

What is CEDS? And what can it do for your community?

Did you know that West Central Initiative helps the nine counties in our region compile a strategic plan for economic development? It's called the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and it addresses the economic potential of an area.

The CEDS plan works to promote sustainable economic development and opportunity, foster effective transportation systems, enhance and protect the environment, and balance resources.

The CEDS analyzes local conditions and identifies problems and opportunities. It outlines the vision and goals of a community, designs the strategies to accomplish these goals, coordinates activities to

implement these strategies, and evaluates and updates the process.

The CEDS does not lay out specific requirements for a county or city. It is intended as a tool for guiding sustainable long-term economic development.

Being part of CEDS has its benefits. It can make projects that are pursuing federal or state funding more competitive since they are part of a regional plan. The CEDS is also a beneficial tool to help economic developers identify trends and items of importance for an area because it pulls together information from many sources.

The CEDS is always evolving and being updated. Take a look at your county's CEDS information at www.wcif.org/?CEDS

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Are our kids school ready?

Out of bed, sleepyhead. Let's see what we can find you to wear—there's got to be a clean pair of socks somewhere. Here's your cereal and a banana. Don't spill the ... okay, let's find you another shirt. Wash face. Comb hair. Brush teeth. Get your shoes on! Where's your homework? Where's your jacket? Quick, the bus is coming!

Sometimes it takes a Herculean effort for parents to get their kids ready for school. But school readiness is more than a morning routine. It starts from the moment our children are born (in some ways, even before that. Read on!) to make sure they are physically,

socially and emotionally ready to do well in school and in life.

This past March, west central Minnesota's Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) coordinators brought together educators, parents, early childhood professionals, caregivers and others for the second School Readiness Forum, March 9 at the Bigwood Event Center in Fergus Falls.

Dr. Jason Downer from the University of Virginia Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning got the ball rolling with his presentation on how to

school ready continued inside

Promising Strategies now an online searchable database

Do you work with young kids? Sometimes it's hard to come up with new and fun activities and programs that will expand your charges' minds and give them and their families skills to grow and thrive. That's why the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) communities—more than 80 of them—compile many of their projects, programs, activities and ideas in a handy online database for anyone to use. It's called

Promising Strategies and it's been around for a few years now. While revamping its Web site, WCI took the opportunity to create a new Promising Strategies online database that's also searchable. So, you can now sort information by ECI community, region, subject and keyword. To visit the site, go to www.wcif.org/?Promising_Strategies (include the ?). Bookmark it so you can refer to it often. We're always adding more!

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our mission

Serving to improve west central Minnesota through funding, programs and technical assistance.

our vision

Uniting ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



School readiness is more than a morning routine. It starts from the moment our children are born to make sure they are physically, socially and emotionally ready to do well in school and in life.

Inside Highlights

- How to retain, retrain and hire experienced workers
- Make a charitable gift and still receive a guaranteed income
- Meet Rena Stigen ■ What is CEDS?
- Promising Strategies is now a searchable database

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improve the quality of teacher-child interactions in the early childhood classroom.

A panel discussion looked at the entire continuum of care needed to prepare a child for school. It begins earlier than most think. "School readiness begins the moment the decision is made to have a child," explained panelist Julie Smith, Traverse Early Childhood Coalition coordinator, parent and family-based child care provider. "The mother's physical and emotional health, prenatal care, the parents' attachment to their child during the early years and their choices for other caregivers—it all leads to the child's ability to function in the world around them."

In the afternoon, groups from the 12 ECI communities spent time honing school readiness plans that they first developed at last year's School Readiness Forum. Each community created a school transition plan that lists goals, action steps, timeline and responsibility and resources. You can see the plans for yourself at www.wcif.org/?school_readiness.

During their work session, the White Earth ECI team decided to produce an early childhood

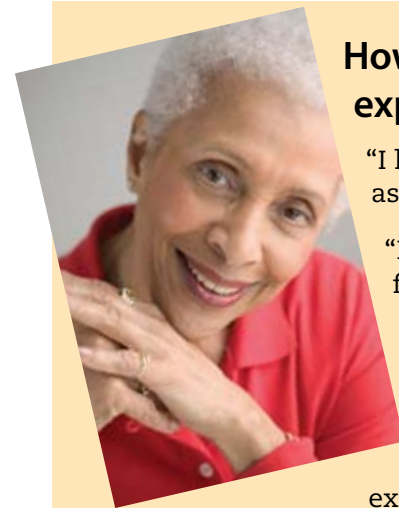
development guide. The guide was completed this spring and given to parents, childcare providers, educators, medical clinics, churches and others. The guide, "Children's Development from Birth to 5 Years: What to Expect and When to Be Concerned," is a sturdy, accordion-fold piece that lists both milestones and red flags for children's behavior. For example, at ages 6 to 12 months, parents should expect their children to enjoy playing games such as peek-a-boo, and point to pictures and objects. A red flag may be that the baby does not appear interested in interacting with others or doesn't show emotion.

The piece is meant to be used as a guide and not replace official screening tools that a school or health practitioner may provide.

The guide also includes local early childhood resources and contact information. "Parents like that it is brief and easy to use. They really like the content," said Mary Leff, White Earth's ECI coordinator. "It's something they'll keep close at hand for easy access." The guide has proven so popular, the White Earth ECI is planning a second printing.



BELOW: The Grant County school readiness team brainstorms at the March 9 event. RIGHT: Dr. Jason Downer, University of Virginia Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, spoke on improving the quality of teacher-child interactions in the early childhood classroom.



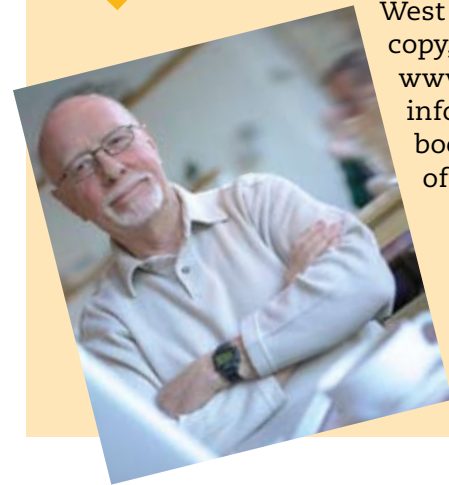
How to retain, retrain and hire experienced workers

"I love what I do. I want to keep working as long as I can."

"I wouldn't mind working if the hours were flexible."

"I sure would like to supplement my retirement income and benefits by working part-time."

As the Baby Boom generation begins to retire, many businesses and manufacturers are experiencing a shortage of experienced and skilled workers. The truth is, the very people who are retiring may be the exact employment pool employers should be searching. But these retirees may not want to work the same way they did before. That's why the west central Minnesota Labor Force Development Council produced a toolkit as a guide for how to retain, retrain and attract the experienced worker. Contact West Central Initiative, 800-735-2239, for a copy, or look through the online version at www.wcif.org/?olderworker_toolkit. New information will be added, so be sure to bookmark it so you can refer to the site often!



MEET Rena Stigen



Rena Stigen has joined West Central Initiative as a spring/summer intern to help with several regional planning projects. They include a regional business broadband survey, assistance with a Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) energy assessment template, updating the regional trails inventory and assisting with a regional transit survey.

Rena graduated from North Dakota State University in 2005 with a degree in business administration. A Fergus Falls native, she will spend six months in Ecuador next year as a Rotary Cultural Ambassador. Upon returning to the U.S., Rena plans to enroll in graduate school to pursue a master's degree in emergency management or community development.

How to make a charitable gift and receive a guaranteed income for the rest of your life

It may sound too good to be true (and your dad warned you against such things!), but a charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a well-respected, often-used giving vehicle that rewards you for your generous charitable contribution.

Here's how it works:

A CGA is a contract between a donor and a charity, such as West Central Initiative.

The charity accepts a gift of cash or appreciated asset and, in exchange, the charity will make fixed payments for the lifetimes of one or two individuals. A portion of the gift may be deductible as a charitable contribution. A portion of the payment received by the donor is tax free.

Let's imagine that John and Mary Jones enter into a charitable gift annuity with their favorite charity. John and Mary are both 75 years old and are in the 33 percent tax bracket. They are funding the gift with a piece of property valued at \$50,000.

Because of their age, John and Mary qualify for a six percent return on their gift. That means they will receive \$3,000 per year, or \$750 per quarter, while either is still living. As noted above, a portion of this payment would be tax free.

Gift annuity payments are not dependent upon the charity's rate of return; instead, the payments are based on a fixed rate schedule. Annuity payments can be made annually, semi-annually or quarterly.

At the time of the death of the second spouse, the remainder of the value of the annuity will be distributed to the charity with no probate fees.

If you would like more information on charitable gift annuities, please contact Kim or Tom at the West Central Initiative office at 218-739-2239, or 800-735-2239. They can show you, in more detail, the advantages of this gifting opportunity and how a CGA can benefit you, your family and your favorite charity.

This is not meant as legal or financial advice, but as information that you may wish to discuss with your advisors. We strongly recommend that you consult with your tax and legal advisors before you enter into any legal contract.



WCI Now! If you use Twitter, you'll be familiar with this online tool that lets you send very short messages (no more than 140 characters). The WCI Now! feed will share news of the region and interesting links. Go to www.wcif.org and click on the WCI Now! menu link to subscribe.

Online Forums: Are you a member of one of WCI's online groups? Each community now has online forums where all the members can meet to chat on the topic of their choosing. Sign in soon and start a conversation on your online group site! Not a member yet? Go to www.wcif.org and click on "Join a Community."

Don't forget to subscribe to WCI's blog, the West Central Blogger, at www.wcif.org/?blog