



# Responsibilities of the Born Learning Delegation

## Background

United Way of Dane County and the Dane County community have a history of involvement in early childhood initiatives.

**Start Smart Dane County (early 1990's)** At the request of then Mayor Paul Soglin, United Way of Dane County led a team of community leaders to discuss school readiness. At the time there were national conversations on the relationship between early learning and adult criminal behavior. After five years of initiative work there was improved system collaboration around childcare standards, childcare center learning and development around literacy, a community reading initiative "Take 5" and the publishing of a Family Friendly Employer Best Practices Guide

**Birth to Four Initiative (2003 – 2004)** United Way of Dane County was asked to lead a team of community leaders in partnership with the Wisconsin State Journal's extended coverage of early childhood issues. The result was the "acceptance" of responsibility by community institutions for four categories of work: City of Madison (childcare), Dane County (child abuse prevention), Madison Metropolitan School District (exploration of 4 year old kindergarten), and United Way (parent support and education). We responded by expanding home visitation for first time parents at risk of abuse or neglect and developing Preschools of Hope.

Over the past year, we have engaged donors, the general community, child care providers and conducted focus groups with businesses, grandparents raising their grandchildren and professionals in the field of parent education. The results of those community engagements have narrowed our focus on parent education.

## Why It Matters

- The quality of life for a child and the contributions the child makes to society as an adult can be traced back to the first few years of life. From birth until about 5 years old a child undergoes tremendous growth and change. If this period of life includes support for growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social-emotional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school and later contribute to society. However, without support during these early years, a child is more likely to drop out of school, receive welfare benefits and commit crime. (Arthur Rolnick, Sr. VP and Director of Research, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.)
- In 2006, 42% of children who were screened prior to entering school did not have age appropriate skill. The remaining sixteen districts in Dane County are not uniformly assessing K-readiness ahead of kindergarten entrance.
- Children from middle-income families are read to approximately 1,000 hours by the time they start kindergarten; children from low-income families only log 25 hours
- Children from literacy poor homes arrive at school with vocabularies of 800 -1000 words vs. 6,000 – 10,000 words for children from more literacy affluent homes
- By the time they start kindergarten, children living in poverty hear 32 million fewer words than children from homes of professionals

- In Dane County 28,000 children are under age 5 and 18% of these children live in poverty. In Madison 11,745 children are under 5 years of age and 29% of them live in poverty.
- This data leads us to believe that we can put strategies in place to help parents and informal caregivers provide the stimulations and experiences that are important for a child's successful start in school.

### **Purpose**

- Create the public will to support all children being cared for and having fun while being prepared for kindergarten with the appropriate skills to be ready to learn
- Determine strategies for sustainable parent education on child development and pre-literacy skills
- Identify what works from parents' perspectives related to easy and timely access to information about child development
- Inventory what is available in the community and identify gaps
- Determine a county wide measure/indicator of school readiness

### **Responsibilities**

- Review and select the early childhood and parenting areas of focus to be studied.
- Complete a focused assessment on issues related to parenting the early years and what is needed to prepare children for learning
- Combine relevant data from existing sources with feedback/experiences of parents of young children
- Attend scheduled meetings and participate in discussions and decisions.
- Help gather relevant data from community engagement.
- Review and discuss findings.
- Create recommendations to be made, in report format, to the greater Dane County community by fall, 2007.
- Determine deployment of Born Learning strategies

### **Products**

- Impact Report to the community on children's readiness for learning and parents' opportunities for education and support as they raise their young children—July, 2007
- Plan for mobilizing the community for the purpose of improving the percent of children ready to learn when they start kindergarten by October, 2007.
- Determine a community-wide measure of assessing kindergarten readiness for all Dane County children.

### **Anticipated Delegation Meetings**

The Delegation will meet monthly from March through October, 2007. Meetings will be held from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on the fourth Thursday of the month (whenever possible). Work/task groups may be formed to address particular focus areas.

### **Composition of Delegation**

The Delegation will be composed of public figures, early childhood community and reputational leaders, clergy, and education leaders who have expertise in the subject area in Dane County.