

Allied Drive Early Childhood Initiative

Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk

March 23, 2004

Issues Facing Allied Drive

Seven-percent of poor children between the ages of birth to 4 in Dane County live in the Allied Drive neighborhood. Of those seven-percent, nearly 8 out of 10 live on the street of Allied Drive. Currently there are 668 families with 1,348 children under 18 years of age living in the Allied Drive neighborhood. Forty-one percent of these families are headed by single women. Twenty-seven percent of these children live in poverty. Significant AODA problems, mental health challenges, and chronic unemployment or underemployment add to the difficulty many Allied Drive residents experience in trying to better their lives and the lives of their children.

Summary: Allied Drive Early Childhood Initiative (ECI):

In summary, through the Allied Drive Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), we propose to increase families' access to:

- a) prenatal care;
- b) health and developmental screening and assessment of infants, toddlers and young children;
- c) parenting education and support;
- d) immunizations and other appropriate health care;
- e) child care and basic human needs assistance; and;
- f) case management focused on training and self sustaining employment – all to promote a culture of hope and success for parents or caretakers and their young children.

Research and Best Practices

In 2003, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk asked the Dane County Department of Human Services (DCDHS) to conduct a national literature search to determine the best approaches for strengthening and sustaining healthy families. The research showed that prevention programs for children must start early on in life. Programs that focus on early childhood development have a better chance of achieving sustained success for individuals over their life span. Key elements of an effective early childhood effort include: systematic screening of infants and toddlers, home visitation, parent support and education, high quality childcare, high quality early childhood education, and coordination to keep these parts working together.

The County Executive and DCDHS also conducted focus groups, over the course of one year, listening to consumers, advocates and providers of services to learn first hand what the County could be doing different and better to help kids and families succeed.

The Allied Drive ECI took this year of investigation and listening and is applying it to the needs of the Allied Drive community. We want both to better help kids and families in Allied Drive and we also want to use what we learn to better help kids countywide.

As is often said, the best social program is having a good job. Work and pride in one's work generates hope and paves the path to financial and other forms of independence. And

as financial stress decreases and self esteem increases, new positive possibilities are born.

Joining Forces for Families

While new opportunities are being created, it is critical to continue to meet basic human needs. This is one key role that the County's Joining Forces for Families program has filled in Allied Drive for many years.

Joining Forces for Families (JFF) will continue to provide the infrastructure to meet the needs of Allied Drive children and families. JFF is a County initiative that started in 1995. It is a collaboration between DCDHS, City of Madison, United Way, local law enforcement agencies, school districts and residents designed to support the success of families and communities all across the County. At present, the JFF team for Allied Drive is made up of a County Social Worker, a Community Support Specialist from Nehemiah Community Development Corporation, City and County Public Health Nurses, a Housing Case Manager from the Community Action Coalition, personnel from the Nutrition Program of the UW Extension, police officers from the City of Madison, Dane County and City of Fitchburg, and volunteer residents. County-funded services provided at the Allied Drive JFF office also include Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (African American Women Support Group) and Project Respect (services to women involved in prostitution and individuals affected directly or indirectly by HIV/AIDS).

As the Dane County ECI moves forward the County will be looking for even more ways to take advantage of growing opportunities to collaborate with other community partners. For example, the Dane County Executive, Mayor of the City of Madison, Mayor of the City of Fitchburg, the Superintendent of the Verona School District, Superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District, the Madison

Community Foundation and the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County are working together and discussing many positive opportunities related to affordable housing, education, recreation, parks and enhanced safety for the community.

After listening to individuals in the Allied community, conducting research, consulting with community partners and taking into account the lessons learned by us all, a new approach was devised to help in the creation of new and positive possibilities for Allied Drive.

Early Childhood Initiative

This new initiative –the ECI- will add three unique and hopeful additions to our existing efforts to assist in enhancing the lives of children and families on Allied Drive:

1. **Home Visitation**: An approach to family health where assessing child growth and development, working with parents and caregivers around parent health and other basic needs, identifying family strengths and positive aspects of parent/child interaction, public health home visits, family referrals to appropriate service providers, and providing parent support and education are used to help build on the strengths of the family. A **Family Support Specialist**, trained in Home Visitation, will be hired to serve as lead for these crucial ECI activities. The Family Support Specialist will possess any combination of education and experience that results in proficiency in identifying conditions that could be detrimental to the well being and healthy development of young children, including parental stress, unsafe conditions in the home and the absence of bonding and attachment. This individual must have the ability to have Allied Drive residents open the doors of

their homes and minds to new possibilities. The County has applied to the Madison Community Foundation to fund this important position. We are hopeful that they will join with us to explore new ways to assist Allied families to make the most of their many strengths and to build a new community of hope and vitality.

2. **Community Participation:** The people who know the Allied community best are the people who live there. The ECI will engage this very important resource by creating two new positions: The Lead Resident Partner will engage families in the services and opportunities offered by the ECI. This individual will be a resident of the Allied Drive community who has demonstrated leadership in working with community issues, someone who commands the trust and respect of Allied residents, and someone who has overcome or is successfully working with the kinds of challenges faced by participants in the Allied Drive ECI. Allied Drive residents will be involved in the hiring process. The County has applied to the Madison Community Foundation to support this key position. Family Partners will provide assistance and family support, mentoring and other forms of assistance to participating parents or caretakers. The assistance can involve money managing, home making, organizing, scheduling appointments, and arranging for transportation and other functions as needed. These individuals will reside in the Allied Drive community and be recognized as people who routinely lend their support to others in the neighborhood. Allied Drive residents will be involved in the hiring process. Support for these positions is being

pursued through Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

3. **Job Preparation and Employment Support:** These services are intended to increase self-sufficiency and provide parents and caretakers the opportunity to be role models for their children by being involved in learning and earning incomes that will eventually enable them to be independent of public assistance. The County will fund an Employment and Training Specialist to work with parents and caretakers around obstacles to employment. The barriers to gainful employment could include: child-care, transportation, literacy, time-management, criminal record and sporadic or no work history. Relationships will be cultivated with area employers and their participation will be assisted by ensuring, to the extent possible, that workers will be on the job on time, ready to work and make the maximum contribution to the success of the business.

The Dane County ECI will focus on infants and children, ages birth to 4, and their parents or caretakers, living in households that are struggling with a variety of life issues that may include insufficient income and education; no viable housing; unavailability of supportive peers or extended family; insufficient parenting skills; AODA, mental health or other problems that affect parenting; child abuse, neglect or domestic violence; or a history of repeated incarceration.

The goal for the first year of the program will be to serve 50 families with an estimated 125 children between the ages of birth to 4.

The ECI will be modeled, in part, after *First Steps*. In an effort to put together a project designed to promote and encourage healthy

children and families in new ways, the County initiated the First Steps program in the Wisconsin Heights community in 2001. First Steps is for families who are expecting a baby, have a newborn and/or have young children. Home Visitation services and access to a variety of family resources are key parts of First Steps. First Steps connects families with a Family Visitor who works with the family until the child enters school. Geographic and other forms of isolation are similarities that are shared by residents of Wisconsin Heights and Allied Drive. The results of First Steps were very encouraging.

Additional Funding Sources

We are exploring ways to obtain or allocate additional Dane County resources. For example, we have Dane County Community Development Block Grant funds that can be devoted to the ECI in the Allied community. At this time, one possibility is to assist with the construction of a proposed Boys & Girls Club or community center that could also provide space for Allied area agencies or organizations including JFF, the ECI or a Wellness Center suggested by Madison Urban Ministry. The County Conservation Fund could be utilized for parkland. There are other potential uses for County CDBG funding and the expressed needs and desires of the community will ultimately determine how this resource can best be used. Another important collaborative possibility and relationship that is in the process of forming is with the University of Wisconsin Medical School. The UW Medical School has expressed interest in being an academic partner with DCDHS in the County's application for new Blue Cross/Blue Shield funds for the ECI.

Dane County is eager to work cooperatively with Allied residents and other community partners in ways that pull together our individual experiences, strengths and resources

for the creation of brighter futures for the children and families of Allied Drive. We are honored and grateful to be able to add our resources and energy to so many community partners who have devoted resources in the past and continue to commit to the present and future of Allied Drive.

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