



1993 Consortium Connections: Fall 1993 [s]

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"Minnesota Children's Initiative"
By Michael Brott, Action for Children

"The Children's Initiative: Making Systems Work" is a major new initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, designed to demonstrate how this nation can improve the lives of its children on a broad scale. The Initiative calls for states and communities to adopt a new way of working with families, to reshape service delivery systems, and to make the investments necessary to shift from a crisis-oriented, fragmented, and inadequate approach to one of inclusion and effective supports for all children. Minnesota is one of five finalist states competing for an implementation grant of up to \$18 million over the next nine years. The other states are Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Rhode Island. The initial planning partners in Minnesota are Becker County/White Earth Reservation, Cass County/Leech Lake Reservation, and St. Paul. Together with the state, the partners are working in their own communities with families, parents and providers to make significant strides in achieving the Initiative's goals.

The Children's Initiative as a Strategy to Improve Children's

Outcomes:

The Children's Initiative seeks to ensure that children reach school-age healthy, safe, and prepared to learn, and that they are given the opportunity to complete their school years as free as possible from barriers to learning and healthy development. Thus, promoting the ability of families to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for their children is also central to the Initiative. Specifically, the Initiative seeks to achieve four pivotal outcomes:

- improved child health (including improved birth outcomes, reduced incidence of preventable childhood diseases and disabilities, and improved overall physical and mental health);
- adequate child development (including increased incidence of achieving milestones in cognitive, emotional and social development);
- reduced barriers to adequate school performance (including increased entry into school with requisite skills and behaviors, reduced need for remediation services, and reduction in preventable barriers to attendance and grade progression);
- adequate family functioning and stability (including reduced incidence of abuse and neglect, reduction in preventable barriers to family functioning, and strengthening of families' economic stability and social integration).

The Initiative calls for a reoriented approach to serving children, replacing the current fragmented systems with one that is outcomes-oriented, family-focused, systemic, inclusive, preventive, comprehensive, and community-based. The Initiative's service strategy at the front-line includes several elements:

- a system of inclusion, by which every child in a community, and his or her family, will be visible to caring professionals and receive services to the extent necessary to ensure safe and healthy development. A key feature of the system of inclusion is universal contact, at a minimum in the hospital at the time of birth, with the family of every newborn in the community.
- an appropriate continuum of services for children and families, drawn together through Family Centers.
- neighborhood-based Family Centers as a hub of the system of inclusion and the locus for family development. The vision for the Initiative is that this service strategy will over time become the child serving system of a state. This vision represents a profound shift in how society supports families with children. Bringing this vision to scale throughout a state will require changes in the way public servants perform their responsibilities, from street-level practice through midlevel management to the top level of state policy making.

Policy and system changes in three broad areas will be needed to implement, expand and sustain the Initiative's service strategy:

- changes in policies, practices and procedures related to service delivery and service access. There must be changes in policies, procedures, and practices that create barriers to serving families holistically, to providing comprehensive services, or to delivering services in timely and flexible ways.
- changes in financing strategies, budgeting and resource reallocation. These changes include increased investment in prevention services and use of multiple funding streams (including reimbursement from private insurance and fee-for-service payments, as well as public sources). In addition, they include maximization of existing federal revenues streams, reinvestment of addition revenues and savings from a reduction in the cost of failure to finance expanded services for children and families.
- changes in governance of public services. These changes are intended to provide for greater sharing of responsibility and accountability among and between the public, the private, the business and non-profit sectors, and among and between levels of government.

"The University in the Community Program" Editor's Note: This piece was adapted from Richard Broderick's article on the UIC in the July, 1993, University Update, a publication for U of M faculty, staff, and alumni. Broderick is a University Relations staff writer.

John Red Horse spoke to a group of employees from the Shooting Star Casino on the topic of "Indian Family Structure." He shared that "in the white culture, the nuclear household is the norm and it works quite well. But in the Indian Community, there is an extended kinship system." He says that Indians are now the only group in the United States with legally recognized extended families. Red Horse notes that the challenge today includes "adjusting to new ways of life in which members of extended family are not always available to help out anymore." As Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota at Duluth, and as a Native American himself, Red Horse brings a valuable combination of assets to his participation in this University in the Community (UIC) event at the White Earth Indian Reservation.

How unusual is it to find a university administrator addressing casino workers? Not too long ago, many Minnesotans considered the University of Minnesota to be an entity not particularly related to the world of people living outside the metro area. In fact, mention of "the U" generally conjured the image of one site--the Twin Cities campus.

Several years ago, the University in the Community (UIC) program was established as a step toward forging stronger links with communities throughout the state. Through the UIC program, scholars from the university visit selected communities state-wide, listening to residents discuss local issues and concerns while sharing expertise and resources. While the UIC focus has been on Children, Youth, and Families since its inception, this past year the Consortium was asked to administer the program.

During 1993, three geographic areas were targeted to share services through the UIC program. These included a West Central area (including Morris, Glenwood, Benson, and Chokio), White Earth Indian Reservation/Mahnomen County, and Hibbing. Although a master plan exists as a means of administering the program, approaches are adapted for individual communities, based on needs assessments. Area planning committees, advised by local resource persons including clergy, elected officials, educators, extension agents, and professional and lay persons in the human services, help develop approaches best suited for particular areas.

The program for the White Earth Indian Reservation was planned to include an exchange of information. University faculty were educated on Objiva culture and on the lives, needs and wishes of the White Earth community. In turn faculty shared their expertise to help the community address their concerns.

Marlene Stum, of the Family Social Science Department on the St. Paul campus, facilitated a discussion among townspeople as they assessed what seemed to be going well, and what seemed to be going less well. Residents were quick to affirm their calm lifestyle, a strong sense of community, their youth orientation, and having the necessities of life - food, housing, emotional support, and education. They expressed concern about problems common to small towns, and some challenges particular to a town faced with lifestyle changes associated with a casino in their midst.

James Kielsmeier, pioneer of a youth services program called Valued Youth Partnership in east St. Louis and a barrio of San Antonio, talked with students at the Circle of Life alternative school at the reservation. He noted that self-esteem emerges through accomplishment, and described how community contributions can fill voids in youths' lives.

Laurie Petro Jensen, Prevention Program Coordinator, led another session with teens at the local high school, discussing with them issues around the topic of "Healthy Decisions: Alcohol and Sex." The program included a discussion of personal and societal impacts of HIV and AIDS. The UIC program has already reached over 2500 people through 65 workshops offered in ten non-metro communities. The program will continue into 1994 to foster relationships between the University and the communities of the state.

"Alcohol Decisions: Promoting Positive Youth Development" by Julie Swanson, Prevention Program Training Coordinator, Center for 4-H Youth Development

Because traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds and nearly 50% of these are alcohol related, 4-H developed the Alcohol Decisions program. Alcohol Decisions trains high school students to teach 4th-6th graders about alcohol and other drugs. Teen teachers work with younger students in schools, 4-H clubs, recreation programs and other youth organizations. By preparing lessons and teaching elementary students, the teens examine their own attitudes and behaviors regarding traffic safety and chemical health. They also learn the importance and responsibility of serving as a positive role model for their peers and younger students.

Currently, there are Alcohol Decisions programs in 47 counties throughout Minnesota. Depending on community needs and priorities, teens teach lessons on traffic safety issues, the effects of alcohol and other drugs, making responsible decisions and how to recognize and deal with peer pressure.

To date, evaluation has examined the effectiveness of the program in attracting and involving high risk youth and developing and maintaining local collaboration. It has also examined the impact of teen involvement in the project on teen traffic safety attitudes and behavior.

For more information on the Alcohol Decisions Program, contact Julie Swanson, Prevention Program Training Coordinator, Center for 4-H Youth Development, 612/625-7246.

"Talkin' in the Streets"--Voices of Today's Youth"

On Friday August 27 the Minnesota Youth Coordinating Board sponsored "Talkin' in the Streets" as part of a Downtown Minneapolis weekend event entitled "Dancin' in the Streets." Young people from Minneapolis were invited to spend the morning with a mentor at their place of work. After the morning's mentorship, participants, community leaders, friends, parents and neighbors were invited to the historic State Theater for an afternoon of listening to youth voice their opinions concerning "What it's like to be young in America today."

The youth who spoke ranged in age from ten to sixteen and addressed a range of issues including gangs, violence, drugs, AIDS, peer pressure, guns, abortion, and community development. Some of the youth told personal stories of their experiences. A girl described being the victim of a purse snatching, and a boy asked adults if they knew what it was like not to be able to play in front of the house or in the park because there were drug deals occurring. Some of the youth told adults what they'd like to see change in America. Still others gave advice to their peers about things such as avoiding peer pressure, and the importance of a college education. Some of the

youth accentuated the positive. For example, one boy spoke of better opportunities for African Americans today than in the past, while a girl discussed successful recycling efforts by today's youth.

This event was the kickoff of an ongoing campaign that will encourage adults to affirm the human dignity of all of the young people they meet. Adults are being asked to sign a pledge that they will treat young people with respect, and affirm their dignity and value to our community. For more information contact the Youth Coordinating Board at 612/673-2060.

"Consortium Update"

This past spring the Consortium sponsored a Policy Day at the State Capitol. University students and faculty met with legislators, lobbyists and children's advocates to discuss what had happened for children in the last legislative session, how policies that affect children are made, and the direction of policy in the future. The event consisted of two roundtable discussions moderated by Chuck Oberg (Dept. of Pediatrics, U of MN). Participants included Senator Pat Piper, Representative Peggy Leppik, Polly Keppel/Child Care Works, Carolyn Hendrickson/Congregations Concerned for Children, Michael Brott/Action for Children, Ann Jaede/State Planning Committee, Lois Engstrom/MN Dept. of Education, Karen Carlson/MN Dept. of Health and Human Services.

We welcome four new members to the Consortium Steering Committee: Jack Rossmann, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Macalester College, Carol Ericson, Superintendent of Roseville Public Schools, Wanda Miller, Administrator for Student Wellness, St. Paul Public Schools, and John Couchman, Senior Program Officer for Health and Wellness, St. Paul Foundation.

Dr. Mary McEvoy, Department of Educational Psychology, was recently appointed as acting director to the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota. After 20 years of service as director and co-director of CEED, Dr. Richard Weinberg has stepped down from the position.

The Consortium would like to thank the following people. We greatly appreciate their contributions and commitment:

- Mary Heltsley, Dean of the College of Human Ecology, and Sau Chu, graduate student in Apparel, Housing and Design whose efforts have resulted in a great new mural outside the Consortium office.
- VP Gene Allen who has shown tremendous support both by providing funding by advocating for the Consortium among others at the University.
- Trudy Dunham, Don Riley, Brad Rugg, Daniel Torrey, 4-H Ambassadors and Consortium volunteers for a successful display at the State Fair where we were able to demonstrate the Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse.
- Dean Mary Heltsley, College of Human Ecology, and Dean Robert Bruininks, College of Education, for funding a grant writing position for the Consortium.
- Hal Grotevant, Head, Family Social Science, and Dean Mary Heltsley for providing funding for a graduate assistant to work on the Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse.
- Anne Petersen, Dean of the Graduate School and VP of Research who has provided funding to promote the activities of the Consortium related to research.
- Beth Maddock, doctoral student in Family Social Science, who worked for the Consortium this summer.
- Lynn Marrs, graduate student in Social Work, who has worked for the Consortium since the Spring of 1992.
- Megan Scott, undergraduate from Iowa State who was an intern at the Consortium this summer.

"MN Children's Summit"

On October 28, invited leaders and child advocates representing organizations from around the state will come together for a Children's Summit at Earle Brown Center. The Summit has been organized by the Consortium, Action for Children, Children's Defense Fund, Congregations Concerned for Children, the Coalition of Family Organizations, MN Business Partnership and the Minnesota State Office of Ombudsperson for Families. This daylong event will include a series of roundtable discussions about what is known to make a difference in the lives of children and how we put that knowledge to work in developing policy and programs and building strong communities for children and families. Discussion will focus on such topics as pre- and perinatal care, the developmental impact of supportive relationships with adults, the importance of helping children find a domain of competence, and the collective responsibility of communities to nurture the development of our children.

Although time and space limit the number of people who can participate in the Summit meeting, this event is only the kickoff of an ongoing effort to improve collaboration and to strengthen the link between research and practice. Highlights of the Summit will be featured in a 40-minute videotape that will be made available for community groups to use as a springboard for discussion and planning for their own children. We are confident that the ideas generated, and the connections made, at the Summit will enhance efforts that are already underway at the state level and in many Minnesota communities. The next issue of Consortium Connections will provide a summary of the Summit and suggestions of how you can build on the ideas that grow out of this exciting event.

"Work Groups in Action"

The Children, Youth and Family Consortium has five workgroups which bring together people in the community and the University to work together on various issues. The workgroups are: Advocacy, Community Education, Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse, University Teaching, Research. The next two pages describe some of the activities of these workgroups and provide information on how to become involved.

ADVOCACY WORKGROUP: The Advocacy Workgroup's central purpose is to ensure that all persons who touch on the lives and well-being of children consider whether existing or planned programs, policies, or practices are "in the best interest of the child."

Toward that end, the Workgroup convened an all-day retreat last year in which people from a variety of backgrounds worked on a set of "guiding principles." These principles together with a dozen or so "givens" have been published as a one-page fact sheet--"In the Best Interest of Children?" (see this newsletter). Copies are available for distribution to school personnel, agency staffs, policymakers, or others.

The workgroup is currently focusing on violence prevention in the lives of 6 to 12-year-old children. Two key messages are being promoted to organizations whose members are influential in the lives of these children--school

organizations, parent organizations, etc. These messages relate to (1) the importance of adult presence in the lives of children and (2) the deleterious consequences of violence in the media and in real life.

Focus group interviews were conducted recently with law enforcement officers, community center and recreation program leaders, a librarian, and other youth workers to reality-check the above actions and to get a picture of today's children. If interested in joining the Advocacy Workgroup or discussing matters identified, contact the Consortium office or workgroup co-chairs Ron Pitzer, 612/625-8169 or Katie O'Brien 612/439-0445.

UNIVERSITY TEACHING WORKGROUP

The University Teaching Workgroup is charged with helping to make the University's teaching efforts more visible to faculty, students and staff, and to bring existing talent to bear on focal issues with which the Consortium is concerned.

Activities of the University Teaching Workgroup have been and continue to be: 1) assisting CEE programmers in the development of a post-baccalaureate certificate for Children, Youth, and Family Studies; 2) helping to develop an interdisciplinary graduate seminar in Educational Psychology on the different approaches to family interventions; and 3) working with Compleat Scholar/ Practical Scholar, CEE, on a series of brown bag lunch seminars on parenting for University faculty, students and staff.

Members of the Teaching Workgroup have been involved as consultants in each of the three projects. If you are interested in joining this group, please contact Mary Lou Gilstad at 612/625-0716.

"In the Best Interest of the Child?"

The Children Youth and Family Consortium Offers a guide for Discussion, Programs, and Action.

Givens--We believe that:

*The well-being of children is of the utmost importance. All individuals in Minnesota communities are responsible for and must join together to ensure that concerns about children are a part of everyday life.

*All children must have equal rights regardless of their economic status, family structure, physical or mental situation, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, or community.

*Children in the greatest social or economic need must be a first priority.

*Actions taken to support children must consider their views.

*The development of a strong family is the best way to help children.

*As the primary nurturing unit of children, families should be supported and strengthened by society in ways that help them help themselves.

*The primary focus of services, action, and programs should be on building and promoting positive development to prevent problems.

Guiding Principles--As communities, we must assure that children are: *Able to experience play, joy, and delight and to have others delight in them

*Safe, fed, clothed, sheltered, drug-free, and cared for medically in a stable economic environment

*Loved, understood, respected, and valued for their uniqueness and views in a reciprocal trusting, and respectful relationship with adults

*Educated in a way that develops their dignity, thinking, and problem-solving

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