

The Importance of Early Education

Agency: Youth Enrichment Services

Program: Early Childhood Education

Service: Provides a quality early childhood education and childcare to children ages 3 to 5. The program includes developmentally appropriate daily preschool with wrap-around childcare. The curriculum focuses on play-oriented learning centers and small groups to develop language, mathematical reasoning and scientific thought.

Need: According the 2005 US Census, there are more than 12,000 children under the age of five in Minnehaha County. Additionally, in 2005, reports showed that 17% of the families in Minnehaha County made less than \$25,000 each year.

Impact: Participation in the early childhood program at Youth Enrichment Services helps children expand their knowledge, build vocabulary, express creativity, develop social skills, and reinforce their fine and large motor skills. 28 children are able to participate in YES' program thanks to scholarship assistance from Sioux Empire United Way.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place. The popular expression could be used for April's situation just a couple of years ago. April had been a stay-at-home mom for most of her daughter's lives. "It just made sense to us financially for me to stay home at first because we couldn't afford childcare," explains April.

Before the birth of her third child, April's desire to work for herself together with their need for an additional income, led to her own cleaning service. No longer able to afford to stay home with her children, finding a quality childcare provider was a priority for their family.

Hannah, 6 and now a kindergartener, Madison, 4, and Connor, 2, found that quality care at Youth Enrichment Services. "I loved being able to stay home with my kids, and was sure to spend a lot of time making sure they were learning and developing properly. I was happy to find out about the early childhood education services Youth Enrichment Services provides," continues April.

And the scholarship assistance the family receives thanks to Sioux Empire United Way is very much appreciated. "The affordability of the program, thanks to the scholarship, helps a lot. We wouldn't be able to afford this type of care without it. The assistance ensures that we can continue to put food on our table and pay our bills."

The program at Youth Enrichment Services is based on Creative Curriculum® that helps young children learn not only the basics of the alphabet, math and writing – it also helps them develop socially and emotionally, two important things for kindergarten preparation.

"My kids don't know they're learning here. It's fun and games to them, and the teachers here are great," exclaims April. "I feel good when I drop them off here in the morning. I know they're going to be treated well."

Studies show the importance of the first six years of a child's life in terms of their long term development. "I know that so much of their lives will be determined during these first few years, and I want them to grow up happy and have self-esteem," finishes April.

