



2009 Community Assessment

May 09



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Section 1: Introduction and Overview

NOTE: This document is an update of the Early Learning Coalition's 2008 Community Assessment published in April 2008, and originally initiated in April 2006. It is included as a part of the Coalition plan, which was approved the Agency for Workforce Innovation/Office of Early Learning in November 2006.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF MARION COUNTY

The Early Learning Coalition of Marion County (ELCMC/Coalition) encompasses a wide variety of programs and services including:

- quality educational early learning programs;
- financial assistance for child care for children at risk of abuse/neglect, for parents transitioning to work through the One Stop Career Center, and low-income working families
- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R);
- The Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program;
- summer enrichment programs (as funding permits);
- child care provider trainings and technical assistance;
- parent education opportunities through Success By 6, in partnership with United Way of Marion County; and
- collaborative community partnerships to enhance the quality education and early learning experiences of parents and children in Marion County.

EARLY LEARNING COALITION'S LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Our community consists of 1,663 square miles, making it the fifth largest county in Florida. It is a land of gently rolling hills at an average of 104 feet above sea level. Marion County, often referred to as "Horse Capital of the World", is home to more than 900 horse farms. ELCMC is located in southeast Ocala, convenient to the industrial area of town and only four miles from our contracted service provider, Childhood Development Services (CDS).

Nearly three-quarters of the Ocala National Forest is in Marion County. The Forest offers 383,573 acres of unique ecological sites, trails, and natural springs. Marion County is also the home of the Silver Springs Theme Park, which encompasses 350 acres.

As of 2008, Marion County's population is estimated at 329,628 and projected to grow by more than 16% by 2015. In 2007, Florida experienced a net-migration of 7,618. (*Enterprise Florida*)

THE RANGE OF DIRECT SERVICES AVAILABLE

The ELCMC offers a variety of direct services either by contracting with Childhood Development Services, Inc. (CDS) or utilizing grant funding and community partnerships to enhance the scope of direct services available.

Our grant-funded programs for fiscal year 2008-2009 include Dolly Parton's Imagination Library through funding awarded by United Way's Women of Worth and Target, and Success By 6's Caring

Through Cribs program funded by Kids Central, Inc. The Imagination Library focuses on providing children, birth to age five, a free monthly book mailed to their home in targeted zip codes. The Caring Through Cribs program provides parents-to-be and parents with children under the age of one year, a free crib, mattress and sheets, and 1 set of pajamas after participating in a safe-sleeping-for-babies training.

The ELCMC continues their Early Literacy and Learning Model (ELLM) literacy program by offering child care providers, who have been trained in ELLM, the monthly curriculum through a check-out process.

On January 2, 2005, the Voluntary PreKindergarten (VPK) legislation was signed into law in Florida. It is the responsibility of the Coalition to ensure that all four-year-old children in Marion County are provided with the opportunity to attend this free, high quality PreKindergarten program. VPK providers must meet state mandated qualifications and are certified through the Coalition. As of March 2009, approximately 1,700 four year-old children are participating in a VPK classroom. In February 2009, the Florida Department of Education released the 2007-2008 preliminary VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rates. These rates measure how well a private or public VPK provider prepared four-year-olds for kindergarten. Marion County had 72 providers counted in the readiness rates with 57 of those providers increasing their scores from the previous year. Two providers achieved a perfect score of 300.

Section 2. Demographic Information – Children and Their Families

The 2008 median household income for Marion County (\$39,354) is substantially lower than the State of Florida average (\$47,804) at that same time. (*USDA Economic Research Service*) Marion County's median household income is only 180% of the federal poverty level for a family of four.

- How many children 0-5 years of age in poverty? 2,149 (+13% since 2000)
(Per 2007 Census American Community Survey, 13.0% M.C. residents below poverty - per 2008 Florida's Children at a Glance, in 2008 there were 16,528 children 0-4 – $16,528 \times 13.0\% = 2,149$)

Additional information on poverty:

Highest concentration – 34475 (NW) 26.1%; 32686 (Reddick) 20%; 32113 (Citra) 18.4%

- Racial and ethnic information on children 0-5 in age based on statistic above:

White	12,658
Black	1,866
Hispanic	1,535
Other	<u>409</u>
	16,528

- Racial and ethnic information on children aged 5 years and older.

White	42,013
Black	6,197
Hispanic	5,100
Other	<u>1,538</u>
	54,848

- Language information on families in the service area.

- English
- Spanish
- French Creole

11.1% speak language other than English at home. (2007 Community Survey)

Areas where other than English spoken in household is high:

Marion Oaks – 34473	34% speak other than English
Silver Springs Shores – 34472	13% speak other than English
NW County – 34482	10% speak other than English

(2000 U.S. Census)

46 languages spoken in public schools; primarily English and Spanish
(Marion County Public Schools 2009)

Ethnic enrollment in Marion County Public Schools (March 2008)

- 59% Caucasian
- 19% African American
- 15% Hispanic
- 4% Multi-cultural
- 2% Asian
- 1% Indian

Estimates of Children in Poverty

Number of children under age 18: **73,317**
(From 2007 American Survey)

Multiply by poverty rate for the area: **X 13.0**

Sub-total: **9,531**

Divide by the number of age groups: **4**
(from 2007 American survey)

TOTAL: **2,382**

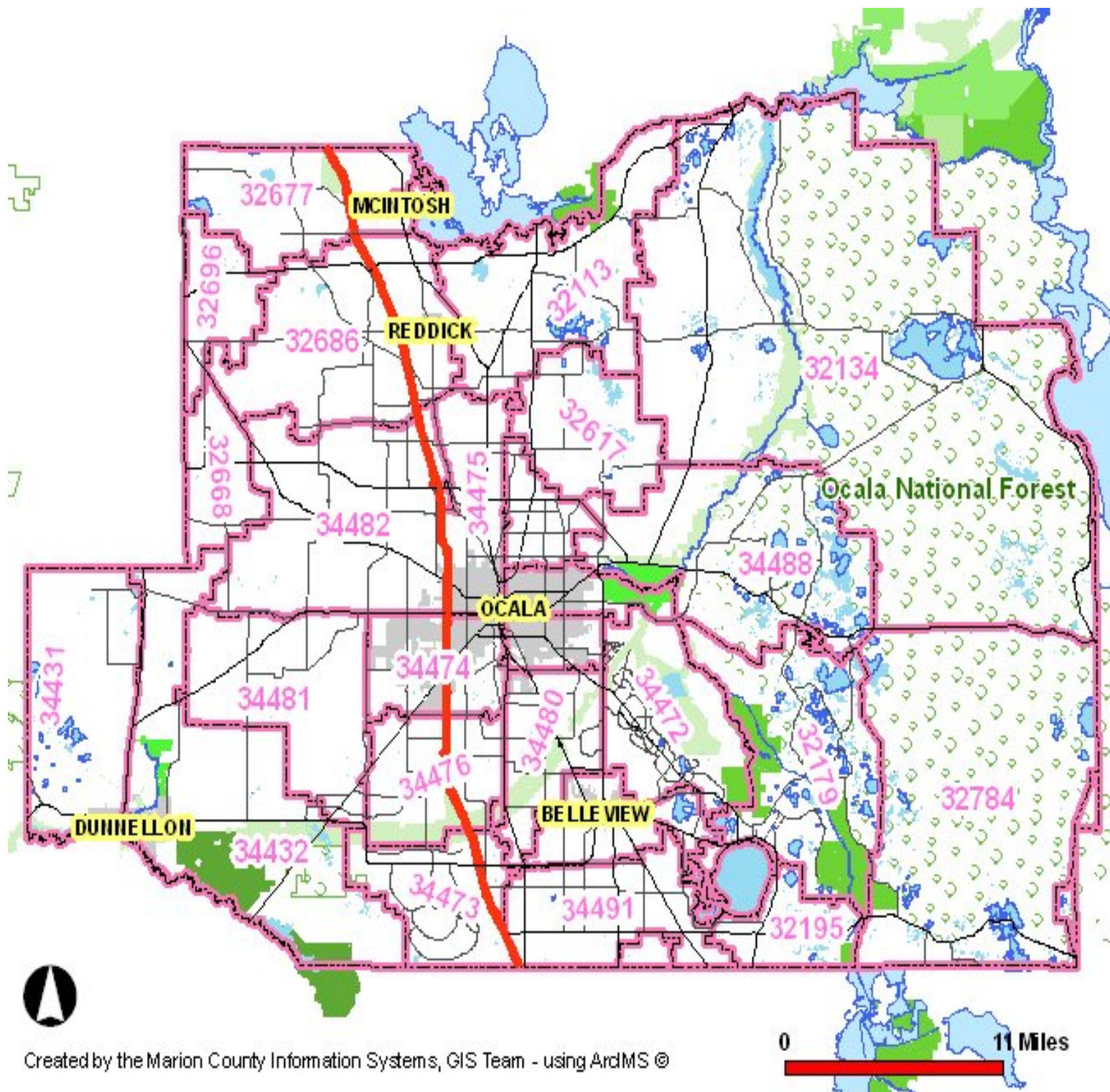
Section 3: Child Care Programs - Demographic Information – Geographic Location

WHERE THE FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS ARE LOCATED

Marion County is spread out among 1,663 square miles. Demographic information has been divided by zip code to provide the most accurate information. The Marion County population based on the 2007 Census Estimate is as follows:

Zip Code	% of pop.	% of (3-26-09 DCF website) Child Care Providers
Citra (32113)	2	>1
Ft. McCoy(32134)	4	>1
Ocklawaha(32179)	3	>1
Weirsdale(32195)	2	>1
Anthony(32617)	1	2
Reddick(32686)	3	3
Belleview(34420-21)	5	5
Dunnellon(34430-31)	7	8
Ocala(34470-71)	13	23
Ocala(all other)	36	37
SS Shores(34472)	7	12
Marion Oaks(34473)	4	8
Silver Springs(34488-89)	3	>1
Summerfield(34491-92)	10	>1

The following map displays the geographic layout of the zip codes in Marion County.



HOW GEOGRAPHY IMPACTS SERVICES AND OPERATIONS - The impact on services derives from the physical size of Marion County. Services are needed throughout the county, primarily in outlying areas. The size of the county also creates a need for transportation to and from needed services. Public transportation service routes have expanded over the recent years but are still bound to primarily inner city limits. Although Marion County is considered an urban county, portions of the area are covered in the Ocala National Forest, while other areas are horse farming communities.

Marion County has several early learning programs that include financial assistance for childcare, Early Head Start, Head Start, Title 1, Pre-Kindergarten, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Teenage Parent Program, Healthy Start, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youth (HIPPPY).

These programs are available through multiple types of providers, such as the public school system, licensed early education centers and family childcare homes, registered homes, exempt centers/sites (school system and faith based), informal providers and home visitation programs.

All of these early education providers have the option to be subcontracted with our service provider, CDS. Subcontracted providers are assessed using our Department of Children and Family Assessment tool at least annually depending on their score and are encouraged to attend a percentage of monthly provider meetings. Contracted providers are also eligible for special educational incentives throughout the fiscal year.

As of 4/1/09, the provider breakdown in Marion County is as follows (April 2008 stats are in parentheses ()):

<u>Subcontracted</u>	<u>Non-Subcontracted (Voucher)</u>
9 Gold Seal Centers (11)	1 Gold Seal Centers (4)
12 Licensed Centers (14)	47 Licensed Centers (42)
0 Gold Seal Family Childcares (4)	1 Gold Seal Family Childcares (2)
2 Large Family Childcares (3)	8 Large Family Childcares (7)
14 Licensed Family Childcares (13)	79 Licensed Family Childcares (73)
0 Exempt Centers (NA)	27 Exempt Centers (31)
4 Gold Seal Large Family Childcares (4)	2 Informals (20)
NA Registered Voucher Homes (NA)	17 Registered Voucher Homes (11)

Services include full time/ part time, weekend and 24-hour care options. Programs are available that utilize many different environmental settings and curricula options.

The subsidy program parent fee is based on family income and family size (sliding fee scale). Parents must be currently working or going to school a minimum of 20 hours per week and be at 150% of the federal poverty level to be determined eligible.

Additionally there were approximately 1,700 four year-old children who are participating in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) in Marion County in the 2008-2009 school year program.

Section 4: Unique Populations

Unique populations in Marion County consist of children with challenges (Early Intervention and Exceptional Education Children), children in foster care, homeless children, children with English as a second language.

For the period February 9-13, 2009, the public school system identified 1,566 enrolled homeless students who meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless. This is an 148% increase from 2007. (*Suzanne McGuire, District Volunteer Coordinator, Special Projects Manager & Homeless Children Liaison, 2009*)

UW Community Impact

There are two priority areas that will serve as the focus community impact through the United Way of Marion County; homeless school-aged children and elder care issues.

Community Impact's purpose is to create a vision council, a consortium of resources and an action plan to move the needle in a positive direction over time. By engaging local organizations and individuals, it is the goal to make positive, lasting changes in community issues.

A January 2009 homeless survey conducted by the Marion County Homeless Council identified 633 homeless persons (up 185 from January 2007). Minor children composed 13% (down 5%) of the total. (*Marion County Homeless Council, 2009 Survey of Local Homeless Coalitions for 2009 Annual Report on Homeless Conditions in Florida*)

Additional related statistical results:

Adults – 18 to 60 years	81%
Elderly – over 60 years	6%
White	76%
Black/African American	15%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
This homeless episode 1 year or more	39%
One year or longer in Marion County	49%

A long-standing unofficial statistical calculation for determining the number of homeless individuals in a community is for every one that is counted, there are an additional 2.5 that are not counted or hidden. Using that calculation - $631 \times 2.5 = 1,577$ – results in a more realistic total.

The Coalition has support services in place to assist families that have children with challenges. The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) is utilized as the first point of referral for children identified during local ELCMC screenings and/or assessments and for families that contact ELCMC with concerns regarding their children. FDLRS refers children needing evaluation to Part C Early Steps or the Part B Program for Pre- Kindergarten children with disabilities in accordance with local practices and procedures. Children that have been identified as having special needs are provided needed therapeutic services in their natural environments, including early learning settings.

The breakdown of services currently (April 2009) being provided for Children with Special Needs is:

Early Steps 250 (April 2007 – 225)
Program for Pre-Kindergarten
270 children in the Developmental Delay Category (April 2007 – 145)
85 being served thru Itinerate Therapy (Parents bring children to school to receive therapy) (April 2007 – 60)

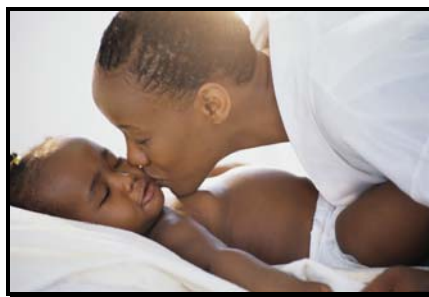
There are also 50 (April 2007-45) children currently waiting to be assessed that may be eligible for Early Steps or Program for Pre-Kindergarten services. (*FDLRS-Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resource System, Martha Cromwell, 2009*)

The Coalition operates a “Warm Line” for child care and early learning providers for the purpose of facilitating the inclusion of all children, including those with special needs. The Coalition also houses an Inclusion Specialist who provides training and technical assistance designed to support inclusion of all children and their families.

In addition ELCMC also purchases curricula, parent resources and children’s books, when available, in other languages. Our website is in both English and Spanish. Currently the Coalition employs a staff member who is fluent in Spanish and is available to assist parents in getting necessary information or enrolling their children in programs.

Genesis House, operated by Childhood Development Services, Inc., began operations in November 2006. This program, with a capacity of 30 beds, provides transitional shelter for children 10-17 years old for the period between removal from the home by court order and placement into a foster home. In calendar year 2008, the organization housed a total of 147 children (41% female; 59% male) for 9,510 nights of lodging.

As of 04/01/09, Kids Central, Inc. was serving 632 (up from 412 in January 2008) children in Marion County (1,832 total children in service districts of Marion, Lake, Hernando, Citrus, and Sumter counties). Of the 632, 137 children were in licensed foster care and 196 were living with a relative caregiver.



Section 5: Needs of Children and Families as Defined by Data

Education

According to the Marion County Public School System in March 2008, 42,599 children were enrolled in public school. This represents a modest increase of 335 students from the same period of the previous year.

According to the Marion County Public Schools, 59% of the children who entered kindergarten in fall 2008 were ready to learn as compared to the state average of 66%. The number of students who entered kindergarten in knowing only one or 0 letters **decreased** significantly from 440 in 2007 to 356 in 2008. The 356 reflects more than 12% of the total students entering kindergarten.

According to the Florida Department of Education, Marion County FCAT results for 2007-2008 revealed 71% of 3rd graders scored at grade level or above in reading (+2% from previous year) and 75% scored at grade level or above in math (+1%). 68% of 5th graders scored at grade level or above in reading and 60% scored at grade level or above in math. 36% (+4%) of 10th graders scored at grade level or above in reading and 69% (+2%) scored grade level or above in math.

In 2007-2008, Marion County had 73.8% of public high school students graduate from high school in four years, a 2% increase from the previous year. The number of high school dropouts increased by 41 individuals to 583.

Two notable decreases for the 2007-2008 public school year were 1) number of non-promotions went down from 1,302 to 430 (872 decrease), and 2) the number of serious school disciplinary offenses decreased by 315 to 1,075.

The public school expenditure per child in 2007-2008 was \$7,943 and the number of children in the free and reduced lunch program was 22,111 (3,952 fewer than the previous year).

Local colleges such as Central Florida Community College and Webster University report an increase in the number of enrolled students, attributed to the high unemployment rate. Some individuals who are having challenges finding employment are returning to school to complete or re-direct their education and skills.

Adult Literacy

More than 55% of Marion County residents read below the middle functioning level of literacy. Over 50% of new employees are reading at or below the 8th grade level and require some type of reading mediation before beginning employment. 27% of Marion County adults read at the lowest level. (*MC Literacy Council, 2008*)

Social Services

Marion County's free information and referral phone service, First Call for Help (352-732-4444), experienced a significant increase in calls during fall 2008 and into spring 2009. For the month of March 2009, the agency received 1,101 calls (up from 919 in February 2009). In order of client

needs, utility bill payment requests were 28% of the calls, rent payment or deposit assistance was 11% and food pantries, health referral and mortgage assistance were 4% each.

The number of people estimated as being homeless on a given day in Marion County has continued to rise since actual count surveys began in approximately 2001. The Marion County Homeless Council is responsible for conducting a local survey which is reported to the Department of Children and Families. The 2009 survey, which was comprised of shelter and resource organization counts and individual interviews, resulted in a total of 633 individuals. Due to the challenges of identifying and interviewing every homeless individual in a community, an acceptable assumption stating that “for every one homeless individual you can count, there are 2 to 3 additional individuals you cannot count”, may be utilized. Based on a multiplier of 2.5, there are more than 1,500 homeless individuals in Marion County. Additional statistics included:

- Male 67% Female 33%
- Under 18 yrs 13% 18-60 yrs 81% over 60 years 6%
- White 76% Black/African American 15%
- Hispanic/Latino 4% American Indian/Alaskan Native 4%
- Military veteran 18%
- Single 92%
- Prior episodes of homelessness in last 3 years:
1 time 48% 2-3 times 24% 4+ times 28%
- Length of current homeless episode:
1 year or longer 39% 1-3 months 37%
- Causes of homelessness:
Employment/financial 47% family problems 20%
- Length of stay in county:
1 year or longer 49% 1-3 months 24%

Head Start/Early Head Start 2008-2009 Family Services statistics revealed that the number of Head Start families reported to be homeless during the school year was 40 (up from 32 in 2006-2007). Of these, 5 families acquired housing. In Early Head Start, a total of 55 (up from 10 in 2006-2007) families were reported as homeless. 18 of these families acquired housing during the school year.

Health

Children:

Infant mortality review for calendar year 2008, per the Marion County Health Department:

Zip Codes of residence highest percentages:

34420 Belleview	8%
34470 Ocala	10%
34471 Ocala	8%
34472 Silver Springs Shores	10%
34475 Northwest Ocala	8%
34482 Northwest Ocala	8%

Additional statistics in reference to 2008 infant mortality:

Very low birth weight	20 babies
Low birth weight	4 babies
Weight within normal limits	12 babies
Unknown	3 babies

In preparation for the WellFlorida Council’s April 2007 Marion County Health Needs Assessment, our community identified key health issues affecting our children. They included obesity and poor nutrition, lack of preventative health services and health education, need for pediatric dental services, and need for mental health services.

A Healthy Start of North Central Florida report revealed that Marion County’s prenatal screen consent rates from July 2008 through February 2009 was 79% - 1,731/2,184. Munroe Regional Medical Center scored high in their infant screening rates at 94%.

The Marion County Community Council Against Substance Abuse reported that 3 of 4 statistics tracked in regard to our youth decreased in 2008. Alcohol use, marijuana use, and cigarette use (current use – past 30 days) all decreased while the usage of other illicit drugs increased from 8.2% to 10.1%.

Birth rates in Marion County have remained somewhat steady and consistently below Florida’s rates. Early access to prenatal care declined in Marion County in the ten years preceding 2007. Low birth weight rates increased in the latter half of the last decade, and the low birth weight rate for black residents is nearly twice that of white residents in Marion County. (*Marion County Health Needs Assessment, April 2007, WellFlorida Council*)

8.55% of the 3,696 live births in 2007 in Marion County were low birth weight babies.

Teen birth rates are an excellent indicator or marker for a healthy community. Teen birth rates have decreased substantially for Marion County teens in the last decade. However, the teen birth rate in Marion County has been substantially higher than the Florida rate since 1997. (*Marion County Health Needs Assessment, April 2007, WellFlorida Council*)

2007 number of births to teens (17 years) increased by 12 to 141.

In 2007-2008, 1,479 Marion County children were admitted to Shands Healthcare in Gainesville. 1,028, or 70%, of those children were uninsured or on Medicaid. (*University of Florida President, Bernie Machen, November 2008*)

Community:

As defined by the federal government’s Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a medically underserved area or population designation is defined by a score of 62.0 or less in four variables. Marion County has HRSA designations for all three of the core service areas: primary medical care, dental care and mental health care. These designations are for different populations. (*Marion County Health Needs Assessment, April 2007, WellFlorida Council*)

The rate of physicians per 100,000 population has been increasing in Marion County to a total of 512 per 100,000 population in 2007. However, the rate still remains significantly lower than the Florida average of 223.9 per 100,000. (*Florida Department of Health, Division of Medical Quality Assurance, 2007*)

Munroe Regional Medical Center's statistics for the period October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2008, revealed: admitted 24,081 patients (down 1,849 from the prior reporting period), treated 93,638 in three emergency departments (up 2,020 from prior reporting period), and performed 11,746 inpatient and outpatient surgeries. (*Munroe Regional Medical Center, April 2009*)

In 2006, there were nearly 48,000 non-elderly uninsured in Marion County. Prescription drugs accounted for nearly 19% of all Medicaid expenditures in Marion County compared to only 9% for all of Florida. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of uninsured residents in Marion County grew by 30%. Dental services are a key area of concern for a majority of our community leaders. The lack of affordable healthcare for the uninsured and underinsured is clearly an area of concern for all leaders. Increased transportation services are needed to increase access to healthcare especially for isolated populations such as the indigent and elderly. (*Marion County Health Needs Assessment, April 2007, WellFlorida Council*)

The population of seniors over the age of 80 is the fastest-growing population in Marion County and may require targeted services to maintain their health and quality of life, according to the U.S. Census, University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

Suicide rates in Marion County are substantially higher than the rates for Florida as a whole. The rates for domestic violence have been much higher than the rates for the state of Florida. (*Marion County Health Needs Assessment, April 2007, WellFlorida Council*)

Barriers to Access

In 2007, the Public Policy Institute published a community study on our community's Access to Health Care. The statistics revealed in the study indicated that our community has a higher average of health challenges as compared to the state and/or nation. When one factors in the current challenges of our economic climate, including rising unemployment, reduction in employment hours and termination of employer-based benefits, the number of residents having access to health care will continue to be a challenge.

The key findings of this study addressed:

- The number of residents who are uninsured or underinsured
- Absence of a regular source of care therefore increased use of emergency rooms and clinics
- Child health concerns of obesity and lack of physical activity
- Insufficient financial resources – increasing number of Medicaid eligible
- Health care provider shortage including nurses
- Structural barriers including lack of transparency of patient information
- Linguistic barriers
- Health literacy – individuals have difficulty obtaining, processing, and understanding basic health information

The full report may be viewed at the Public Policy Institute's website – www.ppiofmarioncounty.org.

A key result of this study was the formation of the Heart of Florida Health Center; a community health center for the medically underinsured. Although the center is open to all residents, 97% are uninsured and the family incomes are below 200% of the poverty level.

Additionally, the Greater Ocala Health Information Trust: A Regional Health Information Organization was also launched. The non-profit community-based organization establishes policies and procedures that ensure the public's Electronic Health Record will be maintained securely and privacy protected.

Dental

In 2008-2009, 355 Head Start/Early Head Start children failed dental screenings. This is approximately the same failure percentage reported in 2006-2007 – 2/3 of the children. Marion County parents of pre-school children face several challenges in reference to their children's dental health: 1) their lack of education in the importance of dental hygiene for young children 2) children may attend a school that is located closer to where parents work but actually live in an area that does not have fluoridated water 3) lack of dental insurance 4) lack of children's dental providers and 5) lack of providers accepting Medicaid. (*Early Head Start/Head Start, 2009*)

In Marion County, children who do not live in areas that receive city water do not have fluoride in their water. Fluoride treatments have shown a 35% reduction in early tooth decay. It is also noted that 10% of the children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start require major dental work by the time they are four years old.

The Marion County Health Department provides dental services for children ages 4-20 who receive Medicaid. Adults are treated only as the schedule permits. The dental clinic is located at the CFCC Hampton Center.

Requests (in addition to child care) through the local Child Care Resource & Referral office remain high for dental assistance for adults and children.

The 2007 Marion County, Florida County Health Status Summary revealed that there are 38.3 licensed dentists per 100,000 population in Marion County compared to the state statistic of 60.9 per 100,000 population.

Mental Health

- Per the WellFlorida report, morbidity data for mental health diseases and conditions are often difficult to obtain. This is in part due to the long-standing view that mental health is not a "health issue" because it does not manifest into a physical ailment.
- In May 2009, the Marion County Head Start/Early Head Start reported the following statistics in reference to the children they serve:
 - 1) Professional mental Health Classroom Screen:

- a) 75 failed screen
 - b) 6 evaluated – no services needed
 - c) 40 receiving outside professional services as a result of Head Start referrals
 - d) 23 referred
 - e) 3 parent refused services
 - f) 3 other status
- 2) Social/Emotional Screen
- a) 25 failed screen
 - b) 12 receiving outside professional services as a result of Head Start referrals
 - c) 8 referred
 - d) 3 parent denied services
 - e) 2 other status
- 3) Head Start Mental Health Services
- a) 154 referrals to outside providers
 - b) 89 active
 - c) 41 closed
 - d) 24 terminated

Additional notes reference above bullet:

The 52 children currently receiving mental health services as a result of Head Start screens are included in the 154 referrals to outside providers. The other referrals were received from parent/guardians requesting services; 34 of those referrals were for family therapy for the parent, or therapy for sibling.

The Public Policy Institute of Marion County's 2004 study topic on mental health brought attention to five key mental health issues which our community continues to work on:

- Overall coordination, communication, and awareness of the delivery of services
- Capture and maintenance of data related to access to care, availability, and continuum of care
- Available and affordable services for indigent, uninsured and underinsured populations
- Under funded diversionary programs to prevent the criminalization of mental illness
- Mental health not prioritized within community education campaigns

From that study, a Mental Health Wellness Coalition was formed. Coalition members provide annual free depression screenings for community residents.

Other issues

The Department of Children & Families reported a slight decrease in the number of investigative reports for child abuse in 2007-2008 at 4,353; 838 cases were verified. There were also two child abuse homicides in that period.

The National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Association's (NACCRRA), 2009 Child Care in the State of Florida report, revealed that the average cost of full-time center care for an infant is \$7,784 and for a 4 year-old is \$6,033.

NACCRRRA also surveyed local Child Care Resource & Referral agencies on the impact of the economic recession in their communities. Almost ¾ of the CCR&Rs said that the number of families unable to make child care payments or those falling behind in these payment has increased between June and December 2008. More than ¼ of CCR&Rs reported the number of centers in their communities had declined between the first half and second half of 2008 and 36% indicated that spaces in centers had declined during that same period. 41% of the centers reported laying-off staff. 45% reported declines in the number of Family Child Care Homes in their communities between the first and last half of 2008.

The Department of Juvenile Justice reported an increase in the number of youth charge with delinquency offenses in 2007-2008 to 1,850. The number of youth incarcerated in 2007-2008 decreased to 186. Between FY 2003-2004 and 2007-2008, the number of youth charged with violent offenses decreased from 275 to 258, a 6.2% change.

Public Services:

Transportation

According to the City of Ocala Planning Department, more than 372,000 passengers utilized the SunTran bus system in Marion County during their fiscal year ending September 30, 2008. Usage continued to increase as their routes expanded and gas prices were extremely high. This was an 8+% increase from the prior year.

Section 6: Community Resources

Marion County's Community Resource Directory is maintained by the Marion County Children's Alliance effective October 2006. This comprehensive directory includes listings of more than 150 organizations and their programs. The directory may be viewed at www.mcchildrensalliance.org.

We have several organizations that create their own "community resource" directory for use by their agency, as well as their clientele. These include various children's agencies, the County, and local law enforcement.

Marion County is "resource rich". The more 150 agencies that provide resources for this County are absolutely needed because of the high poverty rate and large percentage of children in our schools that are eligible for free and reduced lunches. Organizations which participate in the Children's Alliance and other child-associated community committees typically are connected with the best potential collaboration entities and opportunities.

Additionally, Marion County has established several community meetings which provide organizations opportunities to network and work together to make a difference in the lives of families in our county. The purpose of these meetings is to share information, new resources that might be available, as well as providing an opportunity for the leaders of the agencies to explore ways to be more effective with those that are receiving services, as well as explore options to be able to serve additional families and individuals who are qualified to receive assistance:

- Marion County Community Outreach Council -- quarterly meetings with community outreach staff of any and all organizations that are interested in attending. This Council explores options for community events, as well as works with other community events to insure information on services available is distributed through various events in the community.
- Human Services Council -- Quarterly meeting during lunch (meeting space and lunch provided by the Sheriff of Marion County) which provides agencies an opportunity to network, as well as hear a presentation from an agency in the county that is either new, has recently acquired additional services, or some other topic that is of community interest because of an event(s) in the community. The Council is sponsored by United Way of Marion County.
- Public Policy Institute Board of Directors – In partnership with Central Florida Community College, this Board explores various topics of community interest and creates a task force each year to explore the topic. The topic is researched, information is gathered, strengths and weaknesses explored, and a report is issued and released to the community at a press release. The task force then creates a committee that will review the recommendations of the Public Policy Institute and move forward with appropriate changes/recommendations as recommended by the task force. For example, one year the Public Policy Institute created a task force to study access to health services in our county. As a result of this committee, plans moved forward to re-open a community health center, Heart of Florida, in partnership with Munroe Regional Medical Center and the Marion County Health Department.
- Marion County Children’s Alliance -- This agency has been in existence since 2001 and works to ensure all children have a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment in which to grow. Their focus includes * communication, collaboration and coordination among agencies and individuals who work with children and youth; * providing a voice for children with local and state representatives and agencies; and *assistance to parents and youth to help secure needed resources and support services. The Alliance has monthly meetings where an average of over 60 agencies are represented. On an annual basis the Alliance adopts goals to and creates committees to work towards reaching those goals. Current community workgroups include childhood nutrition, autism and other disabilities, mentoring, family violence prevention, faith community network, and safe kids.
- Marion County Homeless Council -- The Coalition is a member of this Council and regularly attends meetings. The purpose of this Council is to insure collaboration among those agencies providing services for the homeless population of our county, as well as allow agencies an opportunity to brainstorm ideas to better serve this population of Marion County. Through this collaboration the Coalition has assisted with the establishment of a room for parents and children who are homeless to be used during the day to allow the parents and children a comfortable, child-friendly environment inside at The Salvation Army Shelter. The focus of much of the federal and state funding for homeless has now shifted towards prevention services.

Marion County’s Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) is a free service for any resident needing assistance and information on child care within Marion County. Staff can provide detailed information on more than 300 providers, including narrowing the information down by zip code or other requested specifics. The service may be accessed at 352-629-0055, ext. 200.

Marion County's First Call for Help (352-732-4444) is a free resource and referral line which can provide the caller contact information on all our community's resources.

Section 7 – Analyzing the Data

SUMMARY

Marion County, as is the entire nation, is currently experiencing significant economic challenges. These challenges are negatively affecting all aspects of health, education, employment, and the ability of social service agencies to financially meet the needs of their clients, including children. As of March 2009, Marion County's unemployment rate was 12.2%, 2nd highest of 23 Florida metropolitan statistical areas. Additional community funding through The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 has poised the community in a pro-active mode to effectively and immediately capitalize on this funding.

In the ten year period, 1996-2006, Marion County experienced a 37% growth rate as compared to the State at 25%. With this rapid growth came an increased demand for social services. Escalating real estate prices in 2004-2006 sky-rocketed the median sales price of a home 44% yet Marion County, as many other Florida counties, still realized an increase in sales.

As the real estate market began to level out in 2007, many aspects of Marion County's economy was, and continues to be, negatively affected by loss of construction jobs, retail sales of materials, construction permits and county property tax income. Record-high property foreclosures continue to leave Marion County families scrambling for shelter, and many homeless. In April 2009, Realty Trac of Irvin, California, listed more than 5,000 properties in Marion County in foreclosure. The rental housing market has become saturated with homes previously for sale, yet families are faced with the challenge of acquiring initial rents and deposits. The lack of average or above-wage jobs promotes the transient nature of the residents of our county. Over 50% of our children will change schools at least once during the school year.

In an effort to meet the needs of the growing population of families in Marion County, the Coalition Board of Directors has been able to increase the percentage of allocated funds for direct services for children. In FY 2008-2009, almost 90% of early learning funds were allocated for direct services yet the waiting list has grown to nearly 1,000. While some families receiving financial assistance for child care have lost their employment and therefore become ineligible for services, many more families have experienced a reduction in working hours and/or salary, and have moved into the eligible category.

Due to the state mandated requirement that Coalitions raise a 6% local community match for funding allocated to the working poor, the Coalition was required to raise \$360,000 in 2008-2009. With the continuing challenges generated by the economic climate, this goal will be increasing difficult to meet. If community match funds are not acquired, allocated funding cannot be drawn down from the state and eligible children must be placed on a waiting list for early learning services. When eligible low-income working parents who cannot afford child care are placed on a waiting list, parents are frequently forced to resign their jobs to care for their children. Thus the perpetual cycle of poverty and public assistance continues – many times throughout generations.

The rise in educational scores from preschool age through primary grades indicate the services directed to families with children in Marion County are making a positive difference.

Early learning environments in outlying areas of our county (geographic size is 1,663 square miles) remain limited. Because of the affordable housing available in the outlying areas of our county, several of these areas also experience the highest concentrations of poverty. For example, Reddick (NW part of county) has a 20% poverty rate. The outlying areas of our county also experience the most challenges with transportation to services. While Marion County has a public transportation bus system, the routes of the bus system are limited and do not include the outreaching areas of our county.

Some of the activities for increasing and improving the early learning environments available in Marion County include:

- The Coalition and Success By 6 encompass a wide variety of programs and services focusing on getting our young children ready to enter school. Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), an early learning program which provides financial assistance for child care to eligible low income working families, and the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program continue to improve early learning opportunities for families. The number of four year-olds participating in the VPK program continues to increase each year as parents and educators realize the significant positive difference that VPK plays in a child being ready to enter kindergarten.
- Coalition funded summer programs, as funding permits; child care provider professional development trainings; parent training opportunities through a partnership with United Way's Success by 6; early education resources for teachers and parents; and collaborative community partnerships.
- The Early Literacy and Learning Model (ELLM) focuses on providing children early educational experiences in literacy and kindergarten readiness skills. The Coalition continues to provide ELLM materials to approximately 15 classrooms in Marion County in which the teachers have been trained in the curriculum.
- The Success By 6 initiative continues to offer free parent education programs, including the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Powerful Parenting workshops and Caring Through Cribs due to local partnerships and private grant funding. The initiative focuses their programs in areas of the county where school readiness scores are low. Parent education remains a strong need in our community.
- Marion County has many early learning programs, including Head Start/Early Head Start, Title 1, Pre-Kindergarten, Exceptional Student Education, Teenage Parent Program, Healthy Start, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youth (HIPPPY).
- The Coalition has support services in place to assist families which have children with challenges. The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) is utilized as the first point of referral for children identified during local Coalition screenings and/or assessments and for families that contact the Coalition with concerns regarding their children. FDLRS refers

children needing evaluation to Part C Early Steps or the Part B Program for Pre-Kindergarten children with disabilities in accordance with local practices and procedures. Children who have been identified as having special needs are provided needed therapeutic services in their natural environments, including early learning settings.

In summary, while our community assessment demonstrates the strengths of our county, there continues to be many unmet needs. The effects of a decrease in one economic indicator, such as affordable housing, will have negative ripple effects throughout other indicators. The continued collaborative activities of the Coalition Board with a variety of community organizations will allow the Coalition to remain an active community partner as the needs of our residents continue to be addressed.

References and Resources:

Childhood Development Services
City of Ocala Planning Department
Department of Children & Families
Department of Juvenile Justice
Early Learning Coalition of Marion County, Inc.
Enhanced Field System (Agency for Workforce Innovation)
First Call for Help
Florida's Children at a Glance 2008
Florida Department of Education
Florida Department of Health
Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)
Head Start/Early Head Start Marion County, FL
Health Start of Florida
Heart of Florida Health Center
Kids Central, Inc.
Marion County Board of County Commissioners
Marion County Children's Alliance
Marion County Community Council Against Substance Abuse
Marion County Homeless Council
Marion County Literacy Council
Marion County Public Health Department
Marion County Public Schools
Munroe Regional Medical Center
National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Association (NACCRRA)
Ocala Marion County Economic Development Corporation
Ocala Regional Medical Center
Public Policy Institute 2007 Study: Access to Health Care
Public Policy Institute 2004 Study: Mental Health
United Way of Marion County
U.S. Census Bureau – 2007 American Community Survey
University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research
University of Florida President, Dr. Bernie Machen
USDA Economic Research Service
WellFlorida Council