

MEDIA RELEASE

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Parent involvement is focus of Harvest Dinner for families in poverty (Nov. 9, 2007)

(Nov. 9, 2007 – St. Joseph, Mo.) A pre-Thanksgiving dinner for dozens of children below the age of 3? This could be messy.

Yet amidst the sea of excited toddlers, bibs and mashed potatoes, families will connect. Children will learn. Social skills will be strengthened and the community's future will be built.

Coordinated by Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph, the Harvest Dinner on Nov. 13th brings together families in poverty who are enrolled in the Early Head Start program to share a meal. The free event serves as a monthly "family fun night," and is just one of the ways the Buchanan County Head Start program strives to ensure the critical years before age five are successful.

"Head Start's family development programs and classes are a resource for helping parents get involved in their child's school success right from the beginning, as well as their own personal success. We want to strengthen the entire family," says Gretchen Herndon, Head Start program director. "We also know the effects of poverty on children can be countered with quality early-childhood development programs like Head Start."

Head Start (for children ages 3-5) and Early Head Start (prenatal to age 3) are programs administered by Community Action Partnership of Greater St Joseph, part of a national program whose core mission is to end poverty.

Created by the federal government in 1965, the Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve more than 500 preschool-aged students in Andrew, Buchanan, Clinton and DeKalb counties who are low-income. Services include weekly home visits to pregnant mothers and families, parenting classes, nutrition and mental health screenings, family events and volunteer opportunities for parents. Head Start child development centers offer free childcare and preschool based on a comprehensive learning curriculum that is designed to include children with disabilities.

"If we don't address the needs of children in poverty at a very young age, from the physical to the educational to the emotional, they can fall irreparably behind upon entering the school system," says Herndon. "Chances for family fun help parents and children build a support network that is a critical component of their success."

Between 2000 and 2005, the percent of Missouri children living in poverty worsened by 19 percent. During 2006, nearly one-fifth of Missouri children (18 percent) were living in poverty.

The Harvest Dinner for families enrolled in Early Head Start is at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 13th at Central Christian Church, 1501 N. Leonard Rd. For more information, contact Lisa Driskel-Hawxby, Prenatal to Five Head Start education coordinator, at (816) 233-8281, ext. 137; or Rachel McCoy, (816) 233-8281, ext. 143 or cell (816) 244-2662.

