

Executive Summary

Every three years Head Start and Early Head Start grantees are required to conduct a comprehensive community assessment that is used in decision making for program planning, implementation, and evaluation. This assessment is designed to help the staff of Child Care Resource & Referral Head Start and Early Head Start in Freeborn and Olmsted counties, MN and their Policy Councils to identify current trends in the communities they serve, understand the needs of Head Start eligible children and their families, and become aware of resources for families that are available as well as any gaps. The community assessment represents a critical piece of the planning process developed to encourage strategic thinking about the agency's capacity to impact families and the community with the overall goal of eliminating poverty. This is an ongoing process which engages staff, the Board of Directors, and community partners to stimulate continuous understanding about the strengths, needs, and resources of the community and families we serve.

This document is intended to provide an analysis of the state of poverty in the community in an effort to improve services intended to move families along a continuum to eliminate poverty in their lives. Ruby Payne, in her book *Bridges out of Poverty*, defines poverty as the extent to which an individual does without resources. Conversely, prosperity or sustainability is defined as the extent to which an individual or community has these resources. Sustainability truly has become an essential ingredient of our time.

Making sense out of assessment data requires that it be interpreted from an array of angles. The geographic area that the agency provides services to is diverse. It spans two counties which include; two large urban areas, two small urban areas and a multitude of small rural communities. This makes service delivery both challenging and unique. The agency uses community forums, community advisory committees as well as surveys and round table discussion with staff, Board of Directors, and Head Start Program Policy Council members to gain insight about the strengths and challenges of families and the community. A number of themes emerged through these discussions; at risk youth, rental housing conditions, lack of mental health services, homelessness especially in Olmsted County for families, need for child care, and the need for better paying jobs.

Parent Surveys, Community Partner Surveys and Other Program and Community Data Sources have revealed the following areas of concern:

1. Disabilities services for HS/EHS children
2. Financial/Legal stress to family
3. Family literacy
4. Housing Including subsidized, and transitional/emergency housing for homelessness
5. Transportation issues for families
6. Family Support Services – goal setting and reinforcement
7. Family Support Services/Quality of Life – a need for support of family issues/parenting classes or programs reinforcing parents as educators
8. Family Engagement – meetings, activities and volunteer opportunities
9. Families would be better served with a 5-day per week Head Start program (72.5 % agree)
10. Affordable Health Insurance/Dental Care Need for MA & MN Care and the uninsured
11. Food availability and nutrition information for reduced income clients
12. Employment issues for families

Parents stated that participation in Early Head Start and Head Start has made significant impacts on their children, including increased language skills and higher levels of self confidence. Participation has also benefitted parents as they indicated they had developed an understanding of their role in their child's life, and a good understanding of their child's learning and development. Parents want resources for further self-development including English as a Second Language, parenting classes, and money management classes.

The state of our economy remains at the forefront of issues facing our nation. The recession of the past decade has left more and more families in the throes of economic hardship; many communities are plagued with escalating unemployment rates, increasing housing foreclosure, record Food Stamp Program participation and more. While the nation has seen some growth in production in past years, most working people have not seen comparable gains in wages and benefits.

The national poverty rate increased from 13.2% in 2008, to 15.1% in 2010. The poverty rate for children under the age of 18 has increase by more than 22% with more than one in four children under the age of five living in poverty. This is the highest poverty rate since 1993. Between 1993 and 2000 the poverty rate had decreased each year reaching 11.3% in 2000.

In conclusion, the CSPNA provides important information toward developing quality care programs for low income families, targeting limited funding resources to those children and families most in need of services, consistent with the goals of Early Head Start and Head Start. Overall, CCR&R Head Start and Early Head Start families are pleased with the services they receive. CCR&R continues to build the types of relationships that can truly impact children's lives. There are some areas for improvement, including the need to cultivate new relationships and to strengthen existing ones. Most importantly, it will contribute towards Rochester becoming a great city for all children, youth and families.