

Introduction to Comprehensive Services

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Health & Nutrition Services

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Champaigne Spivey, our **Health & Nutrition Services Manager**, holds a Master's degree in Public Health, with a concentration on Maternal & Child Health. Our comprehensive Health and Nutrition program focuses on improving the overall health and well-being of the children and families we serve, from the inside out. It is important to note that undiagnosed health concerns can lead to children struggling academically. For this reason, we partner with families to ensure their child connects with their child's medical home pediatrician for their well-child visits and immunizations. Further, we provide on-site vision, hearing, and dental screenings, which can be an effective way to detect early visual and auditory impairments, determine the presence of dental concerns, and remove barriers to academic success through adequate follow up. Should a child need additional support at school in the area of child health (allergies, asthma, etc.) Champaigne ensures that a Health Plan is developed with the parent/guardian and medical provider so the child can receive needed support while at school. Studies have shown that addressing these individual needs early on can aide the child to achieve positive early learning outcomes. Here are some of the services we support and/or provide:

- Vision Screenings
- Dental Screenings
- Hearing Screenings
- Height & Weight measurements
- Blood Pressure Screenings
- Health education for parents, children & staff
- Specialized Health Plans to support health needs
- Oral health prevention and education

Would you like to be more involved in health services at Children First? Here are a few ways you can:

- Join the Health Services Advisory Committee
- Participate in the school to home health education activities with your child
- Participate in the Health Care Institute trainings



Nutrition Services Coordinator

mschwartz@childrenfirst.net;

941-953-3877; Ext. 4430

Melissa Schwartz holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Dietetics and completed a year- long Dietetic Internship at Sarasota Memorial Hospital. She has also worked as a Corporate Dietitian and as a Health Educator for WIC.

Melissa works closely with Champaigne to ensure our nutrition staff who prepare the meals for the children are providing tasty and nutritious meals that follow the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program. We emphasize cultural diversity in menu planning and provide fresh fruits and vegetables whenever possible. Parents/guardians are welcome to provide suggestions for our menus.

Should a child have food allergies or intolerances, we develop a Special Dietary plan that includes food substitutions in partnership with the child's parent/guardian and medical provider. We ensure each child receives the required food components in quantities that are recommended by the UDSA for the child's age.

For special nutritional or healthy diet support, we contract with a Registered Dietitian who can provide ideas on how to maintain/gain optimal nutritional health.

Children First is also collaborating with the University of Florida to encourage Farm to School initiatives and providing nutrition education for our Head Start children. Gardening activities are also part of this initiative.

Melissa welcomes your questions and feedback on ways that we can support each families' nutritional needs.



Disabilities (Inclusion)

With the new school year comes a new title for the *Special Needs Coordinators*. We are now introducing ourselves to staff and families as “**Early Learning Inclusion Coordinators**”. This title emphasizes our purpose to ensure that all children are included and accepted into the Children First family. Research consistently demonstrates that high quality and responsive environments in preschool are associated with positive outcomes for young children, including for children with disabilities. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging, positive social relationships and friendships and development and learning to reach their full potential. We will work alongside our comprehensive services partners to modify and accommodate whenever necessary so that all children will have active participation and access to our daily curriculum.

This year, we will again have two Early Learning Inclusion Coordinators at Children First supporting referrals, monitoring special plans, and providing information to staff and families.



Bonnie Eskell, holds an Master's degree in Psychology with a concentration in Child & Adolescent Development. She will support the sites in the northern part of our county. beskell@childrenfirst.net
941-894-8110



Jane Shaw, holds a Master's degree in Speech/Language Pathology and will support sites in the southern part of our county.
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Mental Health & Wellness



Arianne Kopacz; **Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist** (MS, Licensed Mental Health Counselor)
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Children First offers a variety of Early Childhood Mental Health services and support to children and families using a multi-tiered and dynamic approach to mental health and wellbeing by focusing not just on the individual, but also on the environment and relationships of the child or family. The Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist (ECMHS) promotes the positive social-emotional development of children by supporting their teachers and caregivers from an attachment-based, trauma-informed lens.

Some of the services provided by the ECMHS include monthly classroom visits, periodic social-emotional observations of the classroom, individual observations of children's social-emotional development and behavioral concerns, attendance at monthly classroom staffings to monitor children's progress and coordinate services, family education on infant and early childhood mental health and social-emotional development, parenting education and training, and resources for stress management and wellness. ECMHS can also serve as a liaison to facilitate referrals to mental health providers in the community. Children who indicate mental health needs can also be referred to our in-house infant and early childhood mental health therapist, who is a contracted professional from The Florida Center for Early Childhood.



Susan Miller, MS Clinical Developmental Psychology with an emphasis in Early Childhood; **Behavior Support Specialist**;
smiller@childrenfirst.net

Susan works in tandem with our ECMHS, Early Learning Inclusion Coordinators and Educational program staff to provide support and consultation that will enhance and promote a positive learning environment for the children and families. This entails participating in monthly classroom staffings where behavior concerns are identified, conducting classroom and child observations, create effective supportive strategies, and provide mentoring that will support children who have challenging behaviors and other social /emotional needs. Susan also offers support and recommendations for parents who seek ideas and resources about how to respond to their child's developmental or behavioral needs.

Kudos Corner

From Arianne Kopacz- Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist

I'd like to recognize the Green Crayon and Black Crayon teaching teams at Marieb. Black Crayon is Ms. Thea and Ms. Silvia, and Green Crayon is Ms. Ivette and Ms. Kristen. I was able to visit both classrooms the first week of school and the commitment to prioritizing social emotional development was evident. They are social-emotional superstars!

Ms. Ivette and Ms. Kristen were observed to support their children as they explored the different centers and activities available in their new classroom. Ms. Ivette also practices mindfulness regularly and looks forward to bringing this to her classroom as well. Ms. Kristen is always seeking new knowledge and resources and is always seen delighting in the children's exploration.



Ms. Thea and Ms. Silvia were observed to facilitate a very successful recall time! Children were reminded to share (the toy microphone), be kind, and listen to their friends while they shared what they did in work time. Ms. Thea is using books such as "Respect and Take Care of Things" during morning meeting to reinforce the classroom expectations and values of their school family. She consistently used the language of the book as children interacted with one another and their environment.

Even when both Black and Green Crayon children were on quarantine, it did not stop Ms. Ivette and Ms. Thea from sharing their resources and ideas with one another (empathetic teaming!).



Here are some pictures from today of them showing off some of their favorite tools that they look forward to using when their kids return. Ms. Ivette and Ms. Kristen are currently using ClassTag to send parents social-emotional activities and games, and Ms. Thea is loving using LessonPix to get materials ready for her kids!

From Jane Shaw- Early Learning Inclusion Coordinator

A big thanks a million to the Family Advocates at North Port, Yesenia Colon Morales and Charyssa Livingston who have supported me with tons of paperwork, phone calls and drive by signatures since the beginning of the year! I could never do this job without their help. You guys are great.

