

Story County Empowerment



Counties in Area: Story County

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Vision:

Our Vision - Communities with the capacity and commitment to achieve these goals:

- Healthy children, ready for school
- Excellent childcare
- Nurturing families in safe environments

Mission:

The mission of the Story County Empowerment Board is to empower individuals and their communities to improve the well-being of children, age's birth to 5, and their families.

Local Success Story ~ Story County Healthy Futures Program

The Story County Healthy Futures Program is one of the family support programs supported by the local Empowerment Board. In July 2008, the Healthy Futures Program began working with a young woman who was five months pregnant. She was behind on her rent, had been fired from several jobs, and reported mental health and abuse issues. At the time, the father of the unborn child was in jail awaiting sentencing. Through in-home family support services, this mom-to-be came to understand the importance of attending all prenatal appointments. She also followed through with obtaining a copy of her birth certificate to apply for Section 8 housing and to prepare to apply for other services after delivery of her baby. Her child was born full term and of normal birth weight. The father of the baby had been released from jail, but returned for a parole violation the night the baby was born; he is currently serving a five-year prison sentence. Family support workers have helped this new mom identify and strengthen her personal and child rearing skills. She has become confident in herself as a single parent and her baby is thriving. She has attended anger management classes and is addressing her mental health issues. After exploring career options, she completed financial aid information, met with staff at DMACC, and enrolled in summer classes. She is looking for a new apartment that will provide more room for the baby as he begins to crawl and walk, and she has started a savings account for emergencies.

Why are the programs we support important to reaching our vision and mission?

- Families should have access to quality child care that provides a safe environment for their child when they cannot be with their family.
- Parents and primary caregivers sometimes need support to know how to help their child learn and grow to their potential.
- Quality preschool programs can help young children develop the skills (e.g., mental, social, emotional, physical) that will help them succeed when they begin Kindergarten and throughout their lives.

COMMUNITY PLAN PRIORITIES:

1. Provide affordable, quality, accessible child and infant care.
2. Provide coordinated prenatal and postnatal services.
3. Provide affordable, quality, accessible early childhood experiences.
4. Provide educational training and support for parents and providers.

What services/programs/activities do we support?

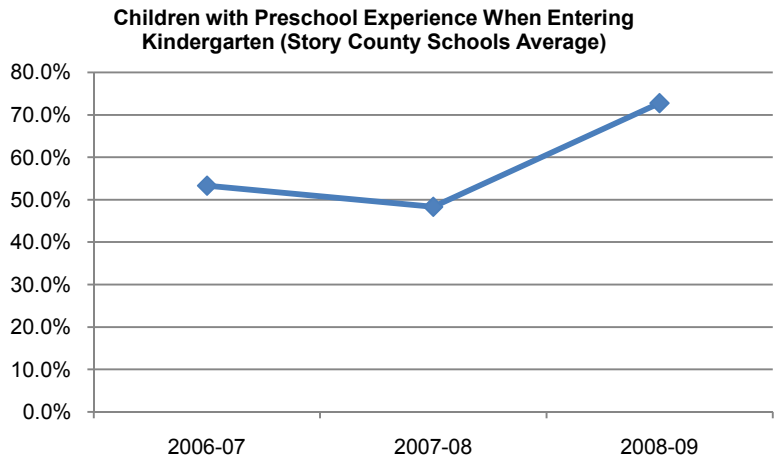
4 Success & Shared Visions Preschool Programs (*Ames Community School District*), Child Care Nurse Consultant (*Mid Iowa Community Action, Inc.*), Colo-Nesco Preschool Programs (*Colo-Nesco Community School District*), Crisis Child Care Program (*Lutheran Services in Iowa*), Foster Care Support Program (*Center for Child Care Resources*), McCallsburg Child Care Program (*Colo-Nesco Community School District*), Meld Parenting Groups (*Lutheran Services in Iowa/The People Place*), Mini-Grant Projects Targeting New/Emerging Issues & Quality Improvements in Early Childhood Environments (*various providers*), Preschool Tuition Scholarships (*various providers*), Project Smyles (*Ames Public Library*), Provider CPR/First Aid Certification Training (*Center for Child Care Resources*), Quality Child Care Project (*Center for Child Care Resources*), Raising Readers at Home (*Raising Readers in Story County*), Stork's Nest Program (*Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.*), Story County Early Childhood Development & Transportation Programs (*Mid Iowa Community Action, Inc.*), Story County Family Nutrition Program (*ISU Extension Story County*), Story County Healthy Futures Program (*Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.*), Story County Infant Network (*Center for Child Care Resources*), Story County Parents as Teachers (*Lutheran Services in Iowa/The People Place*), Story County Preschool Calendar Project (*United Way of Story County and Story County Empowerment*), Storytime Express (*Bertha Bartlett Public Library*), The Comfort Zone (*University Community Childcare*), Empowerment Coordination Services

How do we measure our progress?

1. Percent of children with preschool experience when entering Kindergarten.

How are we doing?

An increasing number of children entering Kindergarten are reported to have preschool experience. However, this does not indicate the quality of the children's preschool experiences. The Story County Empowerment Area supports initiatives to improve quality in early learning environments and to help children from low income families access preschool programs. There are just over 300 child spaces available in Story County preschool programs that have achieved national or state accreditation (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start Performance Standards, Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (QPPS)). The Empowerment area will continue to promote efforts to help children access quality early learning programs.



2. Number of child care spaces in licensed child care centers and registered family child care programs Percent of participating providers at each level of the voluntary Quality Rating System.

How are we doing?

In 2009, the number of child care spaces in licensed child care centers totaled 1,340; the spaces in registered family child care programs totaled 1,184. The economic downturn has affected local child care providers. Some families are looking for less costly child care options; other families may no longer need outside child care as they have lost their employment. As families seek child care alternatives, it is important to make sure support is available, too, for those providing care that are not licensed or registered. Currently 8% of registered family child care programs, licensed child care centers, and licensed preschools in Story County have obtained a rating through the Iowa Quality Rating System (QRS) process. Iowa QRS is a voluntary process for child care and preschool providers to validate the quality of their child care program on a scale of 1 to 5. Seven percent of participating Story County providers have achieved a Level 2 or higher; 4% have obtained a Level 3 or higher. One challenge for providers is justifying the resources needed to make quality improvements in their child care program if they face uncertainty about the ability to stay in business. The Empowerment area will continue to work with providers to support safe, quality child care environments.

What can you do to help?

- Talk with child care and/or preschool providers, and those who offer family support and parent education focused programs; ask what they do to make sure they provide quality services for young children and their families.
- Learn more about early childhood initiatives and available programs and services in Story County. The Story County Empowerment website (www.storycountyfamily.org) is a good place to start; or contact the local Empowerment Coordinator.
- Attend a Story County Empowerment board meeting. The Board meets the first Wednesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. If you like the experience and want to become more involved, volunteer to serve as a member on the board.

Others within our community working on similar issues:

- Story County Childhood Collaboration/Prevention Council
- Story County Community Partnership for Thriving Families (local CPPC initiative)
- Story County Decategorization
- Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team (Story County ASSET ~ includes City of Ames, ISU Government of the Student Body, Story County, United Way of Story County, and Department of Human Services)