

Realizing the promise of education

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Two decades after its initiation, the University of Miami (UM) Linda Ray Intervention Program for substance-exposed babies and toddlers demonstrates long-term success.

The program is designed to help children from birth to three years of age who are developmentally delayed, prenatally exposed to drugs and often with the additional risk of maltreatment, ultimately achieve their developmental milestones and be ready to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

The program started in 1993 as an innovative partnership between the UM Linda Ray Intervention Center (LRIC), Miami-Dade Public Schools, Early Steps, Children's Medical Services, and the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) and has since expanded to partner with the Juvenile Court in Miami.

"The process of establishing close collaboration, for the Juvenile Court to efficiently refer young maltreated children to an early intervention for assessment and services, and for the program to provide child development technical assistance back to judges, attorneys and case workers is considered unique on both a state and national level," said Dr. Lynne Katz, research assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Miami and Director of the UM's LRIC.

Evidence of the long-term achievements of this early intervention model is shared in a new report published in the *Juvenile Family Court Journal*.

The findings demonstrate that core components of the program support positive outcomes for the participating children and that those outcomes may continue to exist into middle school.

Judge Cindy Lederman, who has served in the Miami-Dade Juvenile Court since 1994, orders screening of each child that comes into the court. The judge also monitors that the child has a timely developmental assessment if needed and that the

results are presented to the court. Whenever possible, children meeting criteria are referred to the LRIC for screening, assessments and enrollment in the early intervention program. The court's partnership with the LRIC has enhanced the lives of the children and families in the dependency system, Lederman said.

"Dr. Katz has provided a roadmap to implementing early intervention services in our basic court practice, and has identified and led our court in the implementation of evidence based services for our children and families," Lederman said. "Now young children are screened for developmental delays as a matter of course and our parenting services are effective."

One of the key characteristics of the Linda Ray Intervention Program is the adherence to a set of core components, stated Dr. Mary Anne Ullery, research director at the UM LRIC in the Department of Psychology.

"The ability to provide [early intervention](#) services and to effectively evaluate those services for effectiveness on improving both short and long-term developmental outcomes for a very high risk population of children, represents the unique dual functions of the center," Ullery said.

Previous studies have cited that 80 percent of young children in the child welfare system have developmental delays and that only 30 percent of children in child welfare between the ages of six and 11 are receiving special education services. The Linda Ray Intervention Program and its [child welfare](#) partners have created a pathway for this critical access with the potential to improve rates of assessments and access to services in the first three years for the high risk children.

As for future plans for the center, Dr. Katz said that maintaining the high level of evidence-based services for the children it serves, with sustained funding and collaboration with the court and community partners is a "Herculean task."

"We will continue to examine the outcomes of our [children](#) in high school in hopes that the effects of participation carry them forward successfully," Katz said.

Provided by University of Miami

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