



## MEETING NOTES

### **Region 8 Action Council Meeting**

**Date & Time: May 17, 2023, 1 p.m.**

IN PERSON: Emily, Sarah, Devan

ZOOM: Janine, Amanda, Amiee, Ashley

Regional Council Manager Lou Ann Hayes called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Lou Ann explained the purpose of this meeting was to come up with recommendations that we could enact to address the priority issues defined in the April 19 meeting.

Lou Ann asked members what are ways to grow and improve the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce? Jenine said providing financial help for school training would be very helpful. We need to get the business owners involved and they could sponsor child care slots and review benefits offered to include more child care flexibility. Also, a group of businesses could combine and open a daycare.

As far as training, Ashley said for each credential that child care workers receive, the center is reimbursed for that increase in pay. To get those credentials takes college credit. Lou Ann proposed United Way could bring in a speaker to bring staff from many agencies together at one time to network and get training. Jenine said Head Start has money for training. She said Whiteside County Health Department does have people who can help families with issues they face. Ashley said the YMCA also has someone that does training on some topics.

Sarah said Starnet is a training program through ISBE and offered through Western Illinois University. Starnet isn't even limited to Child Care staff, anyone can take it, especially parents. Child care credit is paid for now. The problem is WIU is not offering college credit for any of the Starnet training. Another training program is Gateways to Opportunity, which is through the Illinois Professional Development System.

Ashley said Gateways does not give any credit for training taken through Starnet or other agencies. Sarah said all training should be honored by all agencies and the



requirements to get a degree are a barrier which chases people away from pursuing one.

Lou Ann proposed a mentoring program and Ashley a hands-on youth employment program for child care would be a great idea to start. High school students then could work in the field to expose them to the realities of the job and learn the skills required.

To help attract more male and Hispanic candidates to the child care field, Lou Ann proposed local staff make a video explaining the job and why they should pursue it as a career. Ashley has a male teacher and both she and Devan have Spanish-speaking staff at their agencies who likely would make a promotional video.

Lou Ann said it's become obvious that the smaller towns in Region 8 desperately need at least one child care center. There are thoughts of centers in Freeport expanding, but Ashley said she's run into some barriers during discussions. Those include delays in getting a State fire inspector to go through potential expansion locations to point out what needs to be fixed, installed, etc. DCFS regulations also are extremely restrictive to the point of making expansion impossible. Ashley said because one door won't close right she had an entire preschool program shut down and sits empty. Even if those hurdles are overcome, there is the need to hire more staff and secure funds.

Lou Ann said one idea to pursue regarding finding more space for child care classes is with the area churches. There are empty classrooms that already have passed code inspections. We need to reach out to area pastors and ask if they're interested. Empty business buildings are plentiful, or the State has funds to build.

Devan said another area to focus on is recruiting people to act as home visitors to offer support and teach skills to new parents. Lou Ann suggested talking with the Senior Center to propose that idea to area retired people and gauge their interest.

Expansion of preschool screening is another area of need to make sure the majority of our kids 0-5 are getting screened. We can help wherever we can with this.

The meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m. The next meeting is June 7.

Todd McKenna  
Administrative Support  
Birth to Five Illinois Region 8

