

A Unique Collaboration: Bringing Better Quality of Care for At-Risk Children in Chicago

Presented at the
National Association for the Education of the Young Child Annual Conference
Chicago, Illinois
November 2007

General Information About the MTF Professional Development Initiative for Early Childhood Educators

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About the McCormick Tribune Foundation

The McCormick Tribune Foundation's mission is to advance the ideals of a free, democratic society by investing in our children, communities and country.

Sara Slaughter – Director Education Program

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More about MTF and how to contact them can be found at www.rrmtf.org

In the Fall of 2002, the McCormick Tribune Foundation (MTF) approached Loyola University Chicago's Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) to coordinate a new kind of project that would collaboratively create sustainable protocols for professional development in early childhood education programs. For this particular project, the Foundation defined "professional development" as teacher education, director education and training, board and administrative development, fundraising capacity building, and infrastructure support.

Ultimately, MTF sought to invest in agency-sponsored early childhood education programs to build their management capacity to recruit, train, and retain high quality directors and teachers, thereby sustaining high quality programming in Chicago's underserved communities. The nine participating agencies represent a microcosm of community-based childcare in the city of Chicago. They serve culturally diverse populations and are located in low-income but rapidly changing communities throughout the city. While each faces their own unique challenges, they are representative of the common issues surrounding early childcare professional development including recruitment, training, retention, and overall organizational health.

As this project began, MTF provided goals for CURL as well as the standards and principles that each agency should strive for as they participated in this professional development initiative. Following those guidelines, CURL and the agencies worked to develop and begin implementation of professional development plans. The Foundation refunded the initiative an additional two years in order to deepen the implementation of the professional development plans as well as address issues of policy and increased inter-agency communication.

GOALS	Shorter-term outcomes:	Longer-term outcomes:
Facilitate the participating childcare programs development and implementation of their five-year professional development plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A comprehensive professional development plan that represents each agency's priorities and needs. ▪ A process evaluation that documents each agency's progression through the professional development initiative. 	An evaluative component for the ten agencies to document the outcomes for the articulated goals in their professional development plans.
Create and document purposeful collaborations with other MTF-funded partners to facilitate each agency's implementation of their professional development plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Utilization of MTF-funded services by the nine agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A synergy between the nine agencies and the other MTF-funded partners.
Increase the capacity of the nine participating agencies to be informed of changes in childcare policy and standards that occur at the local, state and national levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Childcare staff at participating agencies will be informed of current childcare standards and policies ▪ Creation of a university-community model to disseminate policy information among community-based organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participating agencies will have professional development plans that meet current and childcare policy and standards

SOME OF THE KEY COMPONENTS OF THE INITIATIVE

a) *Agency-Level Professional Development Plans.*

- Upon the creation of the professional development strategic plans, each of the participating agencies met with CURL staff quarterly.
- The purpose of these meetings was to update the current professional development goals and strategies attained by each of the agencies; talk with staff about any concerns; and facilitate conversations on how to sustain their organization's professional development efforts beyond this initiative.
- These meetings also allowed CURL staff to document their observations on each agency's progress, highlights, and challenges being faced.

b. *Assessment Conducted by McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University*

- In the spring of 2006, staff from the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University conducted their second program quality assessment of the participating agencies (the first assessment was conducted in the fall of 2002).
- Highlights from the summary report include:
 - There were notable improvements in the level of program quality as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R).
 - There were significant improvements in the quality of administrative practices as measured by the Program Administration Scale (PAS)
 - The centers demonstrated higher quality interactions between teachers and children as measured by the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS).
 - There was an overall increase in the quality of the work environment in the centers as measured by the Early Childhood Work Environment Scale (ECWES).

b) *MTF/CURL Community Fellows – Educating Practitioners on Public Policy.*

- As part of the McCormick Tribune Foundation (MTF) Professional Development Initiative a 'Child Care Policy and Standards' team was created in 2005.
- The purpose of this team was to keep the participating agencies updated on changes in child care policies and standards at the local, state, and national levels.
- These MTF/CURL Community Fellows were chosen to lead this team as they have extensive experience in addressing community-based childcare issues; possess knowledge invaluable to understanding those issues; and experience developing innovative solutions to problems facing urban communities.
- *MTF/CURL Community Fellows*
 - Dina Evans, Senior Director, Children's Programs, Albany Park Community Center
 - Brenda Chock Arksey, Child Education & Development Services Manager, Chinese American Service League
 - Naomi Samuels, Vice President of Child Development Services, Jane Addams Hull House
 - Sandra Schaefer, Early Childhood Consultant, Erie Neighborhood House
 - Jan Stepto-Millett, Chief Operating Officer, Center for New Horizons

The work of the Community Fellows included...

- **Survey Of Educator's Knowledge Of Public Policy Issues**
 - In the spring of 2006, CURL staff and the MTF/CURL Community Fellows administered a survey to all educators at the 9 participating agencies to assess what policy issues were most important to educators and where they received their current information regarding public policy.
 - Of the 128 respondents, the priority issues identified by the respondents were assessments; Preschool for all/blended funding; and type 04 teacher certification.
 - Also of note was that 80% of the respondents were not involved in any advocacy groups and said they got their information on the latest policies from their colleagues and/or meetings.
 - From these survey results, it was clear that practitioners needed to know what was happening with regard to these priority issues and in a setting that was focused on the practitioners – those most directly impacted by these policy changes.

- In response to these survey findings, the MTF/CURL Community Fellows convened 3 events in 2006:

The Early Childhood Education Playing Field



A. *Understanding the Early Childhood Playing Field: Introduction to Public Policy Shapers (February 9, 2006)*. This was a small presentation for staff from the

9 agencies that began the process of sharing relevant public policy information.

- B. *Understanding the Impact of Preschool for All on Early Childhood Educators (September 22, 2006)*. The goal of this event was to have policymakers and policy shapers from the state and the city in the same room with practitioners to discuss “Preschool for All.” This event was attended by over 200 practitioners and advocacy group representatives.
 - C. *Get to Know Your Advocates (November 3, 2006)*. The goal of this event was to continue the learning of the “early childhood playing field” by meeting staff from key Illinois advocacy groups (Voices for Illinois Children, Ounce of Prevention, Chicago Metro AEYC, Coalition for Site Administered Child Care, and Action for Children). Using a small group format, the 50 practitioners that attended the event learned about the goals of each of these advocacy groups and how respective agendas were set.
- c) ***Additional Shared Learning Community meetings:*** In addition to the conference, Loyola CURL staff continued to convene “Shared Learning Community” meetings, in which staff from all participating organizations had the opportunity to discuss best practices, lessons learned, and strategies for increasing professional development within their respective organizations.
- d) ***Program Leaders Working Group:*** It became increasingly clear to CURL staff and the leaders of the nine agencies that the role of site directors had grown in importance in creating and maintaining quality programs and implementing professional development protocols. In turn, this has translated into a growing need for more support for this segment of the agency. For that reason, Loyola CURL staff created a working group comprised of the middle level managers and one other key member of their staff. In most cases, this includes into a site director and an individual such as a master teacher or education coordinator. The purpose of these monthly meetings is to address issues of relevance to this group.
- e) ***New York City conference*** - This conference sought to have our agencies engage in a dialogue with experts from a successful community based organization (Harlem Children’s Zone) about best practices and challenges in the area of early childhood education. To continue the broad participation we have had in this initiative, we gathered teachers, site directors, and administrators from all nine agencies. We had time and opportunity to dialogue about commonalities and differences in the effort to provide high-quality early childhood education within the context of a local community-based organization.
- f) ***Matching grants*** - The Foundation felt that it was important to increase the sustainability of the professional development protocols created through this initiative. The goal of the ‘matching grants’ component of the initiative was to encourage the agencies to begin seeking non-MTF support for professional development. In order to begin raising funds for professional development, all of the organizations were given an opportunity to apply for additional funds (up to \$15,000/year per agency) for two years.

SAMPLE PAGE FROM A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

TRAINING GOAL: TO PROVIDE TEACHERS WITH SUPERVISION, DIRECTION, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES AS THEY PURSUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Training Objective #1

- ✓ Create a mentorship program by 200_ in which administrative staff are taught to become mentors for teachers looking to increase their level of professional development
 - Instead of having a professional development counselor, ___ could work with some of the staff in teaching them how to become mentors
 - Creation of professional development stipend with individual education plan

<i>Actions to be taken</i>	<i>Who will be responsible for each action?</i>	<i>What resources are needed for each activity?</i>	<i>DATE action to be taken</i>	<i>DATE action to be completed</i>

OUTCOME:

- (1) IN 200_, THE ___ CHILD CARE STAFF WILL DEVELOP A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS
- (2) IN 200_, ___ TEACHERS WILL BE "ASSIGNED" A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MENTOR
- (3) IN 200_, ALL ___ TEACHERS WILL HAVE A TRAINING/EDUCATION PLAN

*Some of the Strategies Created by the Participating Agencies
Through this Professional Development Initiative*

- *Created individual professional development plans for staff**
- *Created a Professional Development Mentorship program**
- *Integrated resource personnel into curriculum through collaboration**
- *Improved facilities for both children and staff**
- *Developed new performance appraisals that were specific and aligned with the job descriptions**
- Enhanced professional development by supporting staff in formal coursework
- Provided tuition reimbursement and educational grants
- Created a staff handbook and orientation training
- Established process for comprehensive strategic planning
- Established processes for regular teacher planning and meeting times
- Created classroom leadership teams
- Developed and implemented employee recognition activities
- Developed an annual training calendar based on teacher surveys
- Created an ongoing staff recruitment plan which established relationships with local colleges
- Collaborated with Loyola University Chicago on leadership and management trainings
- Utilized Professional Development Plan to leverage additional funds for professional development
- Utilized peer observation and feedback model
- Enhanced and supported retreats for teachers, management and Board of Directors
- Developed and printed marketing materials
- Created a Directors Leadership Series
- Supported staff conference attendance and memberships to professional associations
- Developing an organization career lattice

*Discussed during this NAEYC Presentation