April 2014

Children Can’t Wait Champions!

What an incredible two-day conference we had on March 26 and 27. It was without a doubt a turning point not just for the Children Can’t Wait movement but for the infants, toddlers and preschoolers living in our community.

I want to thank the dedicated group of 46 community leaders that invested a day and a half of their time, vision, voice and expertise to designing the framework and identifying priorities for our early learning agenda. Throughout both days, the conversation was engaging and productive. We gained important insight into the critical short-term and long-term priorities that move us toward the goal of every child prepared on the first day of kindergarten.

I want to thank our Design Team. They were champions for this effort on so many levels. Thank you: Bruce Ziegman, Tom Nadal, Joan Caley, Laura Parker, Tricia Mortel, and Linda O’Leary.

Of course the day would not have been possible without funders that care about our children and are willing to invest in their future. So a special thanks to The Community Foundation for SW Washington, David and Patricia Nierenberg and United Way of the Columbia-Willamette.

I’d also like to thank our staff and consultants for their hard work. Janalee Ensley, our Program and Partner Coordinator who is always willing to go the extra mile. Denise Barr with Grace Communications and Amanda Tuttle with A. Tuttle Design for always making us look and sound good. A special thanks to Kevin Hiebert with Resonate NW for his organizational skills in pulling the conference together and his effective facilitation skills that brought us tremendous results.

This conference was just the beginning of a creating a shared vision for our community, defining our strategic approach to eliminating disparities, and creating more opportunities for our youngest citizens. We have a lot of work to do but it is exciting work and meaningful work. Thank you for investing in our children and our community.

Debbie Ham
Acknowledgments

Much appreciation and many thanks are extended to those who assisted with the planning, implementation and post-conference work.

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Future search is a unique planning method used worldwide by hundreds of communities and organizations. The method enables large diverse groups to (1) validate a common mission, (2) take responsibility for action, and (3) develop commitment to implementation. The method is especially useful in uncertain, fast-changing situations when it is important that everyone have the same large picture in order to act responsibly. Because it is largely culture free, future search is used in North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, and India to create umbrellas for social, technological and economic planning.

People work in small groups as “stakeholders” (shared perspectives), and in mixed groups that are a cross-section of the whole. Every person has a chance to speak and listen. This creates an environment based on the experience of all those present. The meeting also is managed so that the entire group can be in dialogue when necessary.

**How Future Search Works**

Future search follows tested principles derived from six decades of research and experimentation with what it takes to enable people to act cooperatively without having to defend or sell their own agendas or give up cherished values. The first principle involves “getting the entire system in the room”—meaning people with authority, resources, expertise, information and need. The second involves putting the focal issue in global perspective, helping each person to see a bigger picture than usual. The third requires seeking common ground and desirable futures, while treating problems and conflicts as information, not action items. The fourth asks people to manage their own small groups and take responsibility for acting on what they learn. Future search features working sessions among a wide range of parties who together have what is needed for principled action if they choose to take it.

**The Meeting Agenda**

There are five sessions labeled Past, Present, Future, Common Ground, and Action. Each involves creating a database, sharing understandings in small groups, reports to the whole, and large group dialogues. Sessions are cumulative and the product is an action plan and follow-up structure. People begin with a history of the situation that brought them together. They then build a map of world trends affecting their issue. Each stakeholder group tells what it is doing now about key trends and what its members want to do in the future. Small groups then devise preferred future scenarios. People identify their common ground, key themes that appear in every scenario. The final session is given over to action plans and an implementation strategy.

**Changing Assumptions**

Many future search participants come with justifiable skepticism based on past experiences in unproductive meetings. In future search, they often will set aside stereotypes and untested assumptions as they discover what can be accomplished in this new setting. Most future search participants, given access to information, resources, and people in authority who usually are not available all at once, will create effective action plans, none of them thought were possible.
Children Can't Wait Conference

March 26 and 27, 2014
Support for Early Learning and Families will host the Children Can’t Wait Conference on March 26 and 27th, 2014. The conference will consist of a three hour session on Wednesday, March 26 from 1-4 pm and a full day on March 27 from 9 am - 4 pm. The conference will take place at Educational School District 112 (ESD) at 2500 NE 65th Avenue Vancouver, Washington

Early Learning Background
The first five years of life are critical for a child’s future development. Nearly all brain development occurs in the first 5 years of life so it is essential that young children have a healthy learning environment. 6,000 children are born each year in Clark County and we at SELF (Support for Early Learning and Families) are dedicated to helping them get a successful start.

We want to help improve the early learning environment where we live. To that end, we are planning a conference of community leaders like you to develop strategies for improving early learning.

What is the Purpose of this Conference?
The conference’s purpose is to bring together individuals from a variety of sectors of our community to discuss the essential elements needed to move the Children Can’t Wait campaign forward.

More specifically, this conference will be a highly participative process that involves people working together to build a shared vision and shared priorities for the future of early learning. The emphasis will be on reaching consensus, finding common ground, and embracing future possibilities.

This conference will serve as the foundation for creating the common agenda for the collective impact work related to early learning in our community.

Who Will Attend the Conference?
We have identified key sectors that represent a cross section of stakeholders, community members and service providers. The variety of perspectives and viewpoints allows the entire system to be in the room together for our community’s future for early learning.

What Will Happen at the Conference?
The conference will produce two outcomes. The day and one half of work will produce a prioritized list of goals and vision points to guide the future improvement of early learning. Second, the conference will provide an opportunity for people to designate their future willingness to serve in areas of passion and ability.

We request your presence and involvement both days.

Participants will be involved in analyzing the critical social, organizational and personal events of the past few years and events that have influenced early learning both locally and nationally. Groups will identify political, economic, social and technical trends that influence early learning and supporting families.

How Will This Conference Make a Difference?
By engaging the entire community, multiple sectors and establishing a shared sense of direction, this conference will provide a rallying point for those committed to establishing a vision for early learning in our community that is innovative, focused on results, responsive, and able to keep pace with social, economic and technical changes and trends.

All meeting materials and lunch on Thursday will be are provided.
Conference Participants

In keeping with the format of the Future Conference framework, participants were organized by the “stakeholder” categories established during the planning process. Clearly, each category is not distinct unto itself and, not coincidentally, many individuals represented multiple perspectives relevant to issues in corrections. When an invitation was declined, alternative invitations were extended to ensure cross-representation of the various stakeholder groups identified, mindful of the limitation of size needed for an effective conference. Thus, not everyone invited was able to participate. Ideally, each participant should have attended both days of the conference. However, due to schedule constraints, some participants were only able to attend a portion of the conference. Some sent colleagues to attend in their absence. The participant list represents all who attended any portion of the two-day conference:

**Early Learning**

- Janalee Ensley
- Debbie Ham
- Johanna Hyatt
- Wilma Jackson
- Cheryl Johnson
- Kristin Johnson
- Sharon Linn
- Kim Rivolli
- Carrie Urban
- Kristin Wade

  SELF
  Fort Vancouver Regional Library
  ELKS Therapy
  WSUV Child Development Center
  ESD 112
  VHA
  Little Acorn Preschool
  EOCF
  Developmental Disabilities

**Economic**

- Phoebe Krueger
- Vaughn Lein
- Rick Melching
- Patricia Nierenberg
- Jan Oliva
- Jennifer Rhoads
- Casey Thompson

  Pacific Continental Bank
  LSW Architects
  Retired Community Foundation of SW Washington
  Community Advocate
  Community Advocate
  Community Foundation of SW Washington
  Community Advocate

**Education**

- Jennifer Blechschmidt
- Laurie Cornelius
- Susan Finley
- Karin Ford
- Carol Foster
- Jane Lanigan
- Diane Loghry
- Gaelynn Mills
- Scott Munro
- Tom Nadal
- Karen Peterson
- Laura Parker
- Nancy Tessman

  Vancouver School District
  Clark College
  WSU
  Fort Vancouver Regional Library District
  EOCF
  WSU
  Camas School District
  Evergreen Public Schools
  EPS - ED of Elem Ed.
  Evergreen Public Schools
  WSUV
  ESD 112
  Fort Vancouver Regional Library District
### Conference Participants Cont.

#### Government
- Annette Cleveland: Washington State Senator
- Anne McEnerny-Ogle: Vancouver City Council
- Tricia Mortell: Clark County Public Health
- Monica Stonier: Washington State Legislator
- Jan Wickert: VHA
- Bruce Ziegman: Retired, Fort Vancouver Regional Library District

#### Health/Safety Net
- Joan Caley: CCPHAC
- Susan Finley: WSU
- Kristen Herron: Clark County Food Bank
- Leah Reitz: YWCA
- Vicki Salsbury: CRMHS
- Pat Shaw: Clark County Public Health

#### Parents/Community
- Diana Avalos: Vancouver Public School District
- Judi Bailey: City of Vancouver Neighborhoods
- Cherise Billington: Parent/Community Member
- Curtis Miller: Battle Ground Mentoring Collaborative
- Wendy Sparks: Cornerstone Christian Academy
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26TH

1:00 – 1:40PM Opening and Welcome
Overview and Procedures

1:40 – 3:30PM Focus on the Past: Highlights and milestones
Purpose: Appreciate our history, what the past means for the work here

3:30 – 4:30PM Focus on the Present: Current trends
Purpose: Understand forces affecting our county and get everyone talking about the same world

THURSDAY, MARCH 27TH

9:00 – 10:45AM Focus on the Present (continued)

10:45 – 11:45AM Focus on the Future
Purpose: Imagine a desired future for early learning

11:45 – 12:15 PM Lunch

12:15 – 1:45 PM Focus on the Future (continued)

1:45 – 2:55 PM Discover Common Ground
Purpose: Discover what all present want for the region

2:55 – 4:30 PM Planning for Action
Purpose: Take next steps needed to plan for future action

Note: There will be formal breaks each morning and afternoon.
Focus on the Past

The concept behind exploring the past was based on the need to understand “where we’ve been” in the broadest possible context of early learning, in order to determine implications for the work that needs to be done. Participants were asked to reflect back 30 years (1984 – present) and fill in three timelines based on 1) Personal: key experiences that have shaped each of our lives; 2) Global: world events that have shaped society; and 3) Early Learning: critical events and milestones. The results established a framework for a shared conversation resulting in insight about the implications the “stories” told on the work that is now done, particularly related to early learning.

Focus on the Present

Key Trends

Mind-mapping is a way to look at a three dimensional world in a two dimensional method. The purpose of “mind-mapping” in the conference was to “create a social, economic, and technological context for dialogue” reflecting everybody’s perceptions of key trends. The key question being, “What are the external trends affecting early learning that we all need to be aware of?” with a trend implying a “direction of change” that can increase or decrease in intensity.

The visual creation and impact of a mind-map cannot be accurately described in text. Please note the photo attached to get a better sense of the product created.

The top trends identified where:

- Supporting a healthy foundation for children and families (ACES, social/emotional, outdoor spaces)
- Early intervention
- Private/public funding
- Whole child vs outcomes/assessment focus
- Increased poverty
- Systemic approach needed
- State initiatives (WA Kids/Full Day K, Assessments/Outreach)
- Family change and isolation
- Early learning access and connections

Education Sector Trends

Our strongest consensus was around the notion that we must develop systemic approaches to contact and engage our birth-to-five community. Expanding the Family and Community Resource Center model seemed worth exploring because it already has a structure and a reputation for effectiveness with added advantage of being community based. Because of the changing demographics in our county, along with isolation and lack of awareness of available services, many families, do not receive the support they need to help their children thrive. To reach these families we need to develop strategies to connect with them on a personal level and some successful models (e.g. Natural Leaders and Parents as Partners) are already being used successfully in limited contexts. It seems possible that these strategies could be coordinated through the Family and Community Resource Centers which would provide a systemic approach to these efforts.
We also discussed the lack of planned structural connection between the birth to five population and both the K-12 education system and from higher education programs that focus on the birth-to-five community.

Additional discussion highlighted the need and wisdom of doing our ongoing work with an eye on statewide initiatives from DEL and Thrive by Five so that we can take advantage of any synergies that might be present and also to avoid duplication of effort and misaligned effort.

**Early Learning Sector Trends**

As early learning professionals, we have seen a consistent increase in children and families experiencing poverty in Clark County. In conjunction with this trend, there are changes in family dynamic and structure that are creating more hardship and isolation. While these aspects of culture and society are ever present, there has also been a shift toward an awareness of the critical nature of early intervention because of the intensive preventions that it can create long term for a child. With this recognition has come state and systemic initiatives that have shifted the focus on the development of a child as a whole to outcomes within specific domains such as cognitive development. As early learning professionals, we see this as a threat to the true effectiveness of early learning, as it is only effective when a child’s performance is not evaluated on a few measures, but on their progress as a whole. We would like to see a system approach with:

- Early learning access and connection
- A combination of private and public funding
- An emphasis on supporting healthy foundations
- Eliminating the lack of awareness in the general population
- Measuring success beyond academics

In order to accomplish this system, we need to create some common messages that can be used across agencies and systems. In addition, a concerted effort to reach new and diverse sectors, including those whose first language is not English, in a family’s natural environment. In addition to reaching a more diverse population, as a county we will need to breakdown the silos of funding that impede the ability to truly be change agents for these children and families. This will require information and education for state legislators and a larger voice from our local communities. Currently, we have some good work and momentum in our county through these initiatives:

- WaKIDS
- Early Achievers
- SWEL Regional Coalition

**Parent/Community Sector Trends**

The parents and community group collaborated to understand our role as participants in creating a healthy foundation for the whole child. A healthy foundation provided by parents and community includes a focus on early intervention. If we can cover each child with a systemic approach that meets the needs of the whole child, they will be prepared and protected from the impact of negative circumstances. This is a tall order. That’s why the entire community is required in a systemic approach rather than a disconnected series of silos working in uncoordinated directions.
**Health/Safety Net Sector Trends**

As health professionals and those involved in building the safety net for our community, we identified that there are a variety of trends that are affecting early learning in our community. One major trend is that there are many messages and priorities in our community. On one hand, this is a signal of a robust community who have identified health and safety concerns. The downside is that these multiple messages and priorities are creating a solid approach to service delivery and learning. We see a need to create a focused approach with one to two universal messages.

We also see the value that a move from an individualistic approach to parenting to a more community-centered approach to parenting would aid in building connections and community. This would aid in creating a child-friendly community.

Another trend we recognize is that we see that programs are limited and focused on some but not all our children. We desire a future that we have programs and early learning offerings for all our kids in our community.

As health and safety net professionals we also recognize the changes in technology are affecting the way we deliver services and messages. We see the need to utilize technology for positive change.

**Economic Sector Trends**

As representatives from the economic stakeholder of the community, we have seen an increased need for system-wide collaborations. The first step in this will be to educate the community about the issues related to early learning. This is essential to building social change in our community. The community education should be supplemented with positive stories of how our children are being served. One of the largest factors related to an economic perspective is understanding the gaps in our current system. Conducing a gap analysis of what we have and what we don’t have as an early learning community is essential for us to take the next steps forward. As we understand our gaps, we will better understand the barriers that impede forward progress.

From an economic view, it is essential that all partners in the community invest in early learning. The question we have is “Are partners willing to invest?”. This is essential to move these efforts forward. We also recognize an increased need to tie education and workforce development together into the early learning discussion.

**Government Sector Trends**

As government stakeholders, the trends that are important to us is that to make an impact collectively, it is essential that our different community sector of K-12, transportation, faith, Y’s, social services, childcare/early learning, higher education/workforce, housing, library, health, neighborhoods, technology, government, and food bank all are working together.

The center of the collaboration needs to center around one to two universal messages and focused priorities. This focus on messages and priorities will aid in bringing need focus and collaboration to our early learning system.

Out of this focus could come a 10-year timeline and vision for early learning in our community. We also recognize that the issue of funding will need to be addressed to make all of these messages, priorities and visions become a reality.
Focus on the Future

Future Scenarios of Early Learning in Clark County

In order to move participants toward thinking about the future, they were tasked with imagining an early learning system 10 years from the present (2024), that they could believe in and be willing to work toward. Each group was asked to create a “shared vision for early learning that meets all your aspirations.” Upon completion of this venture, groups were directed to think back to the present (2014) and address the main roadblock(s) that need to be removed in order to clear the way to the future vision.

Common Ground Visions

After completing the exercise to present scenarios of what corrections should be like in the future, participants broke out into three groups to identify the common themes (i.e. values, norms, structures, programs or procedures) that emerged across each of the scenarios. The areas identified six overarching themes:

• Coordinated Efforts
• Establish Common Messaging
• Localized Sustainable Funding
• Naturally-Occurring Connections
• Universal Early Learning Opportunities
• Effective Resource Hubs

Each participant then joined the group that interested them most from the six common ground areas. They were first asked to express the group’s common vision in each area and subsequently to translate the aspirations of those visions into action or “what is it that we can do to make this all real.” The objective was to present vision statements that all conference participants would agree on, based on the prior discussions, as well as statements which could be readily understood by stakeholders who were not present at this future search conference.
Conference Vision Summary

The following six vision categories were adopted by the community at the March conference to focus and align the work of Children Can’t Wait.

COORDINATED EFFORTS
We believe that coordinated systems best serve young children, families and communities. We are a collective voice for all entities supporting young children and families. We have agreed on the strategies, outcomes and measurements to determine the success of the collective vision.

Notes:
• Agree on common measurements and indicators of support
• Adapt a progress monitoring system
• Expand on existing data and conduct gap analysis
• Accountability/framework = outcomes
• Engage the public in kindergarten readiness
• Establish a definition of school readiness
• Create one voice with county-wide coordination
• Coordinate services and systems to best serve families and the community
• Establish key strategies to move early learning forward in Clark County
• Identify a leading coordinating entity for the county
• Develop community-based leadership
• Adopt the “collective impact framework” for this effort
• Identify a system- and county-wide, geographically based and coordinated effort (board)

Next Steps:
• Define SELF’s role as the coordinating organization and communicate this role
• Identify stakeholders existing and missing; conduct gap analysis, to include existing data, common measures, and indicators of success (such as kindergarten readiness)
• Review best practices and other models around the country/world; identify current efforts; and next steps.

LOCALIZED SUSTAINABLE FUNDING
We believe that a local and sustainable funding stream is needed to move the vision forward. This may include a voter approved local levy or other public/private partnerships.

Notes:
• Establish public/private partnerships
• Adopt a local levy or other consistent funding stream

Next Steps:
• Complete a feasibility study on an early learning levy
• Identify a strategy for funding the backbone organization
• Create a strategy for partners to participate in funding the Children Can’t Wait campaign
• Create goals and measurements to use in fund development
• Identify one or more champions/heroes for initial funding

No significant learning occurs without significant relationship.
- James Comer
**NATURALLY-OCCURRING CONNECTIONS**

We are actively pursuing an increased trusted messaging delivery of early learning knowledge by using a coordinated community mentorship program and practices within naturally-occurring connection hubs.

**Notes:**
- Use a trusted local neighborhood messenger model
- Create geographically centric neighborhood based, embedded, naturally-occurring connections
- Offer mentorship, especially for new parents
- Involve family and community as key stakeholders in early learning conversations
- Coordinate community mentorship program and practices (include peer to peer)

**Next Steps:**
- Grass roots surveying - looking for connections, extending invitations to participate in connecting, sharing information about resources. Door to Door.
- Create a Mentoring Task force. Start by identifying potential mentor trainers, develop training material and process, train mentor trainers, then recruit, train and launch mentors in areas where connections naturally occur.
- As a sub-set of Mentoring Task Force - educate train existing natural connection points such as health professionals
- Utilize social media as a tool to access naturally occurring connections.

**ESTABLISH COMMON MESSAGES**

We agree that common messages are necessary to initiate a paradigm shift.

**Notes:**
- Create a community-wide common messaging/social networking system
- Identify universal messaging that must be communicated to and supported by all stakeholders
- Establish key messages
- Create a Clark County that is known as child friendly
- Prioritize universal messaging
- Establish universal messaging that will reach the vision (a consistent message).
- Establish community dialogue on brain development and early learning especially using Family and Community Resource Centers

**Next Steps:**
- Establish key messages
- Create message task force
- Develop core messages
- Develop a message bank (existing campaigns/messages)
- Define purpose of messaging
- Identify audience and tailor messages
- Develop delivery channels/campaign
- Community book reading
- Celebrity messenger
- Develop a social media strategy
UNIVERSAL EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
We are planning to provide universal learning opportunities so that every child has access to quality early learning experiences.

Notes:
• Create a universal preschool system
• Offer a universal voluntary pre-kindergarten
• Provide access to quality early learning experiences for all children

Next Steps:
• Connectors/mentors available to all new parents
• Prenatal-3 group socialization activities (Mom’s and Dad’s groups)
• Pre-school and pre-k in all elementary schools or other community space (teacher and family advocate)

EFFECTIVE RESOURCE HUBS
These hubs will:
• Provide opportunities for authentic voice and participation and broadened community involvement
• Connect families to meaningful tools, resources and services
• Partner with families and community members to create opportunities for children to experience health and well being
• Connect with transportation system to ensure access for all
• Be accessible geographically, culturally and technologically

Notes:
• Expand accessible networks of family/community resource centers
• Access to meaningful tools and resources to help families thrive (community recourse centers, peer mentors)
• Access to healthy and safe neighborhood environments including outdoor spaces and gardens
• Achieve medical community buy in, especially pediatricians
• Engage the entire community
• Access to community resource centers that reflect authentic voice and participation
• Ensure that every family must have their basic needs met
• Expand an affordable county-wide transportation network
• Create a transportation network to resources for families
• Create a network of affordable, quality transportation options (C-tran) that support early learning and families

Play is the highest form of research.
- Albert Einstein
Next Steps:
Identify existing “naturally occurring” community spots where children/families gather and where a potential FRC might locate
• Non-school based pilot in a geographical-specific community

Identify:
• Catalyst individuals/groups
• Existing resource spaces
• Community partners

Inventory:
• Existing resources
• Resources that are lacking
• Priorities for “services/resources? Based on authentic voices of community
• Options for developing potential family resource centers that are accessible and supported by identified partners and stakeholders
• Develop options for technologically based hubs

Connections:
• Connect to community partners that are not identified as participants (business community, faith community, etc.)

Development:
• Develop a realistic and sustainable business model for funding
• Develop sustainable human resources contribution

*** Note: Resources are broadly defined to include health, wellness, education, social/emotional, economic, housing and transportation options
Next Steps…

The next steps for moving the Children Can’t Wait movement forward is to mobilize this vision for our children and early learning community into practical strategies and actions.

To develop strategic next steps, a steering committee will be formed and work groups created. The steering committee will develop this vision into a strategic and scaled plan for our community. The steering committee will be comprised of the foundational community sectors of government, economics, health/safety net, early learning, education and parents/community. Work groups will also be created to move essential and targeted work forward.

Values moving forward

WE NEED EVERYONE
To bring change and support for all of our children, we need everyone to take part and lead where they can. Please let us know how you would like to connect to this work.

START WHERE WE CAN
We recognize that a movement grows over time. Being strategic with resources and capacity will mean that not all goals can be accomplished immediately. Wise and sustainable growth is needed as we undertake change.

EMERGENCE AND CHANGE
We recognize that things change and adjust over time. We recognize that through natural emergence that our visions may need to be modified. This flexibility is a strength and encourages us to constantly look to improve.

For more information on how you can join the Children Can’t Wait movement and get involved in preparing our children for their future, please contact Debbie Ham at 360.213.3486 or debbie.ham@selfwa.org
Every child is gifted. They just unwrap their packages at different times.
Event funding provided by:

[Logo]

CF
THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION