

# Family forum

Minnesota Council on Family Relations

State Affiliate of the National Council on Family Relations

## Policy Conference A Success!

Vicki Thrasher Cronin  
2003 Spring Conference Committee Co-chair

This Spring's conference, "Turning Your Work and Passion into Policy," was our first big step into the policy arena. We were fortunate to have two panels of experts who shared their vast expertise with and knowledge of the process for turning ideas and passions into policy. We



Tim Penny provided an powerful keynote address.

we were also most fortunate to have a powerful and moving keynote address given by the Honorable Tim Penny. As family professionals, we need to focus our efforts around our common cause of

enhancing family life in Minnesota.

The conference was a very successful, thought-provoking and much appreciated learning experience.

Participants were moved by the passion of the speakers and indicated that their experiences were both professionally and personally valuable to them.

In behalf of the MCFR Spring 2003 Conference Committee, Regina Lai

and I, want to thank all our speakers for their willingness to share their expertise with the conference participants. ♦



Linda Rodgers tied everything together.



Members of Power Panel I shared their insights. Pictured from left: Todd Otis, Michael Benjamin, Don Fraser, Kathleen Vellenga and Dr. Reatha Clark King



Creative centerpieces solicited participation.

- parenting skills: Parenting begins before the baby
- Educate school boards, superintendents and other administrators the importance of active parent involvement in their child's education from birth to post secondary
- Expanding family education into K-12
- Equal emphasis on the importance of developmentally appropriate education for ALL children, including ages 0-5, as well as 6-18
- Early care tax incentives to give all parents lots of choices

### Passions List

- Unification of Early Childhood Programs
- Working with Parents, educators and local Government to help children overcome poverty
- Young Mothers/ Adolescent Parenting; building

Winter 2003

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### inside

What is Ready 4 K? ..... 1

President's Letter ..... 2

Fall Conference Highlights ..... 3

Educational Insert:

Getting Children Involved in Household Tasks: Is it Worth the Effort?, M. Rossmann

Readers Corner, T.Bowman

Continued on page 3

## A Note from the MCFR President

Vicki Thrasher Cronin  
 MCFR 2003 President



Vicki Thrasher Cronin

Minnesota Council on Family Relations

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Each January, MCFR's Board holds a day-long retreat to welcome new members and to plan for the new year. Based on our 5 year strategic plan, the Board articulates its goals and objectives for the year. This year, in addition to continuing our membership outreach to diverse communities, greater Minnesota and the business community, the Board determined that we would reach out, focus on policy to create a platform, and eventually to develop resolutions.

Our retreat discussion focused on our voices as professionals and as constituents/citizens; our heads and our hearts. We want to drive change, not just to react to it. We feel like we're always on the defensive, and we want to discover how we can become more powerful, more positive, more offensive in our practice and our research: as well as how we can become a more policy-focused professional organization.

Our work is passionate, and ethical dilemmas will confront us as we look at specific causes. We need to be aware of the many different perspectives on an issue and how they affect different families in different ways. We want to educate thoughtfully and intentionally those who formulate policy. We want to be seen as a resource, a credible, reliable resource, to policy makers and to family professionals.

While MCFR's mission, purpose and philosophy provide a framework for our platform, the MCFR Board needs to know your issues and your concerns so we can flesh out the platform. We heard from those attending the conference (see sessions list summary on page 1). Please take a minute, to tell us about what's important to you as a member of MCFR. Email Vicki at [vickicronin@visi.com](mailto:vickicronin@visi.com) or give me a call at 763-753-5007.

Our first Board resolution (see below), one in support of Early Childhood Family Education, is an example of the thoughtful work our Board leadership and Section Chair expertise can provide to family social

policy advocacy.

This Spring's conference, "Turning Your Work and Passion into Policy," was our first big step into the policy arena. (see Conference Summary on page 1). The conference was a success due in large part to our outstanding speakers who I would like to acknowledge individually. They are: Todd Otis, Michael Benjamin, Don Fraser, Retha Clarke King, Kathleen Vellenga, Janet Gendler, George Latimer, Lori Swanson and Tim Penny. ♦

### MCFR RESOLUTION:

The Minnesota Council on Family Relations, an association of professionals,\* supports the existing law and rules regarding Early Childhood Family Education. We ask that the existing legislation NOT be changed. Language in HF 1404 amends existing law in a manner that has the potential to destroy Early Childhood Family Education quality as well change the program's hallmark of universal access.

The Minnesota Council on Family Relations strongly objects to the change in licensure standards for Parent Educators in the Early Childhood Family Education Program. Parent educators are professionals who require expertise which is accomplished through preparation, practice and examinations and is upheld by a license. Existing legislation provides for provisional licenses, if a licensed educator cannot be found.

Further, we strongly object to changing the age of children whose parents may be served in the Early Childhood Family Education Program. The legislature should continue to allow local schools to

*Continued on page 4*

## Spring Conference Attendees Offer Passions List

Continued from page 1. *The following are comments from your colleagues after attending the Spring Conference. MCFR will continue to solicit your input to determine our public policy agenda. Please watch for continued refinements and offer your input during our Annual Business meeting at the MCFR Annual Conference, Family Ties In Troubled Times, on December 5.*

- Providing equitable and accessible early childhood educational opportunities for all Minnesota children (Birth-5)
- All children have loving adults around them and safe places to live and grow
- More funding for EC Programs (GO Ready for K)
- Bringing quality parenting support to low income families
- Providing community support for families from early childhood to school years
- Helping kids get a decent start in life...
- Effective support for family health and strengths in the inner cities where most influences run counter
- Mental health kids not to suffer and become active members of society
- Affordable, safe, stable housing for families over the life course
- Love and Menending work toward Changes for Kids and Families
- Responsive and affordable Mental Health services to children
- Inform about importance of ECFE program and increase awareness of the concrete and universal benefit of ECFE program
- Professional, quality, well-paid staff who work w/ young children and families
- Get people who support healthy policies and back into positions of power!!
- Fairness for families
- With over 70% of women in Minnesota working- how do we communicate to the legislature how important work/life education is at the worksite for employees, employers, children, families, schools, and communities?
- Strengthening the link and/or support between ECE/ECFE and K-12 education sending all children to school ready to learn and providing the community resources for families to strengthening the family/ education partnership
- To improve/Enhance the opportunities for the healthy growth development of children and families 0-5 particularly in low income
- How to mobilize CDF, MNCRF, ECFE, SR, Child Care HS groups "together"? Develop a coalition with a focused agenda on how to improve lives of children and family
- How to develop a better focus on "family" / "parenting" around all of the early childhood issues
- Identify a "champion" for a unified voice
- Childhood obesity (as I see it, this issue will not be addressed without policy change)
- Marketing and Educating (involves informing and collaborating more with K-12 so that we can gain their support!) better how ECFE supports K-12; working more toward shifting the paradigm to E-12; larger public needs to grasp importance of the role ECFE plays in children's education down the road in order to gain support
- Our current legislature seems to be contaminating the important work of early childhood; I would like to see MCFR advocate for early childhood and parent education
- To help every single child from the youngest to the oldest to feel valued and cared for
- Every child read to everyday
- Maternal and child health
- Basic needs so all children can have opportunity to develop, grow and learn
- Social justice for all families; Family involvement and community in schools
- Affordable, safe, attractive housing for all; Adequate optimal nutrition through the lifetime through education and resources
- Policies in place that keep our youth away from the problems associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse and related violence
- Early childhood education and housing for low income families
- We need to focus on positive parenting- without support at home; we cannot be as effective as we need to be!
- All families have access to basic health care and dentistry as well as affordable safe housing, good education and adequate healthful nutritious food
- Finding and maintaining support (both financial and otherwise) for programs that provide education and (preventive) supportive services for families and children
- Getting the "strength" to add a roll of lobbying. Your issues, when not trained in that area- working in the field was only our emphasis-! Taking on a new responsibility as a part of our job!
- Budget cuts cutting our school family programming
- ECFE- Let's find ways to support the program
- Access to basic/higher education for all adults, especially new Americans, in order for them to gain access to economic opportunity
- Parent education in many forms for families w/ children prenatal thru early adulthood
- Passion-ately believe nothing of significance will happen with decreasing taxes—I will support any candidate with the serious guts to promote increased taxes.
- Am passion-ately opposed to support of more guns (the concealed-carry bill). ♦

# Families in Communities Section Report

By Regina Lai, Chair, Families In Communities Section

Your knowledge, experience and talents are needed. The challenges:

A. "Turning Your Work and Passion into Policy: Game Plans in these Tough Political Times"

1. We will be working on what goals can be achieved from attendees' passions and interests.
2. We will be developing and conducting more advanced trainings as "work-shops", and further trainings to "take on the road" as part of reaching out to educate and train as many as possible. This ties into goals of MCFR, other agencies and University of Minnesota President Bruinicks' statement at the Children's Summit - for

advanced education and training in policy-making.

- B. Gaps in education and services for children and families become more visible when we're closer to the problems they cause, especially in our own and creative methods of positively influencing and strengthening children and families directly or indirectly. This includes children and families we are or may be related to, in our neighborhoods, in our communities, and in systems that govern our lives. We will also focus on strategies and action plans of methods we can support.

Please help make a difference.

Contact Regina

ChildrensHopeInternational@hotmail.com.

## MCFR Resolution

*Continued from page 2*

manage decisions about their programs within the parameters of existing legislation. Existing legislation allows programs to determine who they serve, if funds are not sufficient to serve everyone.

Budget reductions in Early Childhood Family Education do not necessitate changing existing legislation!

Minnesota Council on Family Relations, a state affiliate of the National Council on Family Relations, is dedicated to strengthening families through the education and support of family professionals and decision makers.

The above statement was adopted by the MCFR Board on 4/25/03.

## Minnesota Council on Family Relations

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# Ambiguous Loss

by Ted Bowman



*Ted Bowman*

# READER'S CORNER: Resources Addressing Ambiguous Loss and Related Losses

By Ted Bowman

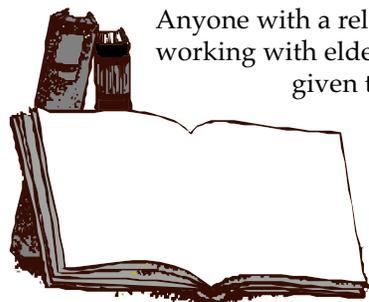
*As a complement to the lead article of this issue of Family Forum, here are three volumes addressing themes of ambiguous and related losses. Each has a Minnesota connection as well. With the exception of one of the editors of The Healing Fountain, all the authors are colleagues here in our state. And two of the volumes were published by Minnesota presses. Home-grown does not mean any reduction in quality. To the contrary, colleagues like these keep holding the quality banner high, inviting those of us working with families to also do quality work. Their insights and practical thoughts will make that easier.*

## Alzheimer's Disease: The Family Journey (2000)

by Wayne Caron, James Pattee, and Orlo Otteson. Plymouth, MN: North Ridge Press, paper \$22.00

As the title suggests, the authors of this practical and haunting volume address the personal challenges of families that include someone with Alzheimer's disease.

Anyone with a relative or friend, anyone working with elders, and all others - especially given the public implications of this disease in costs and impact - will benefit from reading this book.



The book is caringly organized to be easily usable for families living with ambiguity and confusion.

Early chapters emphasize that Alzheimer's disease is a family condition. Drawing on family systems and related theories, the authors discuss the impact for families, especially the uniqueness of this painfully confusing condition. Causes and effects are discussed in detail. Following these overview sections, stages of the disease and the implications for patients and families follow.

For me, this volume has both personal and professional use. Add a name here and there, personalize a few details, and the result could be a Bowman memoir. That's the power of this important book. While clearly connected to research and best practice, it is evident the authors have intimate knowledge of their subject.

## Parent Grief: Narratives of Loss and Relationship (2000)

by Paul Rosenblatt. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, paper \$24.95

Paul Rosenblatt invites his readers to listen to the voices of parents grieving the death of a child. Be prepared as the reader for stories of pain, resiliency, deep grief, and impres-

sive family coping. Even as one working in the field, I found the breadth of subjects addressed, especially through the recorded words of bereft parents, both moving and, at times, overwhelming. I repeatedly put the book down only to reach for it later to read more.

Rosenblatt has the rare ability to weave the interviews with families with the growing literature on grief and bereavement. Covering subjects ranging from parent metaphors for their grief to the impact on couples' relationships to experiences of support, he weaves the stories of parents with commentary and linkage to research and theory.

## The Healing Fountain: Poetry Therapy for Life's Journey (2003)

edited by Geri Giebel Chavis and Lila Lizabeth Weisberger. St. Cloud: North Star Press, paper \$19.95

Speaking to the 2003 graduates of Emory University, Nobel Prize winning author Seamus Heaney reminded his audience that most true and necessary poems arose from places of suffering and decision. When written well, they speak to the realities of our lives in ways that are often accessible and insightful. The editors of this significant volume took Heaney's words further by linking quality poetry with skilled poetry therapists. The result is a wonderfully practical volume for family educators and therapists who want to integrate literary resources into their work.

*The Healing Fountain* is organized in such a way as to be immediately useful to practitioners working with families. Each section addresses common themes of family work. Coping with anger and fear, encountering life's choices, and the parent-child connection are but three of the chapter headings. In each, poems are included along with discussion of the use of poetry resources for that topic. All of the writers are certified poetry therapists in the National Association for Poetry Therapy.