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 have seen much progress in the parents being served in our family literacy program over the last three months. They have become more involved in their children’s school, have increased their reading and math abilities and are developing pre-employment skills. They are beginning to “network” and to see each other as a support group for challenges they encounter as they seek to become self-sufficient.

We are having more success with recruitment. Retention of students has been a concern but we seem to be at a better place now. We’ve lost a few students (for various but valid reasons) but have also gained new students. We hung a large banner over the entrance to the school that advertised our program and it brought wonderful results. We have now enrolled 40 participants – 18 parents and 22 children.

The Coordinator has also conducted other recruitment activities. She presented the program at a meeting for DSS social workers and also spoke to child protective service workers. A discussion was held with the Work First Supervisor about referral procedures. She has visited the Rocky Mount DSS office to follow-up with individual social workers and met with a case manager from Mental Health concerning a mutual client. Home visits to current and potential participants have been conducted to encourage enrollment of new students and retention of current students. Support services in the areas of transportation and childcare continue to be a challenge but most needs are now being met directly or with collaborative services. A follow-up meeting was held with the school system Child Nutrition Manager about providing free or reduced meals for new enrollees.

Other activities included a presentation at two local housing projects and inviting school board members to National Family Literacy Day activities at the school. The family literacy project was also explained and information provided at the school Fall Festival. A new program brochure was developed and distributed.
We are continuing to work with suppliers to obtain all materials that had been on back order. We have had to change some orders and because of that not all funds have been expended for supplies, but will be in the next few months. By the end of December we had expended approximately 40% of our budget but payments had not been made to subcontractors, which should happen next month.

During this quarter we have also been working toward our objective to enhance the development of preschool children by working with their teachers. A six-hour training was conducted by Motheread, Inc. for 52 staff members at Fairview Early Childhood Center. These pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and preschool developmentally delayed teachers and assistants provide services to nearly 400 three, four, and five year olds. In this training, teachers learned how to use Motheread’s Storysharing instructional model and curriculum. This model uses children’s books as a way to teach critical thinking and problem solving skills.

A Storysharing Handbook, with reviews and plans for 32 children’s books had been developed and was distributed to each staff member. Contained in this handbook was a work-focused supplement designed to spark students’ interest in, and understanding of, the world of work. The books featured in the supplement focused on employment themes and helped children and parents deal with areas such as understanding authority, establishing priorities, and promoting cooperation.

In the training, participants analyzed storysharing techniques, discussed the importance of reading aloud to children, reviewed, and discussed the titles found in the curriculum. Two sets, of 32 books each, were also presented to the school for use by the staff with their children and with parents.

We are working with the Research Division of the National Center for Family Literacy to conduct the evaluation of our family literacy project. This includes the collection of demographic data along with academic and employment information. All participants (parents and children) have been pre-tested and will be post-tested at the end of the year. We have collected extensive data and have received our First Data Summary Report from NCFL that analyses our initial collection of data. It has been most helpful as we plan for the continuation of this project. A copy of that report is being sent to you directly by mail.