

Easter Seals, Inc.

Chicago, IL
www.easter-seals.org

Children with disabilities are top-priority customers for Easter Seals. “We believe that children with disabilities are best served in inclusive child care programs,” asserts Bob Siegel, National Director of Easter Seals’ Child Development Network. “Inclusion means that children with special needs are educated in child care classrooms along side their typically developing peers, not segregated in a separate classroom for disabled kids. But, high-quality, inclusive child care is rare,” notes Siegel. In fact, 45% of mothers with infants who are disabled do not return to work because they can’t find child care.

Easter Seals’ Child Development Center Network is working to change that by increasing the amount and quality of inclusive child care available across the country. This summer, the Network in partnership with the

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), will announce new standards for accreditation of inclusive child care that spell out the policies and procedures necessary to provide quality care for all children, including those with special needs. Six sites are piloting the standards and providing regular feedback on implementation. In addition, the Network is designing a self-assessment tool to help other centers establish baseline data on program and child outcomes, identify areas that need more work, and chart their progress over time.

What next? Easter Seals will spread the word. It will use the standards, implementation guide, and assessment tool throughout its own network which

provides child care to 5,000 children. Its 88 affiliates will use these tools to provide technical assistance to other child care providers. The new standards will be presented to state administrators and at NAEYC’s annual conferences. Through all of these channels, Easter Seals is promoting a more systematic approach to inclusion. Says Siegel, “A mom should be able to walk up to a center with a special needs child and not be told that the opening has been given away when they see the child has a disability.”

Heron gives priority to organizations like Easter Seals that help children with disabilities to have access to nationally accredited child care.

