



Dear Iowans:

***Revolutionary
initiative***

Five short years ago, legislation passed that began a revolutionary initiative. We know it today as Community Empowerment. It was founded on the vision that communities and state government could work together to improve the well being of our youngest children. Recognizing the importance of a young child's early development, birth to five, the Iowa Empowerment Board is engaging in efforts to unite agencies, organizations and community partners to speak with a shared voice and meet a set of agencies, organizations and community partners to speak with a shared voice and meet a set of goals on behalf of all young children and families.

***Every child, beginning at
birth, will be healthy and
successful.***

Empowerment's vision, "Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful" is challenging stakeholders at state and local levels to look toward the future and build a system that provides quality early care, health and education for all of Iowa's youngest citizens.

Grounded in the belief that our work is not about "other people's" children, but about everyone's child, we cannot do anything less than provide high quality early childhood education to all children who need it; provide first-rate health care for all children; support families, the most important teachers of young children; and devote the resources – both public and private – to give every child the chance to be truly ready for school and for life.

At the heart of Community Empowerment are 58 local Community Empowerment Areas representing all 99 counties, each with its own leadership and locally developed plan. The level of integration and collaboration among local community partners committed to young children has grown substantially. 2003 marks the completion of all 58 areas completing a redesignation process. Although there have been growing pains, we see continuous growth and better understanding of the possibilities as everyone works together!

Collaboration is the key to success

Across the state, Community Empowerment Areas are successfully moving forward in their efforts to create positive change for children and families. Whereas in the beginning, pulling together the many elements into a successful plan seemed impossible, each year we are seeing progress toward collaboration, achieving statewide results, and increased advocacy for early childhood. We could easily give 58 different stories of success from each of the areas. We have included just a few good examples in the Performance Accountability section and a Showcase Report from each area in the final section of this report.

Iowa Empowerment benefited greatly this year from the technical assistance grant we received from North Carolina's Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center. We thank North Carolina for sharing their expertise and their commitment to working together for better results for children. The Iowa Empowerment Board specifically has been re-energized by presentations and conversations with the folks from Smart Start, and the State Board has committed to "speak loudly, speak often and speak with one voice" for Iowa's youngest children.

***Speak loudly, speak often
and speak with one voice***

Karen Ponder, Director of North Carolina Partnership for Children reminded us that building a system and a movement is all about leadership. Leadership is problem solving, and it demands great purposeful energy. It is teaching, embracing and including. Leadership is, in the words of President Theodore Roosevelt, "to dare mighty things." Leadership is a reminder that the greatest stories in human history are those of individuals who made a great difference on behalf of others.

It is a testament to how much Iowans care for young children and their families as they put aside individual interests and work together to make a difference on behalf of others and help make Iowa a better place to raise a child. The mission is clear and there is much to be done. Let us believe in the future of everyone's children and provide the leadership needed to reach our goals. As author James Baldwin said, "For these are all our children... We will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."

Thanks to everyone that has contributed to this worthy effort.

**Nancy Van Milligen, Chairperson
Iowa Empowerment Board**