

Family forum

Minnesota
Council on
Family
Relations

State Affiliate
of the
National Council on
Family Relations

What Is Ready 4 K?

Vicki Thrasher Cronin

Ready 4 K Associate Executive Director

“Research has shown that investment in early childhood development programs brings a real public return of 12 percent. . . . We are unaware of any other economic development effort that has such a public return, and yet early childhood development is rarely viewed in economic development terms.” Rob Grunewald and Art Rolnick, Minneapolis StarTribune, February 6, 2003.

No one can deny that raising our youngest children well is of unequalled importance for a just and strong society. Now even economists concur. Yet that belief and the actions of our elected leaders are not in line. Far too often

parents and early childhood

professional get little

more than

lip service and sympathy from those in power.

Why? Because we lack the power to demand that they act.

Early childhood advocates created Ready 4 K as a campaign to build this political power. We need to demand that our children are Minnesota's number one priority and we need to back our demand up with the support of thousands of citizens who vote. Ready 4 K aims to be an effective champion for children birth to five and will focus on changing our state in ways that assure that all infants, toddlers and preschoolers get the support and stimulation they need to flourish in kindergarten and beyond. With its allies, Ready 4 K is creating public understanding and grassroots support that is necessary for parents, early childhood professionals and communities to get the information and resources they need to do society's most important job: raising children well.

Organizing community leaders, Ready 4 K is conducting an aggressive public awareness and communications campaign so that the public better understands the problems and challenges of young children and their fami-



Parents and providers, educators, and professionals must unite and organize effectively to advocate on behalf of young children.

lies. Ready 4 K will publicize possible solutions and simple acts that can help improve school readiness of young children. This public awareness campaign, through repeated and memorable messages, will enable better parenting and higher quality early care and education, as well as the necessary public policies to support each.

But general public awareness alone will not be enough to drive the early childhood movement. Parents and providers, educators, and professionals must unite and organize effectively to advocate on behalf of young children. Ready 4 K is focused on bringing together what is currently a fragmented field to become a more powerful united constituency. We are expanding the circle to include the business, and faith sectors as well as citizens at large. For

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Winter 2003

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Vicki Thrasher Cronin
MCFR 2003 President



Vicki Thrasher Cronin

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Our conference, Families and Culture: Exploring the Intersection, was an enormous success. 200 people attended and 140 wrote evaluations, which were almost unanimous in participant satisfaction with their experience. People want more. They don't want the diversity focus to stop. What a fabulous wrap up an energetic year of MCFR work!

Now, a new year, a new governor, and war? National and state budget cuts are slicing through the programs and initiatives that support and provide for children and families. These are hard times for the heart. There certainly has never been a more appropriate time for MCFR to clarify its role and responsibilities in the development of family social policy. This year I will provide that leadership. Our spring conference will take us beyond our daily work, the work of our hearts. We will tame the mystique of family social policy and learn to frame our values in messages that result in policy that supports the diverse needs of families in Minnesota. We will begin now to plan strategically for the future of our children, their families, and their communities. Join us. We have just begun the conference planning and would invite you to our committee. We're looking for a diverse planning group! (Call Vicki at 763-753-5007)

Marcie Brooks, thank you for your leadership in 2002. We grew our membership in diversity and state-wide representation. Marcie renewed relationships with old friends (professional associations) and made some new friends with whom we can explore collaborations! What a gift you have given us.

After you've read your copy of the Forum, pass it on to a colleague, friend or decision maker. Invite them to become a member of MCFR. We are dedicated to strengthening families through the education and support of family professionals and decision makers. And we have fun doing it!



Your 2003 MCFR Board!

What Is Ready 4 K?

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example, in March Ready for K is convening local meetings with legislators all over Minnesota! And we'll be doing it again in June.

Ready 4 K is building a wave: Join the campaign on the web at www.ready4k.org. Our web site will keep you up to date on the campaign. Pass the word; tell your students, clients, friends and family about Ready 4 K. We need everyone who cares about kids and wants to invest in the future to act now. We will win – together!

Annual Conference Leaves Participants Wanting More on Diversity

By Madge Alberts, Conference Co-chair

“The more we become aware, the more we realize we need to learn.”

This thoughtful comment from Dr. Paul Rosenblatt was one of many bits of wisdom gleaned by participants in MCFR's Annual Conference, "Families and Culture: Exploring the Intersection," on Friday, Dec. 6. Attended by over 200 people, the conference focused on issues related to diversity and families, with particular emphasis on new immigrant and refugee families.

A dynamic, energetic, moving and

culture? Panelists shared their experiences very openly, and their responses were revealing in several ways. First, they illustrated the similarities between the three cultures represented - Hmong (Cambodia), African (Kenya) and Hispanic (Cuba). Second, all three expressed some parts of their cultural norms around these issues that made them uncomfortable now. Finally, they illustrated a striking difference from

“mainstream” U.S. culture. All three expressed concepts and beliefs that were very “collectivist” in nature (the good of the many compared to the good of the one; the entire culture/ community being responsible for the upbringing of children and the



Tou Ger Xiong moved and challenged the audience.

The conference left participants hungry for more. Many program evaluations indicated a desire for a follow up conference on the topic of diversity and families. Clearly the topic, and the presenters struck a need among family professionals.



Kids Handle With Care won the 2002 Friend of the Family Award.

challenging performance by Tou Ger Xiong expanded people's awareness of Hmong history and culture, and raised assumptions about life that Americans take for granted. Peppering the audience with wisdom interspersed with comedy and rap, Tou Ger brought people to laughter and tears at the same through the sharing of his experiences and insights as a refugee immigrant to the United States.

A panel of three people who have immigrated fairly recently to the United States responded to three critical questions: 1) What is a “good” parent in your culture and how did you learn how to parent? 2) What is a “good” child in your culture? 3) What makes a happy, healthy family in your

support of families), while American culture is currently much more dominated by an individualist perspective. The panel was moderated by Ann Lovrien from the St. Paul Early Childhood Family Education program.

Following a brief time of small group discussion, two respondents provided a summary and wrap up of the day. Juan Moreno and Rose Brewer, both of the University of Minnesota, challenged participants to think about some of the bigger issues around culture and prejudice, as well as personal next steps.



Ron Pitzer congratulates 2002 Ruth Hathaway Jewson Award Winner, Rose Allen.

Save the Date - Friday, April 25!

The 2003 MCFR Spring Conference!

**WORK OF THE HEART:
FRAMING FAMILY SOCIAL POLICY MESSAGES
IN THESE POLITICAL TIMES**

North Como Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, Minnesota

Learn from and interact with MN policymakers, power players and experts.

Learn how to influence family policy and handle tough challenges as a constituent, an expert and a resource for research and information.

Learn behind-the-scenes power plays and strategies for putting your passions into policy, overcoming obstacles, and helping families.

Minnesota Council on Family Relations

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U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 1794
Minneapolis, MN

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Getting Children Involved in Household Tasks: Is It Worth the Effort?

by Marty Rossmann, Associate Professor and Coordinator, Family Education Program, University of Minnesota



Marilyn Rossmann

Struggling to get children to pick up toys, put their clothes in the laundry, care for younger siblings, and help with other tasks that keep a family going is a BIG concern for parents. Often the amount of work the child accomplishes is less than the effort expended by the parent to get the child to do the job.

I recently did a secondary analysis of data collected over a 20 year period by Diana Baumrind (known for her work on parenting styles.) The new study shows that involving young children (ages 3-5) in household tasks contributes to important outcomes for those children when they are in their mid-twenties. Young adults whose parents got them to participate in household tasks at a young age were doing better at about age 25 in terms of being on a career track, completing education, relationships with others and non-drug and alcohol use than those who were not engaged in helping at home.



What's so important about early connections to the drudgery of routine chores? Tasks such as care of clothes, toys and pets, and clearing dirty dishes develops a sense of responsibility, empathy (contributing and being sensitive to the welfare of the family) and helps

the child to begin to learn life skills. The child discovers that some things that have to be done are not fun. While significant agrarian work, such as egg gathering, is no longer a part of family life, these mundane jobs occupy children with something more meaningful than most TV watching.

What should parents keep in mind regarding sharing responsibilities in the home?

- Teaching a child a task takes time - the kitchen may be all wet and there may be a few "rides" on the vacuum sweeper.

- At first the parent will need to keep the child "company" and try to make the task new and challenging.

-The ability to participate increases with the child's age, so use common sense about the number of tasks expected.

-Try not to divide jobs by gender, all children need to know what is involved in running a household.

- Children should be given a choice about what tasks they want to do (however, doing nothing is not one of the choices!)

- The child should be asked when the task will be completed.

- The tasks should be rotated to avoid boredom and having to always do a job the child dislikes.

- The parent sets the standards (realistically) for how the work needs to be done (child picks up 1/2 of the blocks and the parent picks up the other half.)

- The parent needs to provide supportive feedback, such as hugs, kisses, encouragement and, possibly a star on a chart on the refrigerator. Allowance should not be tied to doing tasks - except for big jobs like raking leaves. Learning how to manage money is too important to run the risk of having to take away the allowance as punishment for not doing a task.

- The consequences of not doing tasks should be logical (toys not put away are "lost" for a day).

- Parents should be models for their children. If parents want children to pick up their clothes and pull up the bed covers, they'll have to do those things themselves!

Finally, if a parent waits until the child is a teenager, it's much more difficult to get them involved in house work (they think the only reason parents want them to participate is because the parent doesn't want to do the work themselves!) Not only is it tougher to draw an adolescent in, according to this study, it also does not accomplish the



benefits for them as young adults in the same way as if they began at a young age.

READER'S CORNER: Books About Relationships: Emerging, Ending, and Continuing

By Ted Bowman

The Art of Loving Well: A Character Education Program for Today's Teenagers.

(1993) Boston: Boston University. Student anthology \$19.95 - teacher's guide \$10.00.

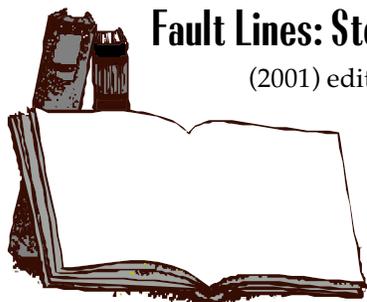
The challenge of teaching adolescents about values and family relationships is often named and lamented. Frustration about if and how it can be done is a common experience. Typical textbooks and teaching methods have been debated and reviewed.

Boston University, in its controversial linkage with area schools in Boston, has created, with the assistance of the Dibble Fund, a character education program using literary resources. The result is a book and teacher's guide that I find stimulating, provocative, engaging, and well done.

The use of stories may provide the distance that allows adolescents to address values and family themes without the risks of self-disclosure or exposure of their own family. Stories, as the developers purport, allow us to think and talk about profound experiences without the embarrassment of talking directly about ourselves.

The choices of stories include a range of viewpoints and voices. The readings are organized in three sections: 1)early loves and losses, 2)romance, and 3)commitment and marriage. While written with an adolescent audience in mind, many of the stories could be easily and effectively used in parent education and in work with couples.

There are parallel resources for elementary and middle school ages. For more information about ordering contact www.BuildingRelationshipSkills.org



Fault Lines: Stories of Divorce

(2001) edited by Caitlin Shetterly. New York: Berkley Books, hardback \$21.95.

We Used To Be Wives: Divorce Unveiled Through Poetry

(2002) edited by Jane Butkin Roth. Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, paper \$14.95

These two volumes complement *The Art of Loving Well* without the teacher's guide. Both deal with divorce and offer stories and poems as a way of addressing important themes.

Caitlin Shetterly has collected a rich array of short stories of divorce, beginning with John Cheever's haunting tale "The Season of Divorce." *We Used to Be Wives* is even more specific. As the title suggests, these are poems of divorce written by women.

The editor, for example, wrote about houses and marriages: "I used to think/once we filled it up/ we would find our lives there." And later, "We carefully stacked dreams like deserted chairs..."

Each of these volumes is organized around the phases of divorce and those affected by such choices. Family educators and therapists would find each of these a useful resource for aiding families in dealing with this all-too common experience.

Gay and Lesbian Couples: Voices From Lasting Relationships

(1997) by Richard Mackey, Bernard O'Brien, and Eileen Mackey. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, paper, \$19.95

The authors of this important volume have been studying committed relationships for years. This volume follows an earlier study of lasting marriages. Their goal, as stated in the preface, was to sensitize people to the world of lasting relationships of lesbian and gay couples without pre-judging the research. Using a rich mixture of measures with an even richer array of voices and stories from the couples, the book pulls the reader in. You will want to read more about each of the couples.

After chapters addressing topics like roles, conflict, decision-making and intimacy, the final chapter compares the results of studies of heterosexual and homosexual lasting relationships. Similarities and differences are highlighting and discussed. The book will be a wonderful resource for all persons working with families. It can be used as important background and counterpoint to prejudicial stereotypes. It can also serve to enrich the direct work of therapists and educators.