



## **The Northland Foundation Receives McKnight Foundation Grant in Support of the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative**

(April 2008)

The McKnight Foundation has awarded \$3 million, three-year grant to expand the *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative...A Campaign for Our Youngest Children* to the Northland Foundation and the five other Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs). In 2008, the MIFs plan to add 12 early childhood coalitions—two in the Arrowhead Region—expanding the statewide network of coalitions to 78.

In 2003, the MIFs launched the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative with the support of an initial multi-year grant from The McKnight Foundation. McKnight provided a second grant in 2005.

The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative was created in response to the concerning fact that only one-half of Minnesota's children were entering kindergarten fully prepared for school success. Since then, the 66 grassroots early childhood coalitions have begun turning the tide for Minnesota's youngest children. One indicator of success: a January 2006 state survey indicated voters now place early childhood care and education as a top priority.

"Communities throughout northeastern Minnesota and the state have joined together to address the key issue of school readiness," says Lynn Haglin, Northland Foundation Vice President and KIDS PLUS Director. "With 80 percent of Minnesota's children in child care outside of their homes, ensuring that our early care and education is of the highest quality takes on urgent importance."

Studies show that children who enter kindergarten ready to learn gain long-term advantages. They are more likely to perform at grade level, graduate from high school, and get and keep a job.

"Through our collective efforts, we are building on local assets to improve resources for young children to ensure they receive the care, support, and education they need to succeed in school and in life," continued Haglin.

Already over 400 projects and programs have been implemented statewide as an outgrowth of coalition work in early childhood communities. Resources from The McKnight Foundation will help engage more communities throughout Minnesota in creating local citizen-based plans to strengthen resources for young children and their families. Funding support will also allow current coalition communities to dig deeper in program development, reach more young children and their families through comprehensive school readiness efforts, and embed model projects in the community for long-term sustainability.

"The first five years in a child's development can lay the groundwork for a lifetime of successes," says Kate Wolford, president of The McKnight Foundation. "Every day, we learn more about the crucial impact that early experiences have on future well-being. In partnership with the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, McKnight is pleased to continue our support for the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative, to help communities create positive local environments for early childhood development."

The Northland Foundation and the five other Minnesota Initiative Foundations serve six rural regions of the state, and were created in 1986 as a partnership between The McKnight Foundation and the citizens of Greater Minnesota.

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