

Report of the Early Childhood Work Group and Coordinator September 21, 2009

Caring Connections Major Project/Program Highlights

On September 10th, the Early Childhood Work Group hosted training in Fergus Falls for the Caring Connections Home Visitors and also opened it up to other early childhood staff on Infant Sign Language. It was very well received with nearly all of the home visitors attending, as well as about 20 individuals from other programs in the region. Feedback from the training was extremely positive!

This event was made possible through donations of \$400 from the Fergus Falls Sertoma Club (received last spring), and \$250 from the Fergus Falls Area Special Education Cooperative (received in September). Participants outside of the Caring Connections program were charged a \$10 fee to help cover the cost of the luncheon so the event ended up being free to the program and agency staff involved with Caring Connections.

Grant Funding Received

The Early Childhood Work Group submitted a proposal to the *Lake Region Hospital* in May and received word shortly thereafter that their request for **\$1,000** was funded. These funds were received in August and will be used to purchase books for families seen in the Caring Connections program.

ACTION REQUESTED: To increase the budget allocation to the Early Childhood Work Group by the amount of \$1,000 for a total amount of \$65,807 to include the amount received from Lake Region Hospital.

One additional grant has been submitted to the TEAM Foundation for support of the Child Care Provider visits and the group is awaiting word on whether or not they will receive that funding.

Child Care Provider Visits

As a result of collaboration among the Henning, Fergus Falls, Pelican Rapids and Perham Early Childhood Initiatives and West Central Initiative's Early Childhood Dental Network, the child care provider visits will be expanded to include a visit which will be offered to 12 of the 17 newly licensed providers as well as the families they serve. This final visit will focus exclusively on oral health and will help providers and parents to better understand the importance of establishing good oral health routines during early childhood. Providers and families will receive toothbrushes and other oral health supplies to help sustain the message.

Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP)

Otter Tail County Human Services received word over the summer that funding for PSOP will continue at least through December 2011. This is exciting news for the Early Childhood Work Group as well as the families served by the program. Because the population served has more significant needs than families with first time infants, not all of the Caring Connections Home Visitors were willing to offer visits to this subset of people. Therefore, after learning that funding would be ongoing, the Work Group decided that it would be best to seek additional home visitors to work exclusively with this component of the program in order to ensure that families in all the districts were served. In August, two new staff were brought on board to serve families in and around the Fergus Falls and Pelican Rapids communities. Services are now available in all districts and the acceptance and usages continue to climb.