



Executive Summary of the 3rd Annual Strong Foundations Conference

January 31 to February 2, 2008
Duluth Entertainment Center, Duluth MN

**Theme: Turning Challenges into Possibility:
Supporting Families with Young Children**

More than 400 professionals from every stakeholder group in the early childhood field participated in the 2008 Strong Foundations Birth-to-Three Conference devoted to the most pressing issues facing at-risk families with young children.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the **Strong Foundations Conference**, Minnesota's Birth-to-Three Conference for Healthy Development, is to strengthen the knowledge, skills, strategies, and alliances of those who work with expectant families, infants, toddlers, parents and communities to build a strong foundation for healthy development.

PARTNERS

The **Strong Foundations Conference**, since its inception, has been a joint effort by the State Departments of Education, Human Services and Health, the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) as well as many statewide partners from early care and education, public health, higher education, infant mental health, foundations, (among others) who were involved in the planning of the conference. All share a deep commitment to provide a forum for those professionals who influence the lives of infants, toddler and their families.

SIGNIFICANCE

The **Strong Foundations Conference** is the only state-wide conference that addresses the unique needs of infants, toddlers and their families and those involved in service delivery and administrative and policy decisions. The conference is comprehensive and multi-disciplinary, offering an unparalleled opportunity for cross-discipline discussions and coordination. Strong Foundations offers workshops on current research and best practices, policy agendas, and emerging issues for prenatal care, infant/toddler and families, with an emphasis on many in-depth intensive sessions while still providing shorter workshop sessions which allow exposure to new information.

CONTENT

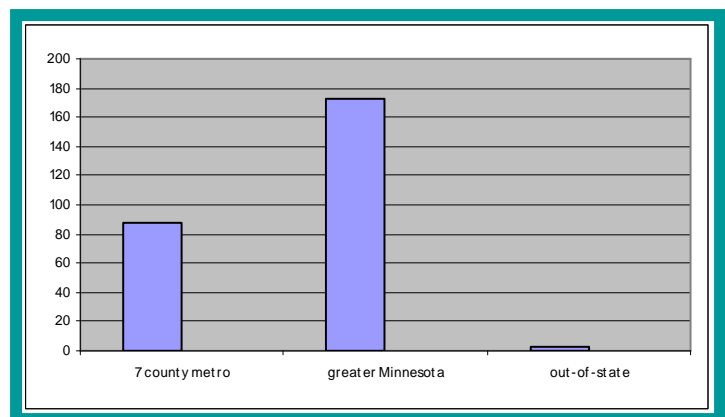
The 2008 conference offered two nationally known keynote presenters - **Judy Langford** Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Social Policy and National Director of the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Initiative and **Yoland Trevino**, Transformative Collaborations International and Vaughn Center, California. These two individuals provided a wonderful opportunity for conference participants to hear national and international perspectives on the ***Strengthening Families*** approach to working with families. There were also workshops and intensives that provided certification for professional development with presentations on wide ranging topics such as:

- ☐ infant mental health
- ☐ reflective practice and relationship-based services
- ☐ early identification of young children with special needs
- ☐ children's health
- ☐ positive attachment
- ☐ child abuse/neglect issues
- ☐ infant toddler curriculum, and
- ☐ fatherhood initiatives to highlight a few of the 50 sessions that were offered.

Response to the conference was overwhelmingly positive; 97 percent of respondents on the post-conference survey indicated they would attend the Strong Foundations conference in the future.

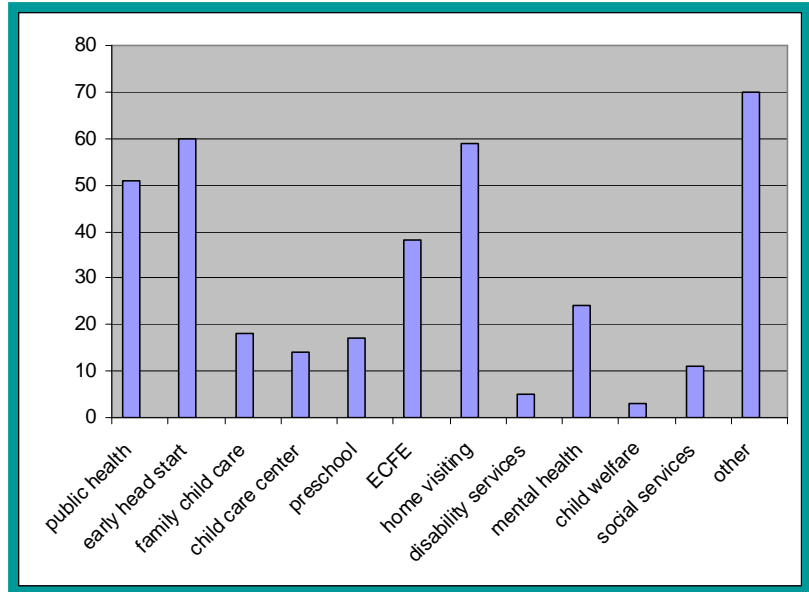
AUDIENCE

The third annual **Strong Foundations Conference** brought together approximately 423 participants from Minnesota and surrounding states. Individuals represented organizations and programs from the seven-county metropolitan area (33.5 percent), greater Minnesota (65 percent) and other states (1.1 percent). All geographic areas of the state were represented.



AUDIENCE

Participants reflected a broad range of disciplines in the infant/toddler area including Early Head Start and Head Start, child care, Early Childhood and Family Education, pre-school, home visiting, public health, pediatric medicine, child welfare, mental health, disabilities services, social services, foundations, state and county government, and advocates and parents.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A primary goal in planning the 2009 Conference is improving access for those with limited resources including but not limited to lack of transportation options. Following the 4th annual conference in January 2009, the collaboration which created Strong Foundations will develop a strategic plan to refine its goals and consider ways to better achieve them through activities beyond the state conference. These might include regional professional development activities, events specifically designed for parents, web-based training and networking, expanded linkages with resources having related goals, etc.

When asked to rate the overall conference:

84.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed the conference content contributed to achieving their personal and professional goals.

84.7 percent reported they learned new approaches, ideas that they will use in their work with families and young children.



A sample of participant comments about the benefits of attending the Strong Foundations conference:

- ☐ The energy that comes from listening to competent, experienced professionals and chatting with others in the field
- ☐ Connecting with other professionals. I live and work in a small community, so it was nice to see what others are doing
- ☐ The workshops had information that you could walk away with and implement back in your program
- ☐ All your continuing education in one place at one time
- ☐ New insights on topics that affect my everyday work

