

# Report of the Early Childhood Work Group and Coordinator

## March 1, 2010

### Caring Connections Program Highlights

Today the Early Childhood Work Group is presenting their Work Plan and budget request for fiscal year 2011. In preparing this information, the Work Group spent a significant amount of time collecting, compiling, and reviewing data to substantiate the need to continue this unique program. As many of you are aware, this program has been in operation since July 1, 2001, and as such, significant data has been collected over the years.

### **Program History**

In June 2004, the Caring Connections Program reached its third full year of operation, and at that time, the model consisted of offering a series of seven visits to families through their child's third birthday. At the end of that time period, the work group enlisted the services of the University of Minnesota Morris and their statistical analysis program to analyze collected data to determine outcomes of the program.

This analysis, which was completed and reported to the CEO Group in 2007, showed that families involved with the program between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2004 had the following outcomes:

- There was a significant relationship between the Caring Connections home visits and participation in Early Childhood Family Education; and
- There was a significant relationship between the Caring Connections home visits and participation in School Readiness Programs; and
- The number of visits completed positively impacted participation in the Infant Follow Along Program; and
- There was evidence to suggest that the 12 month visit was related to increased early childhood special education participation. In addition, at this same time, the Fergus Falls Area Special Education Cooperative reported a significant spike in early childhood developmental delay referrals.

### **Current Outcomes**

As of January 1, 2005, there was a significant restructuring of the program due to a decrease in Local Collaborative Time Study Funding. At that time, visits were reduced to their current status which includes a series of four home visits to first time families through the child's first birthday. The Work Group reviewed data collected since January 1, 2005, which is when the program officially reduced the visits offered to families. While there are many different data sets which were compiled and reviewed, the Work Group selected a few to report at today's meeting to validate the need to continue this program. These data sets show that:

- 1) Child Care: On average, 74% of children visited by the Caring Connections Home Visiting program spend a minimum of 21 hours per week in daycare settings. **The Work Group believes that this significantly substantiates the need to continue the Caring Connections Child Care Provider program which has provided a series of seven quality improvement home visits to nearly all licensed child care providers in the county since its inception in 2003.**

- 2) Literacy: On average, 98% of families participating in the Caring Connections Home Visits report having established a regular reading routine with their infants by 12 months of age. **Improved literacy is a key indicator of school readiness, and therefore, the Early Childhood Work Group believes this substantiates the need to continue this program.**
- 3) Health: 95% of children enrolled in Caring Connections at 12 months of age report being current with their immunization series. (Compared to the state average of 60% at age 24 months. Since we no longer have visits up to 2 years old, we have no way of knowing whether or not immunization rates for Caring Connections children drop off between 12-24 months.) 92% of children involved in the program report being on-time for routine health exams. (State average is 88%). **Routine and preventative health care is a key indicator of overall health, and therefore the Work Group believes this substantiates a need to continue the program.**
- 4) Early Intervention: Home visitors report making referrals for 3.5% of children enrolled in the program for developmental screenings. Child find data collected by the Minnesota Department of Education's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Plan indicates continued growth in Otter Tail County (OTC) related to the percent of infant and toddlers birth to three currently receiving Early Childhood Special Education services. In 2007-2008, the State target was 1.70% and OTC was 1.74% and in 2008-2009, the State target was 2.10% and OTC was 2.10%. Data indicates the current Collaborative partners working in OTC are making appropriate referrals and our established central intake for referrals is assisting in the facilitation of appropriate referrals that result in appropriate programming. Our Caring Connections participants have enhanced our success in assuring early intervention services are initiated consistently and in a timely manner. **Early intervention is a key indicator in establishing school readiness skills in children and in reducing special education incidence, and therefore, the Early Childhood Work Group believes this substantiates a need to continue the program.**
- 5) Program connections: In 2008, 70% of families enrolled in the program reported consulting with Public Health programs in the past 12 months; 18% of families reported enrolling in one or more ECFE classes; and 6% of families reported previous or current participation in Early Head Start or Head Start. **The Work Group believes that by connecting families with local resources early in their child's life, it will reduce family dependence on the "system" later in life. Therefore, the Work Group believes these trends significantly substantiate the need to continue this program.**