose of the regional early childhood center was to demonstrate appropriate programs for preschool children, prior to implementing kindergartens in the public school systems. In Region III, centers were set up in Cabell, Kanawha, Lincoln, Mason, and Wayne counties the first six months.

As counties began operating their own kindergartens, the agency began branching out into other service areas. The name of the agency was changed to River Valley Child Development Services in July 1990.

In 1998, the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, in collaboration with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), established the Program Recognition Project. Growing out of work by NAEYC’s Program Panel on Quality, Compensation, and Affordability, the project selected

River Valley Child Development Services as one of ten “Exemplary Programs” chosen nationwide.

Today, River Valley Child Development Services is serving over 8,500 people a year with a myriad of regional and statewide programs. These programs include: child development centers in Huntington; Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies in Huntington, Charleston and Parkersburg; school-age programs in Cabell County; Family Day Care Food program (serving five counties); West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist (ACDS) program; West Virginia Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources; and West Virginia Birth to Three System, Regional Administrative Units in Huntington and Charleston.

In addition, the number of River Valley Child Development Services staff has grown from 2 to more than 140 full-time employees. Over 74 percent of staff are college graduates. Staff continuously set goals to develop their knowledge in early childhood areas. As part of their development, staff members are required to register on the WV STARS career pathway to continue their professional growth.

River Valley Child Development Services’ family tree—its roots, branches, and leaves—provide nourishment, stability, shelter, strength, protection and growth to the children and families who are the beneficiaries of its unwavering commitment to quality.

