

## Early Childhood Iowa Local Board Composition

### Community Plan Updates

**Name of Early Childhood Area:** Lakes Region (Clay, Dickinson, O'Brien, Osceola)

Iowa Code chapter 256I requires that local ECIA boards report progress toward and achievement of desired results identified in the Community Plan.

Provide a narrative of the ECIA's progress in the last year towards the priorities and strategies identified in the most recent Community Plan. Success and/or challenges to meeting the ECIA goals may also be included.

Our FY14 ECI Lakes Region Priorities continued to be:

- Strengthen the relationship between parents and their children through the provision of quality family support programs ☐
- Improve health and wellness of infants ☐
- Improve the quality of early care and learning environments
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FY14 was another year of significant transitions for the ECI Lakes Region. After six months of having an interim director, a new director was hired in May of 2013 just prior to the start of FY14. Starting with the new fiscal year, our board, who was initiated as a Decategorization board in 1998 and had been combined with the ECI Board since its inception, chose to split into separate Boards. We also had several Board member transitions. In March of 2014, the program service coordinator, who had served as the interim director and been an employee of the Board for the past 6 years, then retired.

For FY14, the Board authorized continued support for ECI Lakes Region's current funded programs utilizing the Plan's current indicators and priorities. The Board felt strongly that our Family Support programs provide very necessary and foundational services reaching out to support young families. The Best Care for Better Babies program offers parent support prenatally and once born, therefore having the opportunity to share important information and resources for healthy development right from the beginning of parenting. The KIDS program also provides in-home support and guidance, supporting parents in their daily lives serving their most basic needs. Meanwhile, the Hand in Hand program offers professional development and emotional/behavior mentoring to child care centers and homes to continue to improve quality of care, and the Preschool Tuition Assistance program is helping to increase enrollment of young children while also encouraging preschools to enhance their quality standards in order to be involved.

In addition to supporting these positive services, the Board also made progress toward several of their additional strategies to support the communities in our four counties.

- The Board continues to encourage and support the involvement of Family Support programs in the Iowa Family Support (IFS) Credentialing process. The Board participated in the KIDS program receiving their reaccreditation in August of 2015. It has also monitored and supported the Best Care for Better Babies Program, who is in its final year of applying for its accreditation.
- The Board participated in offering a few training opportunities to meet the needs of contracted providers, board members, partners, and community members. Two trainings were offered to the staff of our funded programs, not only increasing their professional knowledge but also enhancing their collaboration abilities. Training was offered on Secondary Trauma and on utilizing the simulation dolls they each have for Shaken Baby and Drug and Alcohol Babies. In addition, the ECI LR Director was part of a Dickinson County committee who offered two Poverty Simulations to the businesses of Dickinson County and the Okoboji School system. Two Board members participated as volunteers for these simulations as well.

- The Board succeeded in expanding the Family Resource Directory from Dickinson to include Clay, O'Brien, and Osceola counties. It also updated the link to it on the ECI Lakes Region website by adding a search engine. Through the help of an additional grant from Community Partners Protecting Children and collaboration efforts with the Child and Parent Council, the Board was able to print 500 copies of the new directories and pass these out to families with children 0-5 through the Head Start Program and Preschools in our counties. In addition, 1000 magnets advertising our website with this Directory are in the process of being passed out to businesses in all four counties.
- In FY13 ECI Lakes Region staff assumed responsibility for the coordination of the preschool tuition assistance program. We continue to work with new Preschools each year and increase the number of youth participating in the program. Particularly this spring, a significant collaboration was made with Head Start to allow children on their waiting list to apply for our scholarships and get involved in Preschool while they wait to be accepted into Head Start. Another addition in this area, was the addition of offering Spanish family applications for distribution. This was especially positive when connected to the fact that our KIDS program helped to promote our Preschool scholarships and their Hispanic worker was able to support several families in filling out these forms.
- Our ECI Lakes Region Program Service Coordinator has been trained to post and update our website information. This was beneficial with the expansion of the Family Resource Directory on our website and will allow this directory to continually be kept up to date with current information on services.
- Our KIDS family support program has successfully received and utilized I-Pads in preparation for future technological advances.
- Our Board continues to be involved in supporting our communities by staff participating in six different community groups, the Board serving as a partner with our Love & Logic Parenting program and the Board continuing to support Nature Connection with unobligated funds.
- Finally, in preparation for renewing our Early Childhood Iowa Lakes Region Community Plan, our Board did a four county needs assessment. Input was gathered from 128 community groups, individuals, agencies, and the results of other needs assessments and a Parent Summit. Statistics and area resources were also collected. This assessment has been key in steering our FY15 budget plans as well as guiding the direction of strategies for our updated Community Plan.

Our Early Childhood Iowa Lakes Region continues to face a few challenges. The Board, supported by research, notes that we need to keep trying to address meeting the needs of our Hispanic population on the rise. They are also seeing an increase in drug affected children adding to the already difficult issues that families are facing today. Although we strongly support quality child care, this continues to be a struggle in a voluntary system. There has also been a shortage of Foster Care families to meet the demands. Finally, although our child population has declined, our child poverty percentage continues to increase.

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Summary - The ECI Lakes Region is committed to supporting and collaborating in a system of quality services and providers. The strong and sustained partnerships and collaborations built between and within ECI Lakes Region, area agencies, organizations, schools, and communities are key to building systems to meet the complex needs of our families and children.