

News Release

WYOMING EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIP

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wyoming Kids First Planning Grants Announced

United Way of Southwest Wyoming was awarded one of the first Wyoming Kids First Planning Grants for Sweetwater County by Joan Evans, Director of the Department of Workforce Services, at a news conference held on April 9, 2009, in Cheyenne.

Creating Wyoming Kids First of Sweetwater County, a United Way of Southwest Wyoming Partnership and initiative of the Wyoming Early Childhood Partnership, the Planning Grant provides United Way with \$50,000 in funds that will help staff and operate a Wyoming Kids First position. This Regional Partnership will be responsible for building an early childhood system on the local level by identifying the needs or gaps in services for children zero to age eight and working with partners to fill the needs. This pilot program is funded with seed money through the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. The funds will be used to employ one staff person. The initial work of the Regional Partnerships will include: conducting a community assessment to identify gaps in services in the priority areas of early care and education, physical, mental and emotional health and family support; developing a strategic plan to prioritize and address these needs; and developing a public engagement plan.

“Community volunteers have specified children as one our targeted areas of need in Sweetwater County. This grant will provide valuable resources as we move forward investing in our children and youth to help them become healthy and productive citizens,” said Suzanne Zutter, United Way executive director. “Having another full-time staff person will allow United Way to effectively address these needs and work more closely with partnering entities.”

Zutter stated that Sweetwater County was chosen to receive this grant because of its community collaborations. “Our residents are addressing issues that advance the common good by giving, advocating and volunteering. Our community lives united and that is being recognized,” said Zutter.

Natrona County and the Wind River Reservation were also recipients of the Planning Grants. In all, nine counties applied for this competitive first-time grant. Others counties include Laramie County, Converse County, Weston County, Sheridan County, Teton County and Sublette County. A team of reviewers from Wyoming and Colorado scored the

grants based on current and past efforts of collaboration and their ability to bring partners to the table. The grants were awarded to the highest scoring counties in small, medium and large-sized county categories.

“In the current economic climate it is imperative for non-profit organizations to look for ways to stretch dollars and share resources. Applying for the Planning Grant provided an opportunity to pull together community agencies, business owners and organizations who share the common goal of improving children’s lives,” said Kathy Tacke, United Way director of community impact.

All applicants, regardless of whether they receive the grant will receive training and technical assistance from the Wyoming Early Childhood Partnership (WECP). In addition, each partnership will be supported through the placement of a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) volunteer who can either lead the program or assist with the work.

VISTA members are volunteers that commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and more.

The WECP was awarded the support of 10 VISTA volunteers to help build capacity within each county through the work of the regional partnerships. The WECP will be responsible for recruiting, training and placing each of the volunteers and hopes to match each volunteer to the community that is the best fit for the individual as well as for the partnership. To view the job description and get more information about the partnership locations, visit the Wyoming Kids First website at www.wyokidsfirst.org.

This grant is just the beginning of the work of the partnerships. Through successive grants and the assistance of future state and federal funding, the WECP is confident that their mission will be accomplished enabling all children in Wyoming to live and learn in nurturing environments that prepare them for success in school and life.

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