



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MINNESOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS RECOGNIZE INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING
The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) presents the Innovative Programming Award to the Raising a Reader Early Literacy Program

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.

The Raising a Reader Early Literacy Program from the Lakes Country Service Cooperative Brandon-Evansville Pilot was chosen as a winner of the MNAFEE Innovative Programming Award for 2024. The program, based on a national model, takes place through the reading of take home book bags and school based parent-child activities. From the beginning of the program it was important that the mission of Raising A Reader align with the mission of Lakes Country Service Cooperative and would be a program that would benefit all communities. Driving the initiation of the program were statistics showing that before the pandemic, Brandon-Evansville had 64% of third grade students reading at or above grade level on the MCAT (Minnesota Comprehensive Achievement Test) whereas scores dropped to 39% in 2021-22 and 50% in 2022-23.

Lakes Country Service Cooperative shared their vision and the need to address the issue throughout the community. The local bank was considering investing through their foundation, LA Amundson Ohana Foundation. To enhance understanding, an ECFE class went to their lobby to demonstrate first-hand the types of play and literacy activities families participate in. The Evansville Historical Foundation and the Douglas County Early Childhood Initiative provided financial support to allow LCSC to become the affiliate of Raising A Reader. Teachers, administration & school board members in the Brandon-Evansville School were informed on what was involved with the project, and they became a pilot site involving 80 students in the Early Education Department. Raising A Reader takes a family, school and community collaborative approach and involves children starting at birth and continuing through second grade. The official launch was in the fall of 2021, with a trial run involving a few home and center-based child care centers taking place in the summer of 2021. Currently there are 165 students involved; factoring in other family members, it's estimated that the program impacts approximately 735 people, more than half of the the local population of roughly 1,300.

Surveys of families show that they are establishing reading routines within their homes. All the families involved say they now share books three times a week and the duration of family shared reading of at least sixty minutes weekly has increased from 50% to 92%. Use of at least four dialogic behaviors such as asking their child questions about the text, has increased from 47% to 74%. Connecting to local libraries, an important part of maintaining shared reading, has increased from 34% to 63%.

There are so many benefits to all involved in the program. Children and families are bonding over books in a method called, "book cuddling". Raising A Reader draws not only the young child into the time of book sharing but also siblings, grandparents and other family members, as the young child takes ownership of their red bag of

books and wants to share them with everyone. The community and partners feel like they are making a difference by contributing to the success of the youngest community members and their families. Parents are especially thankful that books are being brought into their homes. They are also excited to learn with their children how to stop and ask questions while reading to their child.

The research is clear that strong, engaged families make a major difference in children's educational and life outcomes. When families read together, they share more than stories. Reading together strengthens bonds between children and the caring adults in their lives. Communities desire to be filled with healthy, strong families who are fluent in literacy and communication. The partners of this project and Lakes Country Service Cooperative are to be commended for recognizing this and working to make it happen in north central Minnesota.

The Raising A Reader Early Literacy Program was recognized at the MNAFEE Annual Conference in St. Cloud on April 11, 2024. Beth Achter, From Lakes Country Service Cooperative, and Deb Berry, who was instrumental in developing the Brandon-Evansville pilot program, 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