

Children's Week calls attention to kids

By Ashley Ames
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2011 Children's Week, six days dedicated to celebrating children and promoting their issues at the Florida Capitol, kicks off today.

The event — unique to Florida — is supported by more than 80 nonprofit, corporate, philanthropic and faith-based organizations and state agencies under the umbrella organization of the United Way of Florida.

The week begins with today's Hanging of the Hands. Volunteers from across Florida hang thousands of decorated paper cut-outs of children's hands in the Capitol Rotunda, where they will remain through Friday.

The hands, created by teachers and children across the state, are intended to be reminders to legislators of the importance of children and families in

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The primary events are today, Monday and Tuesday, and include a day at the Capitol Courtyard where there will be close to 100 interactive booths and information on children's programs

in Florida.

Ted Granger, United Way of Florida president, said the week is about giving children a voice.

"It's important for us to remind policy-makers and folks around the state just how critically

important our children are," he said.

This year is no exception. On the agenda for the Legislature this year are decisions involving funding for Healthy Families Florida and the separation of the School Readiness and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs. The latter could cause a significant upset in organizations like the Early Learning Coalition, Granger said.

David Lawrence, presi-

dent and co-chair of The Children's Movement of Florida, said that children need to be seen as what they are: the future of Florida.

"If I had my way, every week would be Children's Week in Florida. They would deserve no less," he said.

"This at least gives us a chance to highlight and focus on doing right by the children of this state and the families of this state."