

MINNESOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD



INITIATIVE

North Branch Area Early Childhood Coalition Member Information

February 2007

HISTORY

In 2001, the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) began to collaborate on a joint public policy initiative focused on early childhood. Recognizing that strengthening early care and education for young children and their families is the most important investment communities can make for the future, the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative was developed. The overarching goal of the *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative...A Campaign for Our Youngest Children* is to ensure that every young child has the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving, and succeeding. (Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative FACT SHEET March 2005)

The six Minnesota Initiative Foundations each began creating Early Childhood Coalitions in Greater Minnesota. To date there are 50 active coalitions (eight to ten in each of the six MIF regions) located throughout Minnesota. The network of coalitions serves as a vehicle to advance public policy, exchange ideas, share promising practices, and create a statewide groundswell of support for young children.

The purpose of the coalition development is to engage local community members in the issues of early childhood. As coalitions are formed, communities participate in a Visioning Session to identify strengths and needs of young children in the community in the areas of education, child care, physical health, mental health, recreation, community belonging and connection, etc. Coalition members include key community stakeholders such as parents, child care providers, early childhood educators, early childhood special education educators, school district leaders, public health leaders, health care providers, librarians, business owners, family service agencies, city officials, civic organization representatives, faith community representatives, elected officials, and more.

NORTH BRANCH AREA EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITION

In August of 2004 the North Branch area was awarded a grant by the Initiative Foundation to create a local early childhood coalition. A coalition coordinator was hired, community members were invited to join the coalition and were trained by the Initiative Foundation to work as a team to build on the strengths of the North Branch community and make the community an even better place for young children and families.

North Branch Area Early Childhood Coalition's vision statement:

In the North Branch area, every young child will be cherished as a member of a healthy family and a member of the community. Our children will be engaged and supported in their growth and development, and valued as an important citizen. Each family will feel connected to the community, knowledgeable about available resources within the community and empowered to access those resources regardless of their economic level.

Coalition's goal development:

A community-wide Visioning Session was held in January 2005 with almost 100 community members in attendance. People were asked what was needed to make the North Branch area "the best place for young children and families." Five priority areas were identified during this evening and were later adopted by the coalition as areas to address through goal development. These five priority areas and the identified goals of the coalition are:

- 1 Improve communications for early childhood opportunities. Action: We are developing a website to let families know about local events and opportunities, resources in the community, and links to information, organizations, and services about young children. Watch it develop at: www.EarlyChildhood-NB.org/Main.htm.

2 Educate Young Parents. Action: We will participate in and help promote activities which foster the education of young parents. We will purchase display boards to further promote educational opportunities already available to parents. These display boards will be offered to local businesses free of charge and will be updated monthly with flyers highlighting community events for families and classes, workshops, and speakers promoting parent education.

3 Provide recreation for families with young children. Action: We will offer opportunities for families to meet other families for local family gatherings and outings around North Branch and the Metro area. For more information about upcoming "Families Out and About Adventures" go to the website www.EarlyChildhood-NB.org/Main.htm or call Brenda at 651-674-5426 or Tanya at 651-237-0648. We will also assist in the development of an indoor recreation space for families at the Main Street School. In addition we will work with local park boards to ensure the unique needs of young children are considered in park maintenance projects and future park development.

4 Provide access for all preschoolers to literacy-based education. Action: We will promote literacy activities and get books into the hands of children. For example, during the 2004 Midsummer's Day parade coupons good for free books to be distributed at the library were given to families. We've also given away books at the Concert in the Park series, WIC and Immunization clinics, etc. Bins of quality books were developed and are in place for families to read while waiting at the Food Pantry, WIC and Immunization clinics, and the court house.

5 Work to increase funding for early childhood opportunities. Action: We will continue to communicate with local, state, and national policy makers regarding the needs of young children. Rob Grunewald of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank will present on the economic value of investing in early childhood to our local chamber in April of 2006. Also watch for upcoming advocacy training opportunities and ways to make a difference as an informed voter.

FUNDING

The North Branch area received a first-year \$15,000 grant from the Initiative Foundation located in Little Falls, MN. In December of 2005 the coalition was given a second year grant for project funds through the Initiative Foundation. This grant is for \$12,500, with \$2500 in matching funds from the local early childhood program. The North Branch Area School District acts as the financial sponsor of the grant.

Working with the Initiative Foundation, other supporting partners include: The McKnight Foundation The Jay and Rose Phillips Foundation The Sheltering Arms Foundation The Otto Bremer Foundation The Buuck Family Foundation.

YOUR ROLE AS A MEMBER

. Members are invited to monthly meetings of the coalition. For the 2005-06 year, the coalition has agreed to meet on the third Friday of each month from 1-2:30/3:00 PM. If the 3rd Friday falls on a holiday or non-school day for the North Branch district, the coalition meeting will be held the following Friday. Meetings are held around the community, and locations are agreed on the month before.

. Members are encouraged to be actively involved in at least one task team working on an identified goal under one of the priority areas. Task teams typically meet during a portion of the monthly meeting but occasionally will meet outside of monthly meeting time.

. Members will seek out opportunities to learn about early childhood issues and share information of interest with other members during meetings.

. Members will have an awareness of needs in the community and think of ways the coalition could work to address these needs.

. Members will raise awareness of early childhood issues and promote the coalition's work in the community. Some examples of how this could be done include:

-Take information to individual circles of influence, such as co-workers, neighbors, organizations, etc.

-Present information to community groups, such as faith, civic organizations, city, etc. -
Supporting materials available through the coalition include the Ready 4 K DVD on early childhood issues, and brochures highlighting our local work.

-Write letters to the editors and/or informational articles for our local newspapers.

-Volunteer to promote the coalition through booths and/or activities during local, community festivals, events, parades, etc.

. Members will communicate with elected officials on the importance of adequately addressing and funding the needs of young children.

YOUR INCREDIBLE REWARD FOR THIS INVOLVEMENT

You will be joining a talented, dedicated, hard-working, FUN group of people taking the initiative to make the North Branch Area a better place for our young children. Because you have helped promote family education and literacy, encouraged a greater connection of families to the community, and worked to increase public funding of early care and education,

our children will be:

-more successful in school

-better educated

-successful as future parents, employees, and community members.

North Branch Area Early Childhood Coalition Coordinator: