

The Early Years Count!

December 2001

Why not here?

Imagine a community where every child starts school ready to learn and every student reads by grade three. Impossible dream—or realistic goal?

New research makes it abundantly clear that the early years count. In fact, they count more than we ever before realized. What happens—or doesn't happen—with children in their formative years can have a lifelong impact. We know, for instance, that:

- How a brain develops hinges on a complex *interplay* between the *genes* a child is born with and the *experience* a child has.
- Early *experiences* have a *decisive impact* on the architecture of the brain, and on the nature and extent of adult capacities.
- Brain development is *non-linear*: there are prime times (especially in the early years) for acquiring different kinds of knowledge and skills.
- Both *quality of care* and *security of attachment* affect children's later capacity for *empathy, emotional regulation, and behavioral control*.
- By the time children reach age three, their brains are *twice as active* as those of adults. (Rethinking the Brain, Families and Work Institute, 1997)

Research also provides guidance on *how* to make the early years count. Study after study shows that good parenting, quality early childhood programs, and strong student support all work together to ensure that children's minds and bodies develop in healthy ways that prepare them for lifelong learning.

In early 2001, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County was one of 16 recipients of a three-year, five million dollar CAPE (Community Alliances to Promote Education) grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. to raise education attainment. Our county's focus: to build a strong foundation for learning in the early years of life. And key to this foundation are informed parents, effective teachers, and capable learners.

The programs described on the following pages were selected for **The Early Years Count!** CAPE initiative because research has shown that they work—for parents, for teachers, and most importantly, for young children. With an emphasis on high-quality training and widespread implementation, they are programs built to last. They not only provide services now, but also build community capacity to maintain and expand these programs in the coming years.

Your strong support for these and other programs aimed at early childhood in St. Joseph County can help turn the dream to reality.



The Early Years Count!

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Parents as Teachers



"No job is more important to our nation's future than that of a parent, and no job is more challenging. ...While we readily acknowledge the value of job training in other areas, we tend to act as if parenting skills should come naturally."

Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children, Carnegie Corporation of New York

★ **BABIES DON'T COME WITH INSTRUCTION MANUALS,** yet within minutes after birth they begin having experiences that will affect their development in significant ways. What adults do not know about child development has real implications for how they raise their children—and inappropriate, misinformed parenting can inhibit children's intellectual, social and emotional development. However, when parents are equipped with the knowledge and skills to optimize their children's development, they lay the foundation for future success in school, relationships, work and life. For these reasons, **The Early Years Count!** is supporting the nationally acclaimed Parents as Teachers (PAT) program for parents throughout St. Joseph County families.

★ **PARENTS AS TEACHERS VIEWS PARENTS AS THEIR CHILDREN'S FIRST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL TEACHERS.** Through certified parent educators, parents of children ages birth to five get practical how-to information based on the newest research in child development and brain growth.

Parent support and education are provided through a combination of monthly personal visits, group meetings, play groups, and developmental screenings.



★ **PAT'S RESEARCH IS STRONG.** Evaluation has been an integral part of the program since its inception in Missouri in 1981. Parents in PAT grow in their knowledge of child development, good parenting practices, and confidence in parenting skills. They read more to their children and are more involved in their children's schooling—both strong contributors to education success.

By age three, children whose parents have participated in PAT are further advanced in language, social development, problem solving, and other intellectual abilities. By first grade, they score higher than their peers in reading and math; in third grade, they score higher in achievement tests.

★ **The Early Years Count! BRINGS PAT TRAINING TO 76 PARENT EDUCATORS IN ST. JOSEPH COUNTY.** Madison Center is serving as host agency and primary provider of PAT services, which are available free-of-charge to all families, regardless of income. Several other parent-focused agencies or programs have participated in the training as well, including El Campito, Healthy Families, Youth Service Bureau, and PHM School Corporation (through Elm Road Elementary School). Parents may sign up for PAT during pregnancy, after the birth of their baby, or any time during their child's youngest years.

★ **TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT PAT,** contact Deb Ford at Madison Center, 233-4020 or e-mail pat@madison.org



High/Scope

"The professional development of teachers is related to the quality of early childhood programs and program quality predicts developmental outcomes for children...."

"Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers" by Bowman and Donovan

Many young children spend much of their time in early childhood programs and we know that these programs can have a significant impact on a child's education outcome. In fact, the consequences of program quality can last into adulthood.

★ **AT THE HEART OF PROGRAM QUALITY ARE WELL-EDUCATED TEACHERS** who provide stimulating experiences for curious minds, understand the importance of healthy social and emotional growth, and value child-initiated activities. That's why **The Early Years Count!** is bringing The High/Scope Education Research Foundation to St. Joseph County.

Developed in the 1960s and based on the ideas of Jean Piaget, the High/Scope approach supports children as active learners who learn best from activities that they themselves plan, carry out, and reflect upon. Adults arrange the learning environment; maintain a consistent daily routine that enables children to relax and feel secure; and converse with the children about what they are doing and thinking and, when appropriate, by joining in their activities. Adults also encourage children to engage in a variety of experiences that contribute to intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development.

★ **WELL-DOCUMENTED RESULTS SHOW THAT HIGH/SCOPE WORKS.** The goal of the High/Scope preschool approach is to promote the healthy development of children in ways that provide long-lasting benefits throughout adulthood. Numerous long-range studies demonstrate its success. More than 25 years after participation in a High/Scope classroom, individuals had less emotional impairment or disturbance during schooling, higher rates of high school graduation, higher earnings, more home ownership and significantly fewer arrests.

★ **The Early Years Count! BRINGS HIGH/SCOPE TRAINING TO 200 PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, 40 INFANT AND TODDLER CAREGIVERS, AND 20 MENTORS IN ST. JOSEPH COUNTY.** High/Scope training methods match those most associated with program quality: curriculum-centered, classroom observation and feedback, and follow-up by a consistent trainer. Classes for teachers include participatory activities, discussions, presentations, and role playing. Eighty preschool teachers from Head Start and 13 preschools were trained in the first year.

★ **ONGOING SUPPORT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ARE CRITICAL COMPONENTS.** Additional High/Scope training equips mentors to work with preschool teachers as they incorporate what they have learned into their day to day work with children. In October 2001, 15 mentors began this process.

★ **TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HIGH/SCOPE,** contact Jean Perrin, Indiana University South Bend, at 237-4113 or jperrin@iusb.edu or Bruce Nowlin, Ivy Tech, at 289-7001 ext. 5351 or bnowlin@ivy.tec.in.us

"An investment in training is an investment in quality."

High/Scope

Bridges

"As educators, we spend our whole careers hoping for one story of how we saved or helped a child. There are so many children I know now we changed because of this lab."

Jim DuBois, former principal of Elm Road Elementary School

★ **BRIDGES HELPS IMPROVE A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO LEARN.** Thinking and reasoning are the building blocks of education. Without them, students can't learn, no matter how hard they struggle. Unable to concentrate, focus, or sit still, these students are often at loose ends in the classroom, creating problems for themselves and disrupting other students. Since the problem is not in the teaching or the curriculum, children can be trapped for years in unproductive, negative learning situations.

There is a way out. Many educators are utilizing learning therapies or sensory integration techniques to strengthen children's cognitive abilities and perceptual skills. What they find is that when a child's capacity to learn is strengthened, or his perceptual dysfunction remediated, learning takes off and behavior dramatically improves.

The Bridges Lab is like "a weight room for the mind." It's a place where students who have academic or behavioral difficulties come for cognitive, psychomotor, and physical exercises. These exercises help students improve attention span, memory, eye-hand coordination, and other skills essential to the learning process. In the labs, younger students (K - 2nd) work in small group settings, while older students follow individualized programs. Bridges also offers an optional classroom component with workbook activities geared to skill-building for all students.

★ **BRIDGES BRINGS RESULTS.** In five years, Bridges has seen phenomenal growth—from three pilot schools in 1995 to 400 programs in 19 states today. The selection of Bridges as a CAPE initiative, however, comes less from outside influences than from the positive experience and high interest of schools within St. Joseph County. PHM's Elm Road Elementary School, for example, has reaped three years of solid results. More students are reading on grade level and test scores are higher. Schools that implement Bridges also find benefits that reach beyond academic measures, including fewer discipline problems and less special education referrals.

★ **The Early Years Count! WILL SUPPORT BRIDGES IN UP TO 35 ST. JOSEPH COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.** As of the fall of 2001, 25 schools in St. Joseph County have Bridges Labs up and running: eight elementary schools in the South Bend Community School Corporation, two in School City of Mishawaka, nine in Penn Harris Madison School Corporation, two in John Glenn School Corporation, one each in Union North United and New Prairie School Corporations, and two schools of the Ft. Wayne/South Bend Diocese.

At least one more round of funding for Bridges will be available before the grant cycle is completed.

★ **TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT BRIDGES** in St. Joseph County, contact Pam Chipman at 232-5711 or eyc@earlyyearscount.org



“We ignore the opportunities and risks of the first years of life at our own peril—and at the peril of future generations.”

Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development

Risk isn't destiny...

In 2000, more than 80 percent of the 43 public elementary schools in St. Joseph County fell below the state average in the percentage of their 3rd grade students who passed both the language arts and the math portions of ISTEP.

Sadly, a great many children who are not on target by the end of third grade may never catch up. In fact, researchers can identify the profile of dropout-prone students as early as third grade. And while education reform is important, the truth is that many of these children arrived at the schoolhouse door already burdened by multiple risk factors.

In St. Joseph County at the turn of the millenium:

- 5,061 babies were born
- 1,820 (one in three) were born to unmarried mothers
- 603 (one in ten) were born to teen mothers
- 355 (7%) received no prenatal care
- 437 (9%) were low birth weight
- 347 cases of abuse were substantiated
- 392 cases of neglect were substantiated
- 53 children under the age of 4 died
- 51 percent of children in South Bend schools received free lunch
- 231 children stayed at the Center for the Homeless

Many of these conditions are associated with high dropout rates and school failure. Risk does not have to be destiny—but it is imperative that we intervene early.

Why not now?



How you can help

There are several ways that you can lend your assistance to this initiative. If you know or work with parents of young children, please encourage their participation in Parents as Teachers. If you are a preschool teacher or early childhood provider, check out the free training available. If you are an educator or parent of an elementary school-age child, learn about how you can bring Bridges to your school. If you are an employer, a politician, a social service provider, or community member, think about the many ways that you can support families with young children.

To find out more and to keep abreast of early childhood information in St. Joseph County, please visit the new **The Early Years Count!** website at: <http://earlyyearscount.org>

We'd also like to hear from you! Please give us a call, send a note, or e-mail us if you would like to:

- ★ sign up for e-mail notices about early childhood funding opportunities, news, information and events
- ★ request tri-fold brochures about **The Early Years Count!** and/or Parents as Teachers to distribute or set out
- ★ schedule a presentation on why **The Early Years Count!**
- ★ provide information for **The Early Years Count!** website

Finally, you're invited to stop by and pick up a free, colorful **The Early Years Count!** poster for your classroom, business, office, or meeting place or to find out more about this exciting initiative.

The Early Years Count!

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