

Moving Toward Collaboration at the State Level

Empowerment legislation speaks strongly for collaboration and working in partnerships to achieve results for children 0-5 years of age. A result of the Empowerment legislation has been to build stronger partnerships between the state agencies of Public Health, Human Rights, Human Services, Education, and Management. Benefits to the state agencies are derived from the interagency team's ability to share a common vision and mission, promote an environment of respect and trust, and share resources to enhance an early care, health and education system. Positive results for Iowa's young children happen as team members share their expanded knowledge on early childhood within their respective agencies. Adopting a "common vision" has moved state agencies and team members toward "common ground" for all of Iowa's young children.

The state interagency team was set up to "model for local organizations" the collaborative efforts by providing staff from state agencies and maximizing in-kind support provided by organizations in order to support the implementation of Community Empowerment legislation. The state team has moved through all the stages toward collaboration, by establishing an environment that promotes continuous and ongoing sharing of individual information, building relationships and trust, removing turf issues, and orienting new members when there is a change in the membership of the team. The team has moved to a high level of collaboration and functions as a unit of support for promoting state and local partnerships and developing early care, health and education systems to enhance services for young children and their families in Iowa. The state team respects and values each member's knowledge and talents. The state team believes community collaboration is a successful mechanism to build a system in Iowa for all children ages 0-5 and their families. The team believes they can assist Iowa's leaders to guide Iowa to reach the vision "Every Child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful".

Below are some examples of collaboration that were shared by state team members:

"I've learned how important early childhood and early learning is to all state agencies. Early childhood crosses all organization boundaries; education, health and human services through transportation, public safety, and economic development. I have been able to teach the vital connection with public health and learn the same important information from my team peers representing other state agencies. I've come to believe that through public and private organizations working together in a partnership between the state and community level, we will be able to provide the best support Iowa has to offer for all pregnant women, infants, and young children."

"There has been a greater connection between the Community Action Agencies (CAA) and Empowerment because of my involvement on the Empowerment team. I provide regular updates to CAA's and the Family Development Self Sufficiency (FaDSS) Council regarding Empowerment activities. We had CAA employees attend our stakeholders groups to help design Iowa's early childhood system. I have provided information to the state team about the poverty guidelines to help them understand what we mean when we say, "A family must be below 130% of the poverty guidelines to be eligible for a program." I was able to share the Restoring Hope powerpoint with the Empowerment Advisory Council that helps people understand the impact of poverty on children specifically. That in turn led to some of the Advisory Council members contacting their local

community action agencies for more information. Due to my involvement on the Empowerment team I was able to hear about resources and obtain those resources at IDPH that are helpful to our Family Development and Self Sufficiency (FaDSS) workers. We have strengthened the FaDSS program by putting more emphasis on early education opportunities both in the home and other settings and now track this as a goal. We are also tracking immunizations, medical and dental homes. These things all came about as I learned from team members more about the disciplines they represent and has given me a more holistic approach to my work with communities and families.”

“Since joining the team in early 2001, I have the pleasure of seeing collaboration at work at the local level and at the state level through the team. One of the hallmarks of Empowerment is the emphasis on quantifying the achievement of results. What we are seeing now are the fruits of the local empowerment areas labor. More families have access to affordable and quality child care, so that they can attain or maintain employment. Some areas have what would be considered universal preschool, with some areas reporting as many as 98% of kindergartners entering school with preschool experience. The Common Language Framework has become a proven tool for all state agencies, through the implementation of the Accountable Government Act, to use in how to measure and report positive results for the citizens we serve. Team discussions about accountability issues are always healthy and, yes, even exciting sometimes. Through the team and observing local successes, I have gained an even greater appreciation for the potential power of collaborations and partnerships.”

“It is exciting to see the collaborative relationships that have formed on the state empowerment team contributing to other partnerships at both state and local levels. By working together with state and local partners in early care, health and education on a unifying early childhood vision, I have seen an increased interest in the investment to establish a comprehensive system to support all young children and families living in Iowa. We are beginning to develop relationships with public and private partners that may not have not been an active participant in previous “conversations,” such as with businesses and elected officials. Community Empowerment legislation enables local citizens to promote collaboration among education, health and human services in order to improve the quality of life for children, 0 – 5, and their families. Through my participation on the state interagency team, I continue to gain a better understanding that not one agency, department or program can reach the results without the collaborative partnerships established through the spirit of Community Empowerment!”