



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Linda Vukelich
651-278-4241

MINNESOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS RECOGNIZE INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING
The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) presents the Innovative Programming Award to Newborn Baby Talk

St. Cloud, MN, April 11, 2024 – The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) announces an Innovative Programming Award winner. The award is presented to acknowledge MNAFEE's appreciation of contributions to children, parents and families and/or the publicly funded programs that serve them.

Newborn Baby Talk, a program of Northfield Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), was chosen as a winner of the MNAFEE Innovative Programming Award for 2024. Northfield ECFE has partnered with Northfield Hospitals + Clinics and Rice County Public Health Nursing Services for the past seven years to provide a class focused on the unique needs of parents with newborns. The class is offered all year-round, sibling care is provided, and there is no need to register. Families are able to connect with one another, get their questions answered and receive support.

Rice County Public Health nurses wanted to replicate a program they had observed at Red Wing hospital and approached ECFE staff in Northfield. They particularly liked the weekly baby weigh-in process. The original model was to provide free, year-round programming for parents of newborns birth-eight weeks. Babies would be weighed each week. Public Health contributed a nurse, ECFE contributed the Parent Educator, sibling care provider, and classroom space, and the hospitals provided lactation consultants. Parents were welcome to attend at any point in the eight week curriculum. They would “graduate” after 8 weeks and be invited to continue other ECFE classes. After a few years, Northfield expanded the program to 12 weeks.

Initially some physicians and pediatricians feared that if moms went to this weekly support group with their infant and were getting weekly weight checks, they would not return for a follow up visit with the pediatrician. The partners involved in Newborn Baby Talk actively worked with a local pediatrician who was invited to observe the group. As the weeks went on, just as the partners hypothesized, infants coming to the weekly support group continued to see their providers as recommended and issues were identified earlier with active referrals made right from the group to the medical office – thus clients were being seen quicker for things like low weight gain, jaundice, breastfeeding concerns, mastitis, postpartum depression, etc.

Once the medical community recognized that Newborn Baby Talk enhanced their work, the group flourished! It became an expected “standard of care” at discharge from the hospital that all new moms/dads/babies should attend the weekly group. The medical provider who was most skeptical at the beginning became probably the biggest supporter!

Evidence of the success of this program is that there are typically 20-25 families that attend this class each week! Since May of 2021, Northfield Newborn Baby Talk has served 206 families in the post-partum period with many parents continuing on in ECFE in various ways. Participants know the benefits of the program. “This is an

incredibly valuable resource that the Northfield community has! I have friends in other cities who do not have this resource -- I feel bad they don't have a place where they can be validated, encouraged and grounded as a new mom. Thank you for providing it." Another participant said, "As a new mom with no other new mom friends, I felt like I was drowning. Baby Talk was like a life raft of support, resources, and connection to others who were experiencing/had experienced the same things. It's an excellent program - makes me proud to live in this community! It also opened the door to other classes I may not have known about for my child as she got older."

There is a high level of interest in similar partnerships in ECFE programs across the state. Ellen Haefner, of Northfield ECFE, has shared what she has learned from this collaboration with others through MNAFEE conferences and workshops and collaborates with other districts to give guidance and answer questions as they begin implementing their own Newborn Baby Talk.

Newborn Baby Talk was recognized at the MNAFEE Annual Conference in St. Cloud on April 11, 2024. Sara Line and Ellen Haefner from Northfield ECFE accepted the award.

About MNAFEE: The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) is a non-profit association promoting parent education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and early childhood programming in public schools.

About the Innovative Programming Award: The Innovative Programming Award is presented to outstanding projects that exemplify the vision/mission of MNAFEE and are innovative approaches to addressing a community need through cooperation and teamwork amongst individuals and/or organizations, and use of resources. The project could be a one-time event or an ongoing activity that is associated with a parent education, Early Childhood Family Education and/or public school preschool in Minnesota. Its focus could be on children, parents, families or professionals.

Nominees for the MNAFEE Friend of the Year Award must:

- Include at least one member of MNAFEE
- Exemplify the vision/mission of MNAFEE:

Vision: All families have access to comprehensive, high quality parent education and early childhood programming in public schools.

Mission: The mission of Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) is to promote, advocate for, and strengthen parent education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and early childhood programming in public schools.

- Address a community need
- Demonstrate cooperation between individuals and/or organizations
- Enhance the lives of young children, parents, families or professionals