

Career Choices & Challenges

A News Sheet about Montana Early Care and Education Career Development

Fall 2009



New ECP Projects!

Every year, with input from the Career Development Advisory Board, the Early Childhood Projects (ECP) writes a work plan with goals, objectives and timelines for completion. This guides the work we do and helps us keep moving forward with our partners to improve systems for the early childhood workforce and professional development. The upcoming year proves to be busy and exciting—a few highlights:

- ❖ Target outreach to all Tribal, Head Start and Early Head Start programs about The Practitioner Registry and other ECP programs and opportunities
- ❖ Develop a system of support for the Center for Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) training statewide to help fill the gap in professional development focused on healthy social-emotional development for young children.
- ❖ Participate in the National Association for the Education of Young Children's *Pathways to Cultural Competence Project* to explore our professional development system through this lens.
- ❖ Develop a Preschool Teacher/Caregiver Curriculum to provide a comprehensive 60 hour overview of best practices in working with three to five year olds in group settings.

Spotlight on Amy DeHerrera in Poplar, MT

"I never knew the importance of an education while I was growing up. It was through taking these college classes that I developed the awareness of the importance and benefits of having this good clean, healthy knowledge." Her children have attended college classes with her (even at three days old!). "I want to be a positive role model for my children, my students and any other person who enters my life," Amy says. The MSU colleges, both Northern and Bozeman have allowed her through the use of technology to take college courses in the comfort of her own townhome. She says, "I would not have been able to go the distance without it."

Amy DeHerrera is an Assiniboine Sioux native from the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Her Indian name is Circling Eagle Woman and her birth name is Amy Headdress. When Amy's 4 year old son was enrolled in Head Start in 1997, the parent committee came to see her at home to find out if she was willing to be a temporary assistant teacher for a month. .. and she has been with Fort Peck Head Start ever since!

She worked as an assistant teacher for 8 ½ years and has been the lead teacher for 4 ½ years with the three year olds. Amy was originally trained to be a certified mechanic in diagnostics. "I began to attend college when my youngest was 2 years old, he recently turned thirteen!" she stated. Amy received the Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship in 2003, and later went on to receive two associate degrees and will complete a bachelor's degree next May in early childhood education (she already has a bachelors' degree in Elementary Education with a minor as a Reading Specialist!). Amy has managed to accomplish all this while being married for eighteen years, raising four children of her own and several extended family members over the years!!

Amy loves that every day is new and different working with young children and their families. She has the freedom to make things better for her students and advance her own personal growth along with them. Her biggest challenge is learning to let her own children go as they gain independence and become capable on their own. Clearly, Amy continues to challenge herself and make a difference in her community as a lifelong learner. We are inspired by your dedication to early childhood!

Looking for Early Childhood College Courses and Degree Programs?

Please be cautious when choosing a path for your education in early childhood!

We continue to be saddened to find people who have invested time and money in higher education in early childhood from institutions that are not regionally accredited through the U. S. Department of Education. This means their credits will not count toward a level on the Career Path/Practitioner Registry, for Higher Education Merit Pay or transfer into the Montana University System and/or other schools.

The six regional accrediting bodies are:

- ❖ Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools
- ❖ New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- ❖ North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- ❖ Norwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- ❖ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- ❖ Western Association of Schools and Colleges

One of Many...

We had the extreme pleasure of attending a session at the recent Early Childhood Conference in Billings presented by all of the students enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Distance Partnership Program. Christine Lux, adjunct faculty in the program introduced the students and facilitated the session. This program was initiated by Dr. Laura Massey at MSU – Bozeman in 2000 to give Native American students opportunities to complete degrees in their communities. Our spotlight Amy DeHerrera was one of more than 24 students who discussed various aspects of the programs they work in, their educational experiences, and their journey through higher education. Their dedication, humor, and commitment to early childhood professionalism was truly amazing!

Libby and Brandi

Early Childhood Center Directors' Symposium a Huge Success!

The 5th Annual Directors' Symposium took place in Helena on September 10 – 11. This event continues to grow in popularity with over 70 center directors and assistant directors attending this year from all over Montana. Each year a volunteer planning group or directors meets via conference calls to discuss possible topics, speakers and plan the symposium format. The Early Childhood Project and Child Care plus+ guide and facilitate this process collaboratively.

This year a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Seminar took place on the morning of the 10th. The MtAEYC organized and facilitated this seminar. Approximately 30 center directors and assistant directors participated. The intent was to meet the needs of any center that is considering accreditation or those who are already in the process of pursuing it. Everyone had an opportunity to ask questions, to receive guidance on the process and share their experiences with others.

Next year the symposium will be held at the Mansfield Center in Billings on September 9—10. If you are interested in helping with the planning of this event or would like to offer suggestions, please feel free to contact Ann Klaas at 406-994-7454. If you haven't attended the symposium in the past we invite you to attend next year. There are a limited number of stipends to help offset the cost of travel. We look forward to the 6th Annual Directors' Symposium and hope to see many new faces next year!



Incentive Awards for College and Training in Early Childhood!

The ECP is now managing the Merit Pay I and Higher Education Merit Pay programs that were formerly administered by the Early Childhood Services Bureau. Both programs are offered to encourage practitioners to be intentional about their training and education in early care and education. Upon completion of approved training or college course work practitioners receive an incentive award ranging from \$250 - \$750.

We think this is a 'good fit' with our mission of supporting and enhancing the professional development of the early childhood workforce! The ECP has been updating and making revisions to the applications for both programs and invites you to visit our website to read more or locate an application. At the bottom of the home page, click on *What's New!* Your final award payment will be made through the Child Care Under the Big Sky (CCUBS) computer system in Helena rather than from our office on campus. But for questions or information about the programs, please give us a call or send us an email!

*****Please read instructions carefully and complete every section of the application, so you will not miss out on these incentives to help you be a life-long learner!*****

- ❖ Deadline for Merit Pay I (second round) applications: 5:00 p.m. November 6, 2009 in the ECP Office
- ❖ Higher Education Merit Pay Applications available: November 6, 2009
- ❖ Deadline for Higher Education Merit Pay applications: December 4, 2009 in the ECP Office

*****You will need to have a current Practitioner Registry certificate to receive your award - do not wait until the last minute to apply to The Registry! Start today while it is still free through December 31, 2009!*****

It's Still Free!

Don't forget, The Practitioner Registry is FREE until December 31, 2009! If you have not received your certificate in the mail please contact us to find out if your application is complete. We may still need additional paper work from you to complete your application. In the new year, we will go back to our original fees. Initial application fees will be \$25.00 and annual renewals will be \$10.00.

The Time is Now!

“Play is a child's response to life — almost where life begins, play begins. Play...is the way the child learns what no one can teach him.”

—Lawrence K. Frank

Trainer Professional Development: Focus Groups, Surveys and a Forum

Many of you remember and were listed in the original Trainer Directory at the ECP. Trainers in Montana Voluntarily submitted an application that included a brief biography and information about Knowledge Base content areas in which they were willing to offer training. The purpose was to link trainers with organizations planning professional development for early childhood practitioners. This worked well for 10 years, but as we have evolved so have our ideals and expectations for improving the quality of training for the early childhood workforce. Many states have systems in place for qualifying their trainers at different levels such as beginning, intermediate or advanced. Many other states, like Montana, are beginning to recognize the importance of Trainer Professional Development and are striving to identify what combinations of education, training and experience trainer/instructors should be required to have.

As we began this process we enlisted the help of trainers and sponsors of training in Montana to establish a framework or process for qualifying trainers. We began by facilitating focus groups with twenty eight trainers from a wide variety of professional settings that offer instruction in early childhood. The focus groups provided information to develop a survey to gather more detailed feedback from a larger group of trainers. The results of the survey were used to plan a trainer forum that took place in August.

Approximately thirty trainers and training sponsors came together in Bozeman to review the survey results. They began to put some structure around what trainer professional development would be most beneficial in Montana. A report is forthcoming in the next year and a system will be developed that is user-friendly, inclusive and one that will raise the overall quality of early childhood professional development in Montana. A very special thank you to all of the people who have helped us with this project and an even bigger thank you to Sandra Morris of Child Care plus+ for all of her dedication as coordinator. We will be keeping everyone posted on this as we move forward.