



Summer 2004

Children, Youth & Families

A President's Interdisciplinary Initiative

Welcome...

...to the first edition of the **President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families** newsletter. This quarterly publication will keep you up-to-date on what's happening with the initiative, provide a closer look at individual programs that are a part of the initiative, introduce you to the latest research on children and families, and let you hear directly from initiative leaders. The newsletter is available in both print and electronically. If you would like to receive the electronic version or if you have comments or suggestions, please contact Patty Mattern, editor, University News Service, at matte016@umn.edu.

What is the PICYF?

Often when leaders launch far-reaching initiatives, they generate buzz for a moment but soon fade to the background. That didn't happen here. In early 2003, University of Minnesota **President Robert Bruininks** announced the President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families (PICYF). The PICYF, the first of eight interdisciplinary initiatives Bruininks has championed, represents the University's commitment to bring University expertise and research to bear on the issues facing Minnesota's children, youth, and families.

The need to focus resources on children and families is critical. According to the 2000 Census, 26 percent of children in Minnesota are economically disadvantaged, and research shows that hurts a child's learning and development. Bruininks believes that the University has an important role to play—through its centers, departments, faculty members, and research—in creating a platform for raising awareness of children, youth, and family issues.

The PICYF is led by a steering committee chaired by **Richard Weinberg**, professor of child psychology in the Institute of Child Development, and **Marti Erickson**, senior fellow at the University's Children, Youth, and Family Consortium (CYFC).

By bringing together researchers and experts from disciplines as diverse as public health, journalism, child psychol-

ogy, education, nutrition and medicine, the PICYF is pursuing four goals:

- increasing public awareness of challenges, needs, and opportunities of children, youth, and families;
- advancing knowledge and finding solutions to those challenges by strengthening University-community partnerships and establishing new University-community partnerships;
- strengthening relevant academic programs to improve outcomes for Minnesota's youth and families through research, education, and the application of knowledge created by partnerships;
- expanding and sharing the University's intellectual vitality, leadership, and resources through basic research, publications, and outreach.

Progress toward these goals is being made in various ways across the University and beyond. Here are just a few examples of core PICYF activities:

Children's Summit

A series of three annual "Children's Summits" is at the center of the PICYF initiative. The summit brings together University scholars, policy makers, foundation leaders, agency heads and others who desire to work more cooperatively to address children, youth, and family issues in Minnesota. This year's summit, "Staying Strong Through Challenge and Change," held on June 4, focused on middle childhood and the transition to adolescence. (*See article inside.*)

U Connects

This program introduces young people to new ideas and activities and helps familiarize them with campus. The goal of the program is to better link the University's resources to young people and their mentors, and to help more young people see higher education as a possibility.

Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time

The Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time, which Bruininks announced in December, is crafting the vision and strategies to ensure Minnesota's young people—ages 8 to

18—have engaging opportunities to learn and develop during the times when they are not in school.

Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health

The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health is a virtual center at the University bringing together researchers, mental health professionals, community members and others to focus on the emotional health and well-being of Minnesota children. The main objective is to promote dialogue between researchers and community-based professionals and support the transfer of research into the field.

Business Leader Partners

In partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, the McKnight Foundation, Ready 4K, and the Capital City Partnership, Bruininks is hosting informal conversations and workshops on children, youth, and family issues for Twin Cities business leaders. To date, nearly 100 individual business leaders have participated.

Capitol Conversations

During the legislative session, the University holds "Capitol Conversations" that bring together legislators and faculty experts to discuss practical applications for research related to children, youth, and family issues. This year, three sessions were held on topics including supporting Minnesota teachers, violence prevention, and young people's learning and development during time outside of school.

Time Outside of School Plays Key Role in Youth Development

By President Robert H. Bruininks

Thousands of Minnesota children are out of school enjoying a summer break. And while many of us look back fondly on summer breaks filled with everything from city-sponsored summer recreation activities to summer camps to family vacations, many kids today simply do not have those same opportunities. That's cause for concern, as is the broader question of what children are doing when they are not in school. That is why the University of Minnesota has formed the **Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time** to craft a vision and develop strategies to ensure more youth have opportunities to learn and grow during their time outside of school.

What happens to young people outside of school makes a profound difference in their development. On average, young people have nearly 2,000 hours of discretionary time without structure or supervision, according to a report from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. In Minnesota, 42 percent, or nearly twice the national average, of children ages 10 to 12 are home alone after school, according to the 1999 National Survey of American Families, sponsored by the Urban Institute.

Research shows a strong connection between involvement in intentional, challenging learning activities and positive youth development. Students who participate in after-school programs have better school attendance, better grades and test scores, and a more positive attitude toward schoolwork. Time spent in dance lessons, sports programs, summer programs, and similar constructive activities also makes a difference.

One of our own University of Minnesota students illustrates the impact of quality out-of-school programming. When Aja Pridgen was in eighth grade, she joined CitySongs, an after-school program that uses music to promote youth and community development. Sponsored by the University's School of Social Work, in collaboration with the Hallie Q. Brown - Martin Luther King Center, CitySongs is a popular music youth choir and much more. Major social service, educational and cultural activities are integrated into the program to promote positive youth development. CitySongs targets young people of color, grades 3 to 8, primarily from low-income families.

Aja, who is now a sophomore at the U, says that her two years in CitySongs gave her a rich well of experience to draw from. Teamwork and exposure to a diverse group of people played a key role in her development and helped her come out of her shell. And, it helped her get on the ladder to college. As she proudly told those gathered to launch the Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time, "I was a closet singer before coming to CitySongs. Now I'm a voice major at the U of M!"

The commission will examine programs like CitySongs and find out what works best for youth. The commission's goals include building public awareness of the importance of out-of-school time, enhancing strategic use of public and private resources for out-of-school time programs, forming policies that enhance learning and development for Minnesota youth, enhancing the quality and impact of youth programs and activities, and establishing clear benchmarks for the state when it comes to success in the area of out-of-school time.

The University's Center for 4-H Youth Development is providing administrative support for the commission's work, and funding has been provided by the McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota Department of Education, and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. The commission, convened in January 2004, is chaired by WCCO TV anchor **Don Shelby** and former director of Minneapolis Youth Trust Companies **Carol Truesdale** and includes 27 other members who are policy makers, academics, and youth development leaders from communities across the state. It will produce a series of reports on its findings, as well as make recommendations to improve out-of-school time for children and youth.

The commission is just one of many critical action steps we're undertaking as part of the President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families—a three-year effort to focus the University's expertise and public attention on the needs of children, youth, and families.

As a parent, an educational psychologist, and an academic leader, I have seen how young people thrive, and how they grow up to be productive and successful adults when they have opportunities that focus their attention and engage their imagination. I believe that we can make a significant difference in the lives of children and, ultimately, the future success of our state and region, by investing in our children and ensuring that all of us—from citizens to schools to local governments to non-profit organizations to neighborhood groups—align our resources and our efforts on their behalf. That's what this out-of-school time effort is all about, and I look forward to seeing the commission's recommendations in the months ahead.



President Bruninks and his wife, Susan Hagstrum, at the Children's Summit, June 4.

Children's Summit Focuses on Middle Years

More than 200 researchers, professionals, and policy makers who work on child and family issues gathered at the University of Minnesota on Friday, June 4, for the 2004 Children's Summit, "Staying Strong Through Challenge and Change."

The summit centered on the middle childhood and the transition to adolescence, roughly ages 5 to 13. Researchers increasingly believe that these years play a significant role in child development, yet children in this age group receive less attention than children in infancy, early childhood, or adolescence. However, that is changing.

"It's a national trend for people to pay more attention to this period in life," said W. Andrew Collins, chair of the 2004 Children's Summit and the Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Child Psychology at the University. "We're finding that a lot of things we attribute to adolescence actually get started in middle childhood,"

Collins said. "When things take root in middle childhood, it's harder to change their course later on."

For example, drug use is growing much more rapidly in this age group, Collins said. And children are beginning violent and criminal behavior earlier—a troubling trend. Proper early intervention, however, can lead to a successful future for these children. "If you change the course during middle childhood, it can have big effects later on," Collins said.

Summit participants discussed the importance of capitalizing on these opportunities for intervention in middle childhood. Collins will work with the President's Interdisciplinary Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families steering committee and others to use ideas generated at the summit to create action plans that address issues involving the middle childhood years.

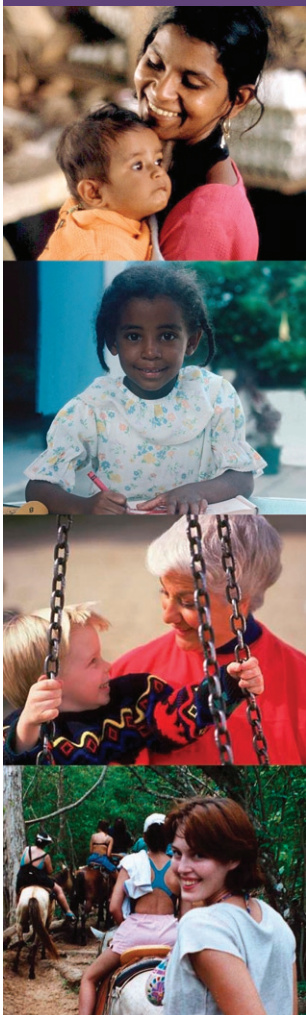
U Research— Project to Improve Lives of Children

University of Minnesota professor Esther Wattenberg is working on developing a model for engaging the community in decision making in rural counties and their adjacent American Indian reservations.

The project is still in the initial phases of planning, data gathering, and community assessment, but it is drawing attention, not only from the communities involved, but also from the rest of the state. Eight counties in Minnesota—Cass, Crow Wing, Beltrami, Clearwater, Mahnomon, Aitkin, Kanabec and Hubbard—rank the highest in at-risk factors for children and families and have been identified for the project. Of these eight, four are 100 percent rural, four are more than 62 percent rural, and all are either home to or adjacent to tribal reservations. The risk factors include those associated with poverty, substance abuse issues involving parents and children, homeless children, juvenile arrest rates, and out-of-home placements.

Wattenberg is affiliated with both the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) in the School of Social Work and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). She and other researchers, along with community representatives, have gathered data and assessed the risk factors for families and children, and convened a series of community forums. During these forums, researchers and practitioners share their insights to spur discussions about what pieces of the local community infrastructure must be enhanced to create model programs reflecting best practices and the resource base available. The first of these forums was held in February, and additional events are planned this summer. This project may offer long-term hope and guidance for meeting some of the difficult challenges faced in rural communities and the adjacent reservations.

For more information, contact Wattenberg at 612-625-6550 or at ewattenb@umn.edu.



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A President's Initiative
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Children, Youth & Families Calendar

Monday–Thursday, August 2–5

“Cultivating Capacity: Linking Youth Development, Health, and Learning,” the 2004 Summer Institute in Adolescent Health, will be held at the Mounds View Community Center, 5394 Edgewood Drive, Mounds View.

This institute emphasizes effective strategies in cultivating youths’ capacities to become competent, confident, and caring adults. Educators of youth for grades 5–12; nurses from school health, clinics, and public health; community health educators, social workers, counselors, and youth workers; administrators; and school board members should attend. It is sponsored by the University of Minnesota’s Center for Adolescent Nursing and the National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Research Center.

For more information, contact 612-626-4772 or ljvegell@umn.edu.

Monday–Tuesday, September 20–21

The 2004 Minnesota Mentoring Conference will be held at the Continuing Education and Conference

Center on the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus in St. Paul.

The conference aims to bring people who represent different sectors together. All use mentoring as a strategy for meeting the needs of youth. Susan Weinberger, the founder and president of the Mentor Consulting Group, will be the keynote speaker. She is an international consultant on mentoring.

Registration and information for the Mentoring Conference are now available at www.mentoringworks.org/Mentor_Conference.html. For more information, call 612-370-9180 or e-mail mentor@mentoringworks.org.

Tuesday, September 28

The Howland Symposium will hold the first in a three-part series on Out-of-School Time. The event, “From Inquiry to Impact: Youth Development in Out-of-School Time,” will be held from 9 a.m. to noon in Memorial Hall, McNamara Alumni Center, 200 Oak Street S.E., Minneapolis.

For more information, contact Lisa Kimball, 612-624-8192 or icd@umn.edu.

For more information: www.umn.edu/pres/picyf