

## **Minnesota FFN Grant Program 2008 Report Summary**

The Family, Friend and Neighbor grant program was established through legislation passed during the 2007 session. The legislation provided for \$750,000 over a two year period. Six grants were funded throughout the state to provide early literacy and school readiness services to children in family, friend and neighbor child care settings supported by community-based partnerships.

This summary highlights project activities and other information recently reported to DHS by the FFN grantees themselves along with observations from DHS site visits with three of the projects. As required by the statutory language, the Center for Early Education & Development at the University of Minnesota is conducting a formal evaluation to be completed by February 15, 2010.

### **Project Activities**

#### ***Northland Foundation***

The Northland Foundation contains four main strategies: conduct a regional FFN caregiver outreach assessment, implement training and education strategies in the four FFN program partner sites, create a learning community among the Northland Alliance partners and create an innovative concepts fund. This project also connects FFN caregivers and the children they care for with the early childhood education programs in four school districts.

Partners include Duluth Schools Early Childhood, Carlton County Prenatal/Early Childhood Coalition, Hermantown-Proctor Early Childhood Coalition, Lake Superior School/Lake County Early Childhood Coalition of Two Harbors and Silver Bay, Arrowhead Child Care Resource and Referral, Duluth Library, Arrowhead Library System, United Way of Greater Duluth, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging and University of Minnesota – Duluth.

#### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Created Outreach Assessment tools including a parent survey and an FFN provider survey which were distributed in the community and discussed at focus groups.
- Developed and distributed a parent survey for an Employer-Based Outreach and Assessment process and awarded innovative concepts funding to the United Way of Greater Duluth to conduct an Employer-based Outreach Assessment process to survey parents.
- Purchased materials jointly for use by all partners.
- Created an FFN Home Visit Binder to be given to caregivers to which pages are added at each visit covering the activities and issues discussed.
- Awarded innovative concepts funding to four subcontractors to develop FFN Home Visitor Kits and curricula around specific themes that can be used by home visitors in each of the program areas.

- Planned and hosted community-based trainings on CPR, library story time, children and the media and challenging behaviors.
- Recruited FFN caregivers for child care training events focusing on infant and early childhood mental health and early literacy.
- Created a Play and Learn brochure to build awareness about training events and held Play and Learn events focused around specific topics.
- Created *Tips for Parents* and *Tips for Communities* sheets to support early care and education.

### ***Early Childhood Resource and Training Center***

This project focuses on urban American Indian FFN providers and the children they care for in Minneapolis. Trainers speak specifically to issues pertinent to the American Indian community. The program makes connections with providers using urban centers, clinics and libraries. Services are embedded within a licensed child care center. Providers receive mentoring from licensed staff.

Partners in this project include All Nations Early Education Center, Franklin Library, the Native American Community Clinic, and a pediatrician at the University of Minnesota for a dental care program.

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Recruited and enrolled American Indian women for Child Development Associate certificate class beginning in August.
- Purchased van for transportation.
- Cleaned and furnished learning space with developmentally appropriate materials.
- Held field trips to parks, a library, the farmer's market, the theatre and museums.
- Trained three staff members on the *Cavity Free Kids* curriculum and held a training attended by community members.
- Held trainings for caregivers on health and safety, literacy, and toxins in plastics.
- Held pancake breakfast for all the community and participants to increase interest.
- Provided home visiting with activities focused on literacy and learning, with activities and games for adults and children to do together.

### ***Library Foundation of Hennepin County***

This project has developed and implemented a community outreach model utilizing current immigrant FFN care providers and their families as Community Ambassadors to build an informal information sharing network to connect additional FFN providers and their families to the wealth of resources, information and services available in the community. Services are connected to early childhood education programs, school districts, parent education programs and family services providers.

Partners include the Alliance for Early Childhood Professionals, Minneapolis Public Schools, NW Hennepin Family Services Collaborative, City of Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, Hennepin County Child Care Licensing and Child Care Registration, Hennepin County Medical Center, Hennepin County Strategic Initiatives and

Community Engagement Department and Resources for Child Caring Child Care Resource and Referral.

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Established a formal relationship with school districts to create practice pre-schools and held practice preschool sessions for Hmong and Latino children with 12 sessions for each group in fall; the spring round will be 10 sessions.
- Created two evaluation tools and assessed participants at the beginning and end of each of the cohort programs.
- Launched two community ambassador program cohorts, each 5 months in length at which caregivers received training and were each required to talk to ten people in the community about the information and training received.
- Recruited seven different organizations to present at community ambassador training sessions for Hmong, Latino and Somali immigrants.
- Hired culturally specific parent educators and incorporated parent education activities into training sessions.
- Set up home visiting through ECFE for Hmong caregivers who could not attend training sessions.
- Community ambassador participants have gone on to enroll in ECFE programs and take early childhood training for child care providers through Resources for Child Caring.

### ***Neighborhood House***

Partners have developed culturally relevant services, interactive activities and resource fairs. They provide support for FFN caregivers through a networking system and providing access to community services. They provide outreach to FFN caregivers and support group meeting opportunities through on-site programming at low-income housing sites which offer training sessions on issues of concern to the caregivers. The Children's Museum involves the children of the caregivers in their program "For the Children" that helps children get ready for school.

Partners include CommonBond Communities, Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota (PCAM), the Children's Museum and Resources for Child Caring (RCC) Child Care Resource and Referral

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Together Time at Skyline Towers, an apartment complex managed by CommonBond, begun, with participation growing over time; participants were more willing to participate when assured of confidentiality. Together Time meets on a weekly basis. Most of the participants have children under 3.
- Reading Circle is another program held at Skyline Towers for children ages 3-5 that also connects the caregivers to a literacy program; children receive bilingual books, many are folk tales.
- A Family Fun night was held at Skyline Towers.
- Staff did outreach door knocking to identify potential FFN providers; CommonBond staff works to identify providers and remind them of sessions; and RCC has

distributed outreach materials that have successfully recruited providers to attend events.

- Neighborhood House has developed a tool to evaluate the progress of children participating in their programs based on the *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress*. The children are assessed quarterly for progress in literacy, logic building/math, physical development and socialization skills.
- RCC has worked with caregivers to help them apply for and receive grants for materials, including toys, books, and activities for children.
- PCAMN and ECE recruited FFN caregivers for 5 trainings, including CPR, developmental delays and nutrition and translated materials into Spanish, Oromo, Somali and Amharic; trainings are held at three sites; PCAM has enlisted expert support for its trainings including the University of Minnesota Extension Services and PACER.
- PCAM is also leading a caregivers network called Circle of Parents
- Eight 2 hr early family literacy modules were completed for East African families at Skyline Towers by the Children's Museum staff; a second round of sessions will be held at Homecroft School; the Children's Museum uses *Para Los Ninos*, a program that is modified to fit within the parameters of each culture for these training sessions.
- A Resource Fair is planned for April of 2009; providers will be provided transportation to the Resource Fair.
- Neighborhood House has made extensive referrals of caregivers and children to other resources.

### ***WCA Schools/Thorson Library***

The Family, Friend and Neighbor Outreach Program is a collaborative effort that provides training materials and children's activities based on the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. The library hosts play and learn groups. Other special events are organized following the ECFE model of child/adult time together and periods of separate instruction. The focus is on health, safety, nutrition and school readiness.

Partners include Thorson Memorial Library, Grant County Child and Youth Council, West Central Area Schools ECFE programs, Ashby ECFE programs, Head Start programs in Ashby, Elbow Lake, Kensington and Herman, Stevens Traverse Public Health, Lakes and Prairies Child Care Resource and Referral, the ELEAH Medical Center, the Grant County Early Childhood Initiative, the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative and the University of Minnesota Extension Nutrition Education Program.

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Put together and distributed 69 toolkits and plan to distribute 50 more. The toolkits contain a variety of pieces of general information about the county, child development, health and safety, literacy, positive discipline and learning activities information. They also include a postcard that can be sent to the Lakes and Prairies CCR&R to get more information.
- Placed ads in a variety of places and have had articles written about the program in the county papers; the news story generated more responses than the ads; the posters and bookmarks have been popular.

- Have held successful play and learn groups focusing on early literacy skills and health and safety and in the process strengthened their relationship with ECFE and the U of Minnesota Nutrition Education program. Public Health supplied bags for the participants.
- The library has created 38 "Ready to Learn" backpacks that can be checked out by FFN providers. All backpacks have surveys included to evaluate the contents, and the packs have been modified in response to comments. The packs are continually in circulation and the contents often need replacement.

### ***White Earth***

White Earth Reservation is working with Mahnomon, Becker and Clearwater counties to provide services to FFN providers. Monthly home visits with the Readmobile are provided. Readmobile stock has been improved and books and other literacy materials purchased to give to the children. Materials and events in the Ojibwe language are offered. Providers are connected to local social services. The White Earth early childhood certified staff/trainers provide assistance to, train and mentor FFN caregivers.

Partners include White Earth Early Child Care Program, White Earth Even Start, White Earth Head Start, White Earth Early Childhood Initiative Coalition, Mahnomon, Becker and Clearwater counties, White Earth Home Health Agency, Women, Infants and Children's program and Mahube Child Care Resource and Referral.

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

- Purchased first aid items such as fire extinguishers, safety gates, smoke detectors, door latches, and other health and safety items for distribution.
- Purchased CHELLO Assessment tool/user's guide and the Minnesota Ounce scale; CHELLO evaluations have started on home visits.
- Purchased items for literacy kits and put together theme-based developmentally appropriate kits with books, art/craft supplies and child development information and kits are being distributed during home visits; 19 literacy kits were distributed at home visits along with safety items.
- Larger bags were purchased to create a different style of literacy kit that includes items and props to enhance the learning environment that are loaned to participants.
- Regular Readmobile visits are very popular.
- Home visitors are seeing an increase in the numbers of books and literacy materials available in the homes.
- Information on dental care and connections to dental clinics is a valued resource for families.
- Distributed ads and brochures and have had articles in the White Earth paper.
- The initiative is working with the Home Health Life nurses to increase referrals.
- A spring training using an ECFE format on Learning and Building Friendships Through Play is planned.
- Three FFN providers attended the Brain Conference in August.

## Successes

- Participants have invited their friends and neighbors to attend programs.
- The number of participating FFN caregivers continues to grow.
- Evaluation plans and evaluation tools have been designed and distributed.
- Feedback about the toolkits distributed has been very positive.
- Children enjoy the story time from the Readmobile visits.
- Advertisements have been successful in recruiting participants.
- We have transformed a well-worn children's space to a space that is comfortable for both children and adults.
- Success was getting caregivers to attend programs.
- We are seeing an increase in the number of books, literacy materials and organizations of the learning environment on home visits.
- Our library materials for FFN caregivers are continually in circulation.
- Play and Learn groups and story hours have been well attended.

## Challenges

- We have had problems recruiting caregivers for one of our ambassador groups and are now working on building community connections.
- Caregivers cancel out before attending a meeting.
- Getting caregivers to understand that they are supposed to attend and participate with the children has been a challenge.
- The turnover rate of FFN caregivers is a challenge
- People don't see themselves as FFN caregivers.
- The time to really work on some aspects of the grant has been a challenge.
- Finding books in the right language is a problem.

## Community Impact

- Participants have stated that the trainings are helpful.
- Participants state that they will share the activities with others they know in the community.
- Children learn activities that can be practiced at home.
- Businesses were connected through the Employer-Based Outreach and Assessment process.
- Community-based events have reached 38 FFN providers.
- Numerous media articles were featured in local and regional newspapers.
- People are grateful for the resources.
- Having people complete an evaluation is a great way to ensure that they actually read the information.
- We participated in the Annual Family First Week parade with the Readmobile.
- Resource information shared with parents has helped with choice of a kindergarten.
- Our play group activities are the only play group opportunities available to some of the children.
- Participants are excited to be able to attend a free class and are sharing information with their friends and neighbors.

## **Promising Practices**

- The best way to recruit FFN caregivers is through personal connections.
- Getting out in the community and talking about the program creates energy and interest.
- Having families preview the materials provides feedback and ownership in the project.
- A Home Visitor training session provided a wonderful opportunity for the home visitors to share information, strategies and materials.
- All events are called “play and learn” to suggest a fun and non-threatening atmosphere to potential participants.
- Modifying curricula to fit within the parameters of different cultures makes participants feel comfortable discussing the topics and applying what they learn to their lives.
- Flexibility in training topics is necessary to meet the needs of the caregivers.

## **Impact of Funding**

- The funding allowed a stipend for the participants which was a recognition of their participation and very helpful to them.
- Funds enable the Museum to extend their services in a way that allows them to interact with the providers as Museum guests more personally and directly.
- The funding allows Early Childhood Family Education services to be brought to FFN caregivers as well as families.
- Funding allows the partners to order materials together and save money.
- Funding allows the project to collaborate on a series of trainings to be held in different locations.
- Funding allowed us to place advertisements in many places.
- Funding allowed us to purchase high quality materials for our “Ready to Learn” bags.
- Funding permits programs to hire necessary staff.

## **Organizational Practices**

- Partnerships are essential. Partnership meetings provide a forum for creative problem solving and development of materials.
- Having one organization as an anchor to coordinate activities and handle joint purchasing has made the project more efficient and allowed more funding for program aspects of the project.
- Having partners permits a range of activities and resources not necessarily available through one source.

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