

**Source: Community Action Partnership**

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## **KCP&L builds playground for low-income children and families; first age-appropriate community play area in Mitchell Park neighborhood**

(June 12, 2009 - St. Joseph, Mo.) A playground is much more than a playground. It's a tool for moving families out of generational poverty and into brighter futures.

On June 10 and 11, 2009, a volunteer team of more than 40 KCP&L employees put this principle into action as they helped Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph assemble a new age-appropriate play area at the St. Patrick's Early Childhood Learning and Development Center, an Early Head Start site in St. Joseph, Mo.

Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph has recently renovated the 1911 building (formerly the St. Patrick's Convent) to serve as an Early Head Start child and family development center, which began serving low-income families in April 2009. When the second classroom opens this fall, the center will serve 36 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.

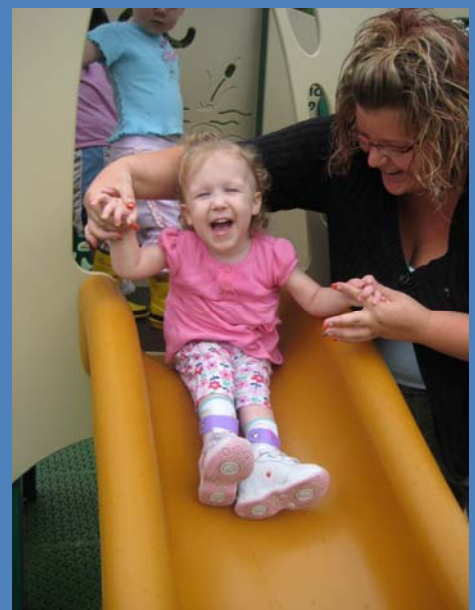
"The goal of Early Head Start is to help give children in poverty the same chance to succeed at school, and in life, as children who don't live in poverty," says Dave Leyland, executive director, Community Action Partnership. "We use every opportunity possible, including physical development through play, to break the cycle of poverty."

In the spring of 2009, KCP&L selected the playground project to begin a series of community service events in the Northwest Missouri region. More than 40 KCP&L employees spent June 10 and 11 installing the resilient flooring and play equipment, utilizing company equipment. The labor and equipment use from KCP&L provides a value of \$5,500 to Community Action Partnership.

"This is a great example of KCP&L's commitment to corporate citizenship, and to improving the lives of children and families in their service area," says Leyland. "We truly appreciate their time and effort, and there's no doubt this project will make a difference to families for years to come."

(more)

View more photos of the playground construction and Open House at the Community Action Partnership [photo gallery](#).



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. Located at 12<sup>th</sup> and Duncan, there is no other age-appropriate play area in the neighborhood that can also accommodate children with disabilities in a safe, challenging environment. Equipment has been 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 does not hold moisture.

KCP&L collaborates with Community Action Partnership to assist customers who need help with utilities, and has helped provide weatherization kits and opportunities for families to learn how to conserve heat and energy. In the spring of 2009, the company announced it will sponsor a classroom at the St. Patrick's Early Childhood Learning and Development Center, with a gift toward providing classroom furniture and learning materials.

In 2009, Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph received a gift from the Norma J. and William J. Kenney Charitable Trust, U.S. Bank trustee, to purchase resilient tile flooring and equipment for the new outdoor community play space at the St. Patrick's Early Childhood Learning and Development Center.

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.”

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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