ACAP celebrates youngest learners during Week of the Young Child

Aroostook County Action Program’s early care and education centers spread throughout central and southern Aroostook communities recently participated in Week of the Young Child by hosting celebrations and special learning experiences geared towards the youngest people to benefit from ACAP’s services.

“Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration of early learning, young children, their teachers, and families sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The goal is to bring awareness to the importance of early learning opportunities for children birth to age 5,” said Family Engagement Specialist Amy Murchison of ACAP’s Early Care and Education department.

According to their website, NAEYC is the world's largest early childhood education association, with nearly 80,000 members and a network of over 300 local, state, and regional affiliates. The organization first established Week of the Young Child™ in 1971, recognizing that the early childhood years (birth through age 8) lay the foundation for children's success in school and later life.

NAEYC organizes the week and offers suggestions for themes and activities, but it's the local centers in each community that decide which events to coordinate for their students during the week. ACAP centers in Dyer Brook, Houlton, Presque Isle, and Caribou arranged for special events all week long in celebration of Week of the Young Child. Each activity was designed to enhance the learning experiences for the young, curious minds who attend the centers. Many special guests to the centers read books or led special group activities.

In Houlton, special guest readers during the week included Houlton Elementary Principal Candy Crane, and local SNAP Educator Heather McGuire read a book about monsters not liking broccoli. The preschool students all had an opportunity to try raw asparagus, many commenting, “it’s not so bad.” Teacher Melanie Greaves’ husband, Bill Greaves, Lieutenant in the Maine Forest Service, read one of the children’s favorite books and explained what he does for work while talking about the uniform he wears. Teacher Linda Stevens’ daughter Doreen Conlogue is the County Executive Director for Farm Service Agency. Her visit included an explanation of what she does at work and a reading of “Mr. Brown Can Moo.” She then presented each child with their own copy.

In addition to staff introducing their families in Houlton, students’ families were also invited to become involved. One dad, Eric Schools, visited the school and helped the children make a structure with “goop.” Then mom, Kira Schools, took the kids outside on Thursday, working with them to do nature painting and creating wall art featuring pine cones, rocks and pussy willows. Another student’s twin sisters visited and her older brother read “The Giving Tree” to the class.
ACAP Executive Director Jason Parent spent his week visiting classrooms in centers all over The County, also taking time to read books to and enjoy the company of the students.

At Gouldville School in Presque Isle, each day had a theme, featuring healthy treats, like flavored waters, and fun activities, like an indoor obstacle course. Special guest readers at Gouldville included Rob Thibeault, retired Aroostook County Sheriff, and Melissa St. Pierre, the Youth Services Librarian at the Mark and Emily Turner Memorial Library. The kids also had an opportunity to watch a clogging demonstration by parent Julea Gorneault and Phyllis Howe, bus monitor, performed on her Pianica for the students. Finally, EMT and North Lakes Region Fire Department fire fighter Jesse Belanger visited to teach the students about stranger danger.

In Caribou, students explored the world without having to leave their classrooms. Each classroom was decorated with various country’s themes – like China, Mexico and Ireland. The staff prepared special cuisines to introduce the students to unique flavors associated with their countries and their activities centered around learning about the other cultures. As a bonus, Deputy Clark from the Aroostook County Sheriff’s Department made an appearance as a guest reader.

In Dyer Brook, the ACAP/RSU 50 Partnership program did nature paintings with parents during the week.

ACAP Early Care and Education Centers in Presque Isle and Caribou are the only licensed child care facilities north of Bangor to hold national accreditation through NAEYC. These centers must demonstrate a high quality of service delivery to young children and families to reach the rigorous standards set by NAEYC. Programs must practice a research-based curriculum and assessment process as part of accreditation, leading to improved outcomes for school readiness for children. Staff, families and the community all play a vital part in supporting the program to meet the high standards.

According to the NAEYC website, “Week of the Young Child™ is a time to recognize that children's opportunities are our responsibilities, and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that each and every child experiences the type of early environment—at home, at child care, at school, and in the community—that will promote their early learning.”

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ACAP is celebrating 45 Years of Making Life Better in Aroostook County! ACAP provides the people of Aroostook County with services and resources that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, and workforce development services. For more information on ACAP, or to make a tax-deductible contribution, please contact the agency at 771 Main Street, on the web at www.acap-me.org, or by calling 764-3721.