

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Community Action Partnership receives funding from local trust for new community and educational play space \$32,000 to begin project for low-income children and local collaborators in early childhood education (Jan. 9, 2009)**

**(St. Joseph, Mo.)** A recent gift to Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph demonstrates that St. Joseph values early childhood education as a key to school success, and breaking the cycle of poverty.

In December, Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph received \$32,000 in funding from the Norma J. and William J. Kenney Charitable Trust, U.S. Bank trustee, to purchase resilient tile flooring for a new outdoor community play space at the St. Patrick's Early Childhood Learning and Development Center, an Early Head Start site in St. Joseph, Mo. The trust committee plans to help provide age-appropriate play equipment in the coming year.

The St. Patrick's center, located at 12<sup>th</sup> and Duncan, is the former site of the St. Patrick's Convent. Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph has recently renovated the building to serve as an Early Head Start child and family development center, set to open in mid-January. The center will serve children who meet federal poverty guidelines or who have a disability, ages 18 months to 3 years. It will provide developmentally-appropriate learning experiences, nutritious meals and health screenings, as well as opportunities for whole-family goal setting and socialization.

Local partners involved in early childhood education – including Parents as Teachers and UCP Children's Therapy Services – plan to utilize the space in collaboration with Community Action Partnership's Early Head Start program. Each of the programs, and others, such as the United Way's Success by Six® initiative, share the same goal – providing early learners the highest quality education possible to ensure success in school, and ultimately, in life.

“Without a doubt, the most critical service we can make to the future of our community is providing an outstanding early childhood learning program,” said Tom Watkins, chairman, Success by Six. “Research shows investing in early childhood learning creates our next generation of leaders, breaks the cycle of poverty and pays for itself many times over in returns to the community. This collaborative project can serve as a demonstration site for early learning programs across the state.”

According to guidelines set forth by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, the play space will provide safe, resilient flooring that helps prevent injury and allows for children with disabilities to play. Equipment will be selected to encourage gross and fine motor skills, as well as develop capacity for skills such as problem-solving and socialization appropriate for young children. The flooring material is specially designed to provide year-round opportunities for exercise, as it **(more)**

**Community play space**

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does not hold moisture.

Studies show that one-third of American children are overweight, and 70% of these will become overweight adults. The play space at St. Patrick's Center will be open for community use, and will encourage children and families to increase their health and fitness level.

"By the time children reach the age of 3, research indicates much of the brain capacity for language, math, and personal traits such as compassion are almost fully formed," says Lisa Hawxby, coordinator of Community Action Partnership's Early Head Start program. "We are pleased to work with educators across the community to reach children and parents with tools for success at this critical age."

Debbie Kunz, coordinator, Parents as Teachers, a program of the St. Joseph School District, is excited about the opportunities for collaboration the new learning center at St. Patrick's will provide. "I am convinced that the more we partner together, and the more the community sees us as providers sharing a common goal, the greater impact we can make on increasing early learners' chances for success," says Kunz. "We'll use the St. Patrick's Early Head Start site for visits with families. It will be a true neighborhood beacon."

Community Action Partnership has provided programs to move low-income families out of poverty since 1964, serving nearly 16,000 people in poverty in Northwest Missouri. Head Start is one of the core programs managed by the agency, and there are 12 Head Start centers available to low-income families across Northwest Missouri. Early Head Start is offered to families in Buchanan County. The Head Start child development program promotes success for the whole family, and is currently serving nearly 500 low-income children in the Northwest Missouri area. Additional services provided by Community Action Partnership to low-income families include utilities assistance, affordable housing, financial literacy and home ownership classes, life skills and workforce training.

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