The Family Literacy and Employment Project (FLAE) is a collaborative project among many agencies which seeks to design and pilot a work-focused comprehensive family literacy program to assist families in reaching economic self-sufficiency, enhance the development of preschool children and reduce the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

We were excited to finally begin our Family Literacy and Employment Project in July (after construction and other delays). Materials and equipment have been ordered and received and the classroom for the adults is completely established. Although the population we have targeted has many barriers to participation, by the end of September we had enrolled 30 participants (14 parents and 16 children).

Each participant has been pre-assessed and individual plans developed to help them reach their goals of self-sufficiency. Their academic strengths and needs have been identified as well as an assessment of pre-employment skills. Appropriate classroom materials have been acquired to support the needs and positive achievement of participants and they are well on their way.

Much of the Coordinator's time, during these months, has been spent on recruitment of new students and retention of enrolled students. A presentation about the program was made at the first PTO meeting. Many home visits have been made to prospective participants as well as to enrolled parents for support and encouragement. Meetings have been held with personnel from the Rocky Mount office of DSS to discuss joint clients, receive and provide referrals, and to work together to provide support for participants.

A business sponsorship has been developed with Hastings in Rocky Mount. They have agreed to support the FLAE through monies donated by customers at their coffee bar. We are currently planning publicity and presentation of the first check in October.

The local Red Lobster Restaurant has also been very responsive to the program. They supported a "lunch outing" as an incentive for parents' participation and achievement in the program. The assistant manager is in discussion with the coordinator as to the possibilities of collaborating with our project through job training and employment opportunities for our participants.

Two of the greatest barriers, for our targeted population, to participation in this program and to employment, is transportation and child care. Those have, therefore, been two areas that we've focused on over the last few months. Necessary transportation agreement forms have been developed and a meeting was held with central office staff
responsible for transportation to arrange for parents to be able to ride the school bus with their children to our site. Seminars have been presented to the parents concerning the selection of day care providers and possibilities for monetary assistance. The class was taken to ECDSS to learn about and to apply for subsidized daycare. The parents also visited prospective day care centers and discussed the advantages of each for their particular situations, both currently and in the future.

Many Parent Time Sessions have been held with parents to focus on parenting education and to help them develop their support network. Topics addressed have included child development, self-esteem (for child and parent) child development and how to read with your child. Personnel from the Health Department have discussed childhood diseases and their prevention and school personnel have addressed the school curriculum and ways parents can support their children’s learning. A Mary Kay representative did "make-overs" for the participants and discussions were held concerning the importance of good grooming and appropriate dress for work. They discussed the requirements for being a Mary Kay representative and what this type of work entailed. Parents also toured the Down East Partnership for Children's Parent Information Center. They checked out parenting materials to review at home.

The staff of the FLAE attended the Advanced Family Literacy Institute in Louisville, Kentucky. There they learned more about using computers and the internet with participants, providing pre-employment skills, and appropriate parent-child interaction time with various ages of children. They also received information about materials that would be appropriate to use in work-focused family literacy programs.

Information about the Family Literacy and Employment Project was shared in a session at the North Carolina Community College System's Basic Skills and HRD Conference in Charlotte in August. There was much interest in this approach to family literacy and follow-up has been conducted with interested sites. We will continue to work with other possible sites over the next few months to help them bring a more work-focus approach to their comprehensive family literacy programs.

By the end of September, we had expended approximately 21% of our funds, but this will increase more rapidly over the next few months as our sub-contractors complete their work.