



Consortium Connections

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Butcher, Baker, Tinker, Tailor:
Communities Working Together for Children and Families

Remember the childhood rhyme that starts "Butcher, Baker, Tinker, Tailor?" Let's eavesdrop on these four citizens, meeting to decide what they could do to make their community a better place for children and families.

The Butcher, being an outspoken individual, began the meeting by pronouncing that everyone would be much better off, if only the citizens were better nourished. She proposed a program that enhanced beef production, noting that this would not only improve nutrition, but would also provide added income for the area's beef cattle farmers.

The Baker, not wanting to be outdone, chimed in that he agreed poor nutrition was at the root of all their troubles, but he thought perhaps it would be better to begin by encouraging wheat production. In this way, the citizens would be better nourished, and the beef farmers would have better food for their cattle.

The Tinker, who had sat quietly through the discussion, was unable to remain quiet for another moment. "You're both forgetting," she said, "that in order for either the beef farmers or the wheat farmers, or the two of you, to improve the lives of children in this community, we first need to focus on having more machinery around, farm equipment, butchering tools, and bakery appliances."

The Tailor, who was very meek, realized that all eyes were upon him. Gulping, he ventured his opinion that before anyone could do anything that had already been mentioned, people needed to be well clothed for the harsh winter.

Noticing that their allocated time had expired, the four citizens agreed that something had to be done, and someone needed to do something about it.

They agreed to meet again sometime.

You won't meet these four individuals at the exciting community initiatives that are the focus of this issue of Consortium Connections. Instead, you will learn about creative, holistic efforts by a number of communities across the state to improve the lives of their children and families. On pages 2 and 3, Marilyn Larson and Michael Brott write about The Community Connectors Institute (CCI), a project of the Consortium that is funded by The McKnight Foundation. CCI has been working in three communities in Minnesota, facilitating citizens working together for children and families. The article describes this model project and some of the theory that went into developing it. On page 3 you will find excerpts from an article that highlights some constants that make programs successful. Pages 4, 5, and 6 include brief descriptions of nine community initiatives across the state that are making a difference.

We hope that this issue of Consortium Connections will help us all write a new ending to the fable of the Butcher, Baker, Tinker, Tailor; one where the citizens in the community can come together, reach agreement, and take actions that will benefit the well-being of children and families.

The Community Connectors Institute
Marilyn Larson and Michael Brott

The Community Connectors Institute (CCI) is an initiative actively working to fulfill the Consortium's mission of connecting University resources with community needs. Funded by The McKnight Foundation, and housed at the Consortium since it was formalized in May of 1994, CCI has been hard at work facilitating local citizens working together in three Minnesota communities. CCI exists to strengthen communities through cross-disciplinary focus and vision, toward the goal of supporting children and families. CCI is working intensively with front-line workers (including teachers, clergy, nurses, social workers, and law enforcement personnel), agency and institution directors, and policy makers in Lake County, Winona, and a Minneapolis neighborhood. By the end of the three-year program, CCI participants from each community will have spent over 30 days together, developing a shared vision of what they want for their community, creating a common language, and working together across their various professions and agencies to create leadership and resources. The focus of CCI's work is to identify "best practices" in the community, practices that will produce the best outcomes for children, and then begin to implement these in the community's programs and services.

CCI emerged from a careful study that integrated both the current professional literature and information acquired from interviews with parents, youth, front-line workers, and those who train and manage front-line workers. This information was subsequently validated and enhanced by a panel of national and state experts, whose recommendations were integrated into the format, design, and content of the CCI learning model. CCI operates from the belief that in order to produce positive outcomes for children and families, community institutions and

programs must have skilled, caring staff who can work across disciplines.

As it happened, CCI efforts emerged simultaneously with a movement of private and public funding agencies toward collaborative service delivery efforts. This movement provides encouragement for agencies and institutions to develop sincere, effective working arrangements with and among each other. Together, the efforts are envisioned as an integrated approach that is culturally respectful, involves input from service recipients, and encompasses an entire community in defining and creating a vision of child and family well-being.

PHASE I - Creating A Vision

Many efforts toward collaboration are in progress, both in Minnesota and in the nation. CCI is unique in its focus on relationship-building between participants and their respective organizations, and in its efforts to model and strengthen the leadership skills necessary for the collaborative efforts to continue long after the funding period. CCI operates from the perspective that strong and healthy relationships are the solid foundation upon which collaborative ventures are based. In addition to relationship- and team-building, CCI participants have addressed issues of personal care, power and powerlessness, personal and shared leadership, time management, and learning about each other's disciplines and organizations. Participants developed a shared vision, which represents citizens' opinions concerning the priorities in their communities. Shared vision is an important CCI concept because the vision is the "container" which holds the group together in their collaborative efforts. Whole systems thinking lies at the heart of the CCI effort. Participants bring individual professional frameworks, complete with languages of their own, which means that there may be twenty or more views of an issue and how it should be addressed. Learning to see and think across disciplines means learning to look with a broader lens. In practice, this might mean that a public school teacher would ask himself, "How does what I do, as a first grade teacher, relate to the whole Winona picture for the children, youth, and families that are touched in some way by my class?" Participants report seeing ripple effects that reflect some CCI processes and activities becoming integrated into other groups and initiatives in their communities.

As part of whole systems work, CCI participants developed a list of best practices, first by learning what Lisbeth Schorr and others have described as common best practices that appear across programs and services, and result in positive outcomes for children and families, and second, by identifying best practices within their own discrete disciplines. Although terminology and differences in emphasis were identified in the various sources, many of the best practices identified by organizations and disciplines corresponded with those from other disciplines and those identified by Schorr. Best practices are not refined, lofty statements. Rather, CCI participants simply asked "How do I want to be treated, and what is best for all children and families in our community?" Some of the many responses were:

convey respect at all times from our organization to children and their families meet children's needs flexibly

build partnerships with families and children by discovering their strengths and their personal goals and aspirations

focus on people rather than "the system"

expect people to be responsible, respectful and resourceful

model what we have learned

partner with families by having an open, honest dialogue, but respect their individual family values and traditions

Training for whole-systems thinking is multi-directional, with front-line workers endeavoring toward best practices that will have positive outcomes. This thinking affects the way institutions organize themselves to support front-line workers, with a "trickle up" perspective where the managers and policies are influenced by feedback from the workers. This way of thinking provides nurture and belief that fosters the best work to happen.

PHASE II - Implementing Best Practices

As CCI moves into its next year, participants will focus on individual institutions. This activity will involve movement from creation of vision to implementation of two or three best practices in all the participating community agencies and institutions. This requires commitment from schools, health facilities, social service agencies, places of worship, and various other agencies, working together to pursue the practices identified by their peers as high priority needs. In addition, it will involve training programs that enable the agencies to sustain those practices over time. Accomplishing the goals of Phase II will also require instilling an impetus in the participants to celebrate what they have done, and to encourage them to persist while meeting formally less often. It is critical that the participants feel sufficiently strong to pursue the work. One of the challenges of the CCI endeavor occurs when the community begins to institutionalize people's personal contributions. At this point, there exists a possibility that the work will become "bureaucratized," with regulations and policies stopping or slowing the forward momentum. CCI will assist the participants in identifying means by which organizations can systematize flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness to families in ways that avoid stifling abilities to respond to family needs.

With the recognition that the total needs of all children and families cannot be met through formal service channels, CCI participants have prioritized the need to work within their organizations and within CCI toward development of an informal sustaining support for children and families. Participants want to introduce their communities to the values and behaviors that say "We care for our friends, our neighbors, our relatives. Each of us wants to encourage each citizen to take some responsibility for developing assets in our children and youth." A big part of the work will involve introduction of this concept into organizations and civic groups.

The insight and wisdom gleaned from CCI work thus far is valuable to the University as it determines how to prepare students for their future interaction with children and families. Through community interaction, all of us

can help children and families succeed in ways most appropriate for them. Some ways envisioned for this to happen include symposia to share the work in progress; graduate student practica at CCI community sites; use of the Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse and interactive bulletin board to facilitate new communication; and participation by cross-disciplinary teams of community members in applied classes across various departments.

For more information about the Community Connectors Institute, call 612-922-8018, or write 4317 Upton Avenue South, Suite A, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

If you're involved in an initiative that has a similar mission to the initiatives described in these pages, and if you would like to communicate with us and others about our learnings, please call or write the Community Connectors Institute. (See address, above).

Successful Programs

Excerpt from workshop article "Effective Services for Young Children" by Lisbeth Schorr, Deborah Both, and Carol Copple. The background paper by Lisbeth Schorr draws on the book, *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (Schorr 1988)

Successful programs are comprehensive, flexible, and responsive. They take responsibility for providing easy and coherent access to services that are sufficiently extensive and intensive to meet the major needs of those they work with. They overcome fragmentation through staff versatility, flexibility and active collaboration across bureaucratic and professional boundaries.

Programs that are successful with the most disadvantaged populations persevere in their efforts to reach the hardest-to-reach and tailor their services to respond to the distinctive needs of those at greatest risk. Many of the programs providing health, education, and social services to multiple disadvantaged children and families find it essential to combine these services with the supports traditionally provided by the families.

Successful programs have common theoretical foundations that undergird their client-centered and preventative orientation. Staff of these programs believe in what they are doing. Effective programs seek to replace the prevailing preoccupation with failure and episodic intervention with an orientation that is long-term, preventative and empowering.

Staff in successful programs have the time, training, skills and institutional support necessary to create an accepting environment and to build relationships of trust and respect with children and families. They work in settings that allow them to develop meaningful one-to-one relationships, and to provide services respectfully, ungrudgingly, and collaboratively. Moreover, frontline workers in these programs are given the same respect, nurturing, and support by program managers that they are expected to extend to those they serve.

Successful programs deal with the child as an individual and as part of a family, and with the family as part of a neighborhood and a community. Most successful programs have deep roots in the community and respond to needs perceived and identified by the community. They tend to work with two, and often three, generations, collaborating with parents and local communities to create programs and institutions that respond to unique needs of different individuals and populations.

Successful programs are well managed, usually by highly competent, energetic, committed and responsible individuals with clearly identifiable skills and attitudes. Contrary to the common belief that great charisma is essential for running a successful program, managers of effective programs have identifiable attributes that can be learned and systematically encouraged, such as a willingness to experiment and take risks, to tolerate ambiguity, and to allow staff to make flexible, individualized decisions.

Nine Community Initiatives Across Minnesota

Teens Networking Together

St. Paul, MN

Teens Networking Together (TNT) is a program for youth, 13-18 years of age. TNT is housed in the West Side Citizens Organization (WSCO) of St. Paul and shares their mission, but with a teen focus. Teens Networking Together is an action oriented, neighborhood based organization empowering teens to participate in and advocate for solutions to West Side community youth issues. TNT began in 1990 as West Side youth began to organize around issues that concerned them: racism, neighborhood crime, the escalation of gang violence, and the need to change the negative attitudes towards teens. TNT has a board of teens, modeled after WSCO's structure. In addition, there are 10 working groups, focusing on issues of concern to teens, such as Teens Running Our Own Streets (TROOS) which addresses crime and violence prevention and Sisters In Action (SIA) which focuses on female self-assertiveness and empowerment. Currently there are 150 teens who are regular, active members of TNT. Programs and special events reach out to larger numbers of youth in the community. The majority of TNT members come from low-income and working class backgrounds and are representative of Latino, Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese, African American, Anglo, and Native American communities. Teens Networking Together is run by and for teens; their voices and their actions are TNT.

For more information, contact

Armando Cavazos

Director

Teens Networking Together

625 Stryker

St. Paul, MN 55107

ph: (612) 293-1708

fax: (612) 293-0115

KIDS PLUS

Duluth, MN

KIDS PLUS is a comprehensive long-range strategy to improve the well-being of youth and children in northeastern Minnesota through the formation of local coalitions of parents, youth, and service professionals. These coalitions serve as focal points for discussion and action on relevant issues, as well as catalysts for program and service development. Currently, there are ten community coalitions located in seven counties. The sites, selected to reflect the diversity of the region, include: International Falls, Silver Bay, Barnum, McGregor, Bovey-Coleraine, Hibbing, Grand Portage Reservation, Hermantown, West Duluth (neighborhood), and Grand Marais. KIDS PLUS also sponsors an annual conference called "Connecting Kids and Community." The Northland Foundation, which has coordinated the initiative since it began three years ago, notes many lessons learned: with support, communities can come together to improve the well-being of children and youth; community collaborative efforts can help to change community attitudes; developing a community-held vision for children and youth is critical for designing effective projects and programs; and the opportunity for different communities to exchange information at the annual meeting enriches everyone. In addition, the Northland Foundation has increased its ability to respond to issues facing children and youth in northeastern Minnesota. The program will be expanding to include additional sites in the region.

For more information, contact: Lynn Haglin, KIDS PLUS Director, Northland Foundation, 332 W. Superior Street, Ste 600, Duluth, MN 55802
ph: (218) 723-4040 fax: (218) 723-4048

The Village Concept
Stillwater, MN

The Village Concept is a child-centered, family-focused effort to mobilize community support and resources for children and youth. The "village" includes children, families, citizens, and people who work with non-profit agencies supported by the St. Croix Area United Way, Washington County Social Services and Health Services, and the Stillwater Area Schools.

Action Teams are working toward needed changes in five areas. The Family Support Team is sponsoring training on mapping social support networks which will be ongoing, cross generations, and involve whole communities. The Staff Support Team hosted a symposium, bringing together people who are effective in their work to share common attributes of effectiveness.

The Information and Referral Team is planning conversations to learn from the agency staff person who first responds to phone calls from consumers. This is a first step to effective and efficient use of the assets in the community. The Healthy Community Team is considering several ideas, possibly an adolescent "health fair" with the local hospital. The Communication Team is working toward improved awareness of, and access to, the many resources in the area.

The community is learning that change in systems comes in small steps. Increased trust and understanding are built by carefully planned and celebrated experiences.

For more information, contact:

Katie O'Brien
The Village Concept
115 Martha Street
Stillwater, MN 55082
ph: (612) 439-0445

St. Paul New Americans Program
St. Paul, MN

The St. Paul New Americans Program (SNAP) is designed to help newcomers to the U.S. become familiar with their new homeland, accustomed to the American culture, and aware of the means to achieve self-sufficiency. The program focuses on providing increased confidence, positive support, and beneficial services to refugees and immigrants. SNAP is a collaborative program between the St. Paul School District and the City of St. Paul. SNAP also works with more than 30 agencies and organizations to provide services and programs. SNAP began in the fall of 1990 in response to a series of events that tragically affected the Southeast Asian community in St. Paul. Organizers have learned that the needs of the community are constantly in a state of flux and effective programs are ones which are able to change to meet the evolving needs of the community. Those needs are best identified by consistently being a part of the community.

For more information, contact:

Tom Lyons, Jr.
St. Paul New Americans Program
740 West Rose
St. Paul, MN 55117
ph: (612) 293-5989
fax: (612) 293-8806

Three Children's Initiatives Create Family Centers

The mission of the MN Children's Initiative is to bring families and communities together to improve child health and development, make every child ready and able to learn, and improve family functioning. The initiative, being implemented in Becker County, Cass County/Leech Lake Reservation, and St. Paul/Ramsey County, is designed to create changes in the service delivery system for families and children. The goal is to make government more

streamlined, efficient, and helpful in reducing barriers, thus making the system more inclusive and better able to serve its customers. To achieve this goal the three initiatives are opening family centers where a variety of services will be offered to children, birth to six years of age, and their families. Staff will be trained to empower families to help themselves, and the latest technology will be used to link agencies together and simplify intake and referral procedures. The Children's Initiative is currently in its first year of a three-year implementation phase.

Becker County Children's Initiative
Detroit Lakes, MN

The Becker County Children's Initiative is a collaborative with three primary partners - public health, the Detroit Lakes School District, and the County board (representing Human Services). Other partners include the White Earth Indian Reservation, the public library, County Extension, the Crisis Center, and the hospital. Consumers comprise 51 percent of the governing board. After two years of planning, Becker County Children's Initiative is on its way toward implementation.

Collaboration takes tremendous time and patience. Members of the initiative know that they are breaking new ground with nothing to really guide them. Staying focused on the common goal - improved outcomes for children - allows them to weather the ups and downs.

For more information, contact:
Beth Walter
Becker County Children's Initiative
P.O. Box 24
Detroit Lakes, MN 56502
ph: (218) 847-5988
fax: (218) 847-9077

Cass County/Leech Lake
Reservation Children's Initiative
Walker, MN

Family centers are being developed in communities throughout Cass County/ Leech Lake Reservation. The centers will serve as resources for families, focal points for the community, and local centers for government services.

Part of the goal of the initiative is to restructure the way services are delivered so that there is more cooperation and collaboration between agencies.

The initiative itself is a model collaboration with representatives from local agencies, five area school districts, Leech Lake Reservation, non-profit organizations, county government, and concerned individuals/consumers. It is anticipated that several family centers will open this spring. The success of the initiative is credited to the shared vision for systems change and the willingness of the key players to stay involved and work collaboratively for the best interest of families.

For more information, contact: Jim Clark Project Coordinator, Cass County/Leech Lake Reservation Children's Initiative
Box 274
Walker, MN 56484
ph and fax: (218) 547-3253

St. Paul/Ramsey County
Children's Initiative
St. Paul, MN

The SPRC-Children's Initiative is creating neighborhood-based family centers where access to information and services will be simplified.

The need for these centers was identified during town meetings with parents who spoke out about their sense of isolation, their frustration with the system, their irritation over the myriad of forms required by systems designed to serve them, and what they perceived to be a lack of respect from providers. The centers were designed with the help of parents, neighborhood groups and organizations and other constituents including the City of St. Paul, the St. Paul Public Schools, Ramsey county, local private foundations and other private funders, and service providers.

For more information, contact:
Kathleen Vellenga
Children's Initiative Coordinator
St. Paul/Ramsey County Children's Initiative - Wilder Foundation 919 Lafond Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
ph: (612) 659-6042
fax: (612) 642-4068

Children First
St. Louis Park, MN

The "Children First" initiative in St. Louis Park is a partnership between education, business, city, health, and religious communities to design and pursue mechanisms which will contribute to the healthy development of children and youth from birth to 18 years of age. The initiative is applying the lessons learned from research involving 300,000 students in 620 cities, including more than 50 Minnesota cities.

The study, conducted by Minnesota-based Search Institute, identified 30 building blocks, or assets, for healthy

development including: family support and parent communication, links with other adults, extracurricular and community activity, religion, assertiveness and planning skills, and caring for others. Fewer assets increases the likelihood for chemical abuse, anti-social behavior, school failure and other at-risk traits. A survey of more than 1,000 St. Louis Park students indicated an average asset base of 16.7; the national average is 16.3. With funding from foundation grants, the initiative hired a coordinator this fall to work with the partnership groups and with St. Louis Park's 34 neighborhoods. Activities have included older adults volunteering at school bus stops; uniformed police and firefighters serving meals in elementary schools; a clinic providing free vaccines in a low-income neighborhood; and a book club for mothers centered on youth issues. "Children First" believes that collectively these efforts will strengthen the sense of community and create a more caring city for children. For more information, contact:

Karen Atkinson
Children First
6425 West 33rd Street
St. Louis Park, MN 55426
ph: (612) 928-6075
fax: (612) 928-6020

K.I.D.S. - Handle with Care
Red Wing, MN

K.I.D.S. (Kinder Intervention and Discipline Styles) - Handle with Care's mission is to reverse societal acceptance of physical punishment by teaching alternative discipline styles. The KIDS project began in 1993 with a telephone survey of 1,003 parents in the Red Wing area and another similar community to document local parental discipline styles. The survey found that about 83 percent of the parents surveyed said they had hit their child, 35 percent having done so in the past year.

The survey provided the focus for this three-year plus violence prevention project coordinated by the Minnesota Extension Service in Goodhue County and involving a coalition of 30 professional and community citizens. The KIDS project intends to create an awareness of the harmful effects of punishment; reduce the social acceptance of the use of physical punishment; educate the Goodhue County community about alternative methods of discipline; and participate in a long-term research project to evaluate educational and awareness programs.

Programs include a "No-Hit Day," when area residents are asked to display a blue ribbon to demonstrate support for stopping the spanking and hitting of children; classes for parents on discipline; and the production of a kitchen magnet to remind parents of positive discipline methods. For more information, contact

Kathleen Olson
Extension Educator
University of Minnesota
MES-Goodhue County
Room 105 5th Street West
Red Wing, MN 55066-2540
ph: (612) 385-3100
fax: (612) 385-3258
Internet: kolson@mes.umn.edu

Consortium
Update

Erika Graue joins the Consortium staff as Office Specialist. Erika comes to us from Boulder, Colorado, where she spent the last six years teaching at the elementary and middle school levels, delivering teacher-training workshops, writing resource materials for teachers, and serving on curriculum reform and development teams at the local, state, and national levels. Erika has an M.A. in education, with an emphasis on Curriculum and Instruction and a B.A. in Sociology with a focus on Health and Illness. Both degrees were awarded from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The Consortium welcomes the following new members to its Advisory Council: Sharon Vegoe, Professional Development and Conference Services and the School of Nursing at the U of MN; Mao Yang, Ombudsperson for Asian Pacific Families, State Office of Ombudsperson for Families, and Lynn Galle, Director of the Shirley G. Moore Laboratory Nursery School at the U of M.

We proudly announce that Marian Heinrichs, who has worked at the Consortium for the past year and a half, received her Ph.D. in Child Development in December. Marian continues on our staff as Community Program Specialist.

Geraldine Brookins, Ph.D., has been elected by the American Psychological Association to serve a three year term on the Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest.

Expansion of CEC (Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse) is progressing quickly. An Advisory Board has been formed and three new content areas have been added: youth, adoptive families, and Southeast Asian families. CEC is now on World Wide Web on Internet which enables users with appropriate software to access multimedia information including pictures and sound. Fathernet (see Fall '94 Consortium Connections) is being widely used, with lively ongoing discussions on the chatline. For more info call Lori Bock at 612-625-7251.

The Consortium was a partner in a grant (\$425,000) awarded by the National Telecommunications Information Admin. to the MN Extension Service. This project will increase public access to computer information throughout MN and will help citizens gain access and skills to use CEC and other on-line electronic resources.

The Consortium has received a grant from the State of Minnesota through the Higher Education Coordinating Board to foster transdisciplinary professional education in service to children and families.

The Consortium celebrated its 3rd Birthday on 10/31/94. Following a premier showing of the video from the MN Children's Summit, Rich Weinberg facilitated a panel discussion on next steps for Minnesota children. In addition, the Consortium Annual Award for Distinguished Service was presented to Erna Fishhaut and Mary Lou Gilstad. Rich Weinberg and Jan Joannides were also honored for their service to the Consortium.

From November 15 - December 15, 1994, the Consortium and Chi Psy conducted the annual book drive, "Food for Thought." Nearly 1,200 books were donated and then delivered to various sites across the Twin Cities.

Consortium Director Marti Erickson is facilitating the planning board for a Father-to-Father Initiative. The group is preparing a proposal for a planning grant. The Consortium also played a key role in bringing together top researchers from around the country to discuss strategies for collaboration on fathering research. This meeting was held in Massachusetts in December.

Marti Erickson was interviewed by CBS-"48 Hours" regarding parent-child attachment problems as an underlying cause of youth violence, and her prevention intervention work through the STEEP program.

The Consortium has been asked by Vice President Gore to co-sponsor the Family Reunion IV conference tentatively scheduled for July 9- 10, 1995. The conference will focus on the impact of media on children's development and family functioning. In anticipation of the conference, the Consortium will be creating a media section within CEC.

A conference on the needs of Southeast Asian children and families is in the early planning stages for a possible spring 1995 date. The conference will be held in partnership with St. Paul's Southeast Asian Coalition and the U of M's Southeast Asian Research Studies.

The Consortium will co-sponsor an International Symposium on Adolescent Health in the Twin Cities, March 17-19. The Symposium is being produced by the Adolescent Health Program at the U of M.

Connection Corner

Action for Children Joins CEC

In January 1995, Action for Children joined the Consortium in providing information to the public about the state of Minnesota's children on-line. Action for Children, a bipartisan organization made up of representatives from the public, private and non profit sectors, was created by Governor Arne H. Carlson in 1991 to develop recommendations for bettering the lives of Minnesota's children. Action for Children published a long-range plan, Kids Can't Wait: Action for Minnesota's Children in 1992 and First Steps: Kids Can't Wait 1994 Progress Report.

In October 1994, Action for Children began a new phase of its public information campaign with the distribution of media packets containing information on experts to call, best practices, reports, and stories from communities around the state about changing systems for the better. The media packets will be available through the Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse under the title, Action for Children. For more information, call Kathy Bardins, public awareness director at 612-541-9363 or Dianne Marsh, Minnesota Planning at 612-296-7939.

Worthy Wage Day - April 27

The Worthy Wage Campaign is a multi-year campaign to raise public awareness and find solutions to the low compensation of child care providers. In Minnesota, the average starting wage for a child care teacher is \$6.50/hour, and there is a 40% turnover in staff yearly. The average cost of care for a preschooler in the state is approximately \$5,000 per year. The challenge is to compensate child care providers with a living wage while recognizing that child care is expensive for families. To help voice the need for a child care system that nurtures children and pays living wages to caregivers, call Margaret Boyer, director of Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals to lend your support, 612-721-4246.

If you have items for the Spring issue's Connection Corner please send them to the Consortium office by April 15, 1995.

More Money For Families!

The Consortium, as a member of the Minnesota Alliance for Children, is working to get the word out on tax credits that can benefit working families. Workers with low to moderate incomes can put more money in their pockets this tax season if they qualify for the federal Earned Income Credit and state Working Family Credit. These tax benefits are designed to help working families make ends meet. Last year Minnesota families that received money through these tax credits shared in over 160 million dollars -- an average of nearly \$1,100 per family!

Who's eligible and for how much?

Workers making less than \$23,755 who have one child at home may get up to \$2,343.

Workers making less than \$25,296 who have two or more children at home may get up to \$2,907.

Workers without children who make less than \$9,000 and are 25-64 years old may get up to \$351.

Even though some workers may not earn enough to be required to file tax returns or have taxes taken out of their paychecks, they may still qualify for a refund.

Free Help Available!

The only way to get this extra money is to file federal and state tax forms. Beginning in February, trained volunteer tax preparers will help people with the tax forms - for FREE!

Information about the tax credits can be found in state and federal tax booklets. During tax filing season, people can call 296-6417 in the Twin Cities or 1-800-937-5437 in other parts of the state to find out where to get free tax help. People with hearing or communications impairments may call 1-800-829-4059 for **TDD**.

Consortium Calendar

February 15 Early Identification of Mental Health Needs of Children and Youth and Access to Services workshop will be held at the Earle Brown Center in St. Paul. Sponsored by the Maternal Child Health Section of the Minnesota Department of Health, the workshop will also be presented in Mankato on March 8, Eveleth on April 12, Alexandria on May 17, and Bemidji on June 14. For registration information contact: Maria C. Rubin at 612-623-5342.

March 9 Twin Cities Youth Policy Forum, The Experience of Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/ Transgender Youth and Working Effectively with Them, 1:30 - 4:30 pm. For information call Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner or Rebecca Saito at Search Institute, 612-376-8955.

March 17-19 International Symposium on Adolescent Health in the Twin Cities, The Symposium is being produced by the Adolescent Health Program at the U of M, co-sponsored by the Consortium. For more information contact Linda Boche at 612/626-1980.

April 5 A Place for Children, symposium sponsored by the Child Abuse Prevention Studies Program(CAPS), 4 - 6 pm at the Earle Brown Center on the St. Paul Campus. A presentation will be given by Dr. Marti Erickson, followed by a panel discussion. For information on the symposium or on the CAPS program (offered through the U of M School of Social Work and Continuing Education and Extension) call Ann Ahlquist 612-624-1680.

May 4 & 5 Community Challenges and Responsibilities: Issues in Teen Pregnancy and Teen Parenting. This conference, which will be held at the Earle Brown Center in St. Paul, is presented by the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPP). For information call Teresa at 612-296-6550 or 1-800-657-3697.

May 18 Twin Cities Youth Policy Forum, Legal Issues as They Relate to Youth and Youthworkers, 1:30 - 4:30 pm. For more information call Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner or Rebecca Saito at Search Institute at 612-376-8955.

May 19 Minnesota Gerontological Society Spring Conference focusing on issues of diversity and aging. Keynote address by James Jackson, distinguished scholar on race, ethnicity, health and mental behaviors, and the director of the African American Mental Health Research Center at the University of Michigan. For information contact Renae Oswald-Anderson at 612-696-0311. (Dr. Jackson will also be teaching two courses on diversity and aging at the U of M spring quarter as a guest of the All-University Council on Aging.)

Submit entries for calendar to the Consortium office. Spring issue deadline is April 15.

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