



REGION 8 ACTION COUNCIL MEETING NOTES

1 p.m. Jan 18, 2023, Stewart Centre Freeport

IN PERSON: Ashley Harms, Stephanie Lewis, Devan Spellman, Stephanie Koclanis.

ZOOM: Emily Dixon, Amiee Schoenhaar, Jenine Patty-Anderson, Amanda Meyers, Kenny Lewis, Chandra Morris.

Regional Council Manager Lou Ann Hayes called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m.

Lou Ann started with a review of the January 4 meeting and then also talked about her trip to Springfield with other Birth to Five staff to meet with State legislators. She said the trip was successful and they met with many of the representatives from various regions and informed them of what Birth to Five is all about.

Lou Ann then announced Birth to Five Illinois had chosen the Northwest Illinois Early Childhood Consortium (affiliated with United Way) for a grant totaling \$52,128. The funds can be used immediately and will help to fund the 2-1-1 phone number that acts as the referral hotline for a variety of local social service agencies especially helping parents to find child care resources.

The discussion then focused on survey questions Lou Ann had sent out to the group prior to the meeting dealing with the huge gap between number of kids under 6 in our region and the number of slots for early childhood education and care. Answers included locations, lack of qualified staff, buildings needing costly improvements, “red tape” in many areas, transportation concerns, lack of 2nd and 3rd shift providers, among others.

Members also said there are many unlicensed providers in the region that go unaccounted for if they do not receive Child Care Assistance Program funding. Lou Ann said a glaring need is in Carroll County particularly in Thomson, Savanna and Mount Carroll where only 1 provider is known. She hopes to set up a meeting with people from those areas to get a provider for both towns.

Another survey question was what data is needed to get a better analysis of the slot gap. Members said need a breakdown of 0-3 and 3-K numbers. General



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numbers should work. Besides the numbers, members also wanted to know why such a large number of kids were not enrolled in some type of licensed early childhood education and care.

Family & Community Engagement Specialist Dean Wright told a story of a local mom who attended a preschool screening and was told her child would not qualify for various reasons. He then asked the mom if there was any follow-up from the school district later on and she said no. Council members said this happens often that families are not referred to other options at the screening to ensure kids are ready for kindergarten.

All agreed there seems to be a breakdown in getting parents information at the screening events and also a lack of follow-up with parents of kids who do not qualify for preschool openings in the schools. Building awareness of options is a priority as is connecting providers to the districts to get their information out.

Members also said they've seen a decrease in parent participation in screenings and early childhood education and care in general since COVID. However, it is now trending up. Another positive sign is growing numbers in programs that train and certify people for jobs in ECEC. Lou Ann suggested a career fair event maybe needed to help get recent graduates jobs in the field.

Council members continued discussion on the issue of how best to prepare Hispanic children for kindergarten. Lou Ann told them she is meeting with Fr. Diego who conducts Spanish Masses at St. Mary's Church to discuss this issue. Fr. Diego works with the Hispanic congregation and could act as the lead person on this outreach as a trusted source of information within that community.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m. The next meeting is at 1 p.m. on Feb 1.

Todd McKenna
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