Dalton-Whitfield Community “Springs into Reading”
An Archway-initiated book drive titled “Spring into Reading” kicked-off on February 14 and will conclude on March 16. Recipient organizations/programs include: local pre-k institutions, Sharing is Caring (a program for families who have earned credits by participating in parenting and enrichment classes), and Book Nooks (bookshelves containing child-appropriate books that are making their way to local businesses and waiting areas in the community). The ultimate goal of the book drive is to foster at-home reading for children with minimal exposure to books and family reading at home. To date, seven organizations are hosting book bins for donations, and approximately 400 books have been donated.
Reach Out and Read Update

Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based nonprofit that assists medical providers to promote early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms. At well visits, practitioners give new books to children birth to five years old and advice to parents/caregivers about the importance of reading aloud. The Archway Partnership Executive Committee first discussed implementing the Reach Out and Read program at its December 2012 meeting. Readers to Leaders along with a local pediatric office, the local library, and funding by faith-based organizations have begun the Reach Out and Read program in Dalton-Whitfield County.

On February 24, local leaders joined Archway staff for an information session and tour of White’s Pediatrics, one of the two local pediatric practices that have been funded for Reach Out and Read. Archway executive committee member and superintendent of Dalton Public Schools, Jim Hawkins, attended the tour and noted that the program is “high leverage” and is “giving the highest return on investment.” To date, the program has received $5,000 in funding, and more than 10,000 people have been reached.

Book Nooks Receive $3,000 in Funding

The Archway Partnership has recently launched one of its newest initiatives: Book Nooks. As a result of dedicated volunteers working through Readers to Leaders and First Five, an Archway Partnership birth-to-Pre-K work group, bookshelves containing child-appropriate books, or “book nooks”, are making their way to local businesses and waiting areas in the community. The initiative is gaining ground and popularity in the community and is now able to reach even more families and children with $3,000 combined in recent funding from two local organizations. Book nooks serve to support and enhance a literacy-rich community.
Saturday Academy: Collaboration in Action
After many discussions with the local school districts, non-profit organizations, and local citizens, it was clear that building parent capacity for the families with young children should be a top priority of our local Archway education efforts. Teachers report that children are entering kindergarten without basic readiness skills. Further, the majority of preschool-aged children in the Dalton-Whitfield community do not attend early learning environments. There are also concerns that school-aged children need additional tutoring, help with homework, and stimulating activities on the weekends. After brainstorming community solutions to support the young children and their families of the community, the idea of Saturday Academy was conceived.

Prior to kicking off a pilot program and study on March 8, Archway fostered a collaborative planning meeting. Sixteen individuals representing 12 community organizations gathered on February 24 to discuss a vision, objectives, and areas of support for the program! Funding followed suit, with private donors and organizations pledging $5,600 in support.

The pilot program began as planned on March 8, with over 45 children, 19 families, and 25 volunteers! The Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership hosted and facilitated the first of six consecutive, fun-filled Saturdays for 3-5 year olds and their families at the local Community Center. To enhance school readiness for young children and their families, community partners worked together to host parent education classes, parent-child interactive classes, and family fun time. Researchers from the University of Georgia, Georgia State, and West Georgia were assisted by faculty from our two local systems, as well as Dalton State College in assessing children's school readiness skills. At the conclusion of the pilot study, the researchers analyze parent and child data to determine if the programming was effective building parent capacity, improving home learning environments, and improving preschoolers’ school readiness skills. Pictures of the event can be seen on our Facebook page here.

Archway Speaks to Local Emerging Leaders
Archway Professional Melissa Lu recently accepted an invitation to speak to a group of local emerging leaders at the Emerging Leaders Institute on February 25. Melissa shared with the group some of Archway’s efforts in the local community and the role of the University of Georgia in these efforts. Following the presentation, many class members volunteered to assist with local initiatives.

UGA Graduate Student Conducts Focus Group Sessions
UGA graduate student Rosanna Cruz recently collaborated with Dalton-Whitfield Archway professionals to conduct three different focus group sessions on February 27. The focus groups were to assist with the development of a Dalton-Whitfield messaging campaign to foster at-home reading between caregivers/parents and children. The groups were presented with and provided insight on three different messages. Their feedback will be used to select a final message that will be promoted in the future.
Community Continues to Address Lack of Prenatal Care for Uninsured Mothers
At the most recent First Five Healthcare Subcommittee meeting on March 4, attendees were presented with a proposal from Steven Miracle, First Five Healthcare Committee member and CEO of Georgia Mountains Health Services, Inc. Georgia Mountains Health Services currently operates a local health clinic at the Gaston Community Center. The proposal presented would, ideally, combat the community-wide problem of non-existing, full-term prenatal care for many women by collaborating with the local Health Department and Hospital. Upon hearing the proposal, the group decided that a collaboration of the local health clinic and the local health department may be an effective plan for providing affordable prenatal care for the affected women and babies in the Dalton-Whitfield Community. Upcoming steps include many meetings occurring in parallel fashion: (1) a meeting with the Health Department Board to gauge interest and support of a full-term prenatal clinic; (2) a meeting with local OB/GYNs to determine levels of collaboration and support; (3) a fieldtrip to similar collaborating agencies (Hall County Health Department and Long Street Clinic in Gainesville, GA). In the meantime, Steven Miracle will take steps towards the paperwork involved in extending his clinic in the Health Department, and the Archway professionals will search for grants, funding, and will present the proposals to the Archway Executive Committee. The First Five Healthcare subcommittee will meet again at the end of April to share what they have learned and plan for future steps.

The Archway Partnership Speaks at Local Rotary Club
On March 4, Archway Professionals Melissa Lu and Katy Green spoke to the Dalton Rotary Club about the Dalton-Whitfield First Five Coalition. The presentation included the group’s current goals, community-wide challenges in prenatal care and early literacy, and accomplishments. Photos of the event can be viewed below, and the presentation can be seen here.

First Five Executive Committee Chair Dixie Kinard talks about Archway initiatives and introduces Archway Professionals Melissa Lu and Katy Green. Katy Green discusses First Five’s involvement in the community. Archway Professional Melissa Lu addresses attendees.
Archway Executive Committee Update
At the March Archway Partnership Executive Committee meeting, the group unanimously decided to form and become the board for an education initiative, with Melissa Lu as director. The goal of the group is to focus exclusively on Archway–originated education initiatives until 2015, unless an issue arises that requires a voice of support and/or resources from the group. The presentation can be viewed here. In future months the group will develop an operating strategy and budget.

Readers to Leaders: An Update
Readers to Leaders is a citizen-based group that was formed through the Archway Partnership after local government, civic, and school leaders made a pact to implement the Literacy Collaborative in both Dalton Public Schools and Whitfield County Schools. The group is focused on supporting literacy efforts outside of the classroom and ensuring that students and families have every possible opportunity to succeed.

The First Five Early Literacy subcommittee joined forces with Readers to Leaders at their latest meeting on March 12 to discuss the Week of the Young Child, an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The Purpose of Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families, and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs. The 2014 Week of the Young Child is held on April 6-12.

First Five and Readers to Leaders will host a community-wide event in honor of young children as well as their families and teachers. The event will be held on April 12 at the conclusion of Saturday Academy. Dalton Parks and Recreation will sponsor an ice cream social, and many local groups will be invited to participate and perform.

The two groups also began preparing for a community-wide summer literacy celebration that will be on July 24. The purpose of the summer literacy celebration is to come together as a community to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of early literacy.
Young Professionals of Northwest Georgia (YPONG) Project Success
YPONG put the funding that Archway secured for them from the Community Foundation of Northwest Georgia to great use on February 22 when they completed a local park revitalization. Before and after pictures are below.