



Blandin Foundation *at* Home

Report to the community

Summer 2011

Dedicated to student success

After a career in education spanning nearly three decades and two states, you might expect Bovey resident Cynthia Johnson to put her work on the shelf. But as a life-long learner, advocate of education and guidance counselor at Greenway High School for 11 years, Johnson's retirement plan looks a lot like a continuation of her career.

In May 2010, three years after her retirement, Johnson joined community members from the Itasca County area to form the Student Success Core Team, an initiative born out of a series of community conversations exploring how to provide opportunities for all students in the Itasca area to succeed, co-sponsored by Blandin Foundation and the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC). The team's task: to survey the current state of education in the Itasca area and determine how to ensure students are given the skills necessary to succeed.

As the team discussed the realities of the region, the challenges became clear.

"We talked to the business community, and too many students come out of school not prepared to do what they wanted to do, nor are they prepared for the work force," said Johnson, also owner and editor of the *Scenic Range News Forum* in Bovey. "We have to look at different ways of providing educational opportunities for all of our students because the future is going to require every kid to have more education past high school."

As the Student Success Core Team met to address these

issues, two subgroups emerged. One addresses families and how children are prepared for education at home.

The other, in which Johnson participates, is a team focused on educational transformation in the region.

Last fall, the team outlined four goals: finding out how students defined success, finding the right tools to ensure teachers are successful, assisting school districts in ensuring students find success, and establishing a teacher academy for teachers in the region to learn best practices from their peers.

"We gear everything for about the 20 percent of kids who are going to go to a four-year university," said Johnson. "The other 80 percent of the students deserve excellent educations also."

Johnson continues her work in the education field for one simple reason.

"My motivation is all about paying back by paying it forward," she said. "Because I had a great education, I had lots of doors open. I came into public education believing as a country and as a culture that every student deserves the same kind of education I received."

The Student Success Core Team grew out of a series of community conversations co-hosted by Blandin Foundation in spring 2010 as part of its strategic focus on expanding opportunity for every person in Itasca area communities.



Cynthia Johnson, former counselor at Greenway High School and owner/editor of the *Scenic Range News Forum*, continues to work with the Student Success Core Team to better understand factors that affect successful education in the Itasca County area.



Mission: To strengthen communities in rural Minnesota, especially the Grand Rapids area

Vision: To be the premier partner for building healthy rural Minnesota communities, grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared.

The "At Home" report to the community is published periodically by the Blandin Foundation and distributed to residents of the Grand Rapids area, its home community. Contributors include:

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GRAND RAPIDS
PROUD TO BE A PART OF
MINNESOTA'S NATURE

Splendid undertakings

Dear Neighbors:

Charles Blandin was a man who had the strength and vision to establish this foundation during the uncertainties of 1941, making headlines across the country. While his dream was of a healthy Grand Rapids and Itasca County, what he cared about most was the Foundation being a valued community partner—a vision we still hold for our work.

In 2011, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP), having partnered with more than 6,000 rural Minnesota leaders—500 in Itasca County alone—in building their skills and networks. Hardly a day goes by that we don't hear a story about the impact of a single person who effectively framed an issue, built social capital and mobilized resources for their community. Community leadership most certainly matters.

Our public policy and grant-making work also give us a front-row seat to rural community leadership. The transformations we have seen through our partnerships in rural broadband, early childhood and student success—work that often leads the way nationally—makes us even more hopeful for rural Minnesota communities and their futures.

A look at the list of 2010 grants also is a powerful reminder of the passion and innovation of leaders here and throughout rural Minnesota, as well as the significant needs of our neighbors in such uncertain times.



Laurence Rossman, Charles Blandin's good friend, said in 1946 that one of Blandin's basic expectations for his foundation was that it was to be a "...partner in splendid undertakings with the community and the county."

To our many partners, thank you for your truly "splendid" work to propel our students, to care for our neighbors, to create an intentional future for our communities, to work across and celebrate our differences, to be generous with each other. As in 1941, the challenges and opportunities of the future will demand the best of us all.

Jim Hoolihan
Jim Hoolihan

A share in progress

2010 grants infuse community action

Since 1941, Blandin Foundation has been a partner in community-driven activities in the Itasca County area and rural Minnesota. Working with people who share the Foundation's mission of strengthening communities, grantmaking efforts move forward projects and programs of all sizes and scopes, giving people here, and throughout the state, the opportunity to enhance their rural communities.

Grants listed below were awarded between January and December 2010, and were made in the Foundation's three strategic priority areas. Each area addresses a unique aspect of rural life, with the common vision of healthy rural communities grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared. Brown type denotes grants made in the Foundation's home giving area, the Itasca County area. This list does not include grants of \$1,000 or less.

Commitment to Home

Local Grants

Centennial Rotary Club of Grand Rapids \$1,900
2010 annual Thanksgiving dinner for the Grand Rapids area

Cooperative Solutions \$10,000
Early Case Management/Early Neutral Evaluation voluntary mediation pilot program over 18 months for low-income families in the Itasca County area

Depot Commons Association \$5,500
Support for the 2011 Governor's Fishing Opener

GRACE House of Itasca County \$50,000
For operating support of the shelter and day center services in Itasca County

City of Grand Rapids \$50,000
Support for the Library Alternative Heating Project

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation \$1,300
Mt. Itasca funding plan facilitation as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation \$5,000
Angel of Hope Memorial Park as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation \$50,000
Supplemental support for the Itasca County Sharing Fund

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation \$7,400
Support for a seminar sponsored by Healthy Brains for Children to reinvigorate the focus community organizations place on public education regarding fetal alcohol syndrome

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation \$4,800
Production of the 2010 Itasca Area Nonprofit Giving Guide

Grand Rapids Area Male Chorus \$5,000
Partial support for the regional Big Sing event in 2011

Greenway Senior Citizens \$2,000
Upgrades to the roof and chimney of the Marble Senior Center

Habitat for Humanity of Itasca County \$50,000
Sustaining contribution for low-income housing development in Itasca County

Independent School District 318 \$146,000
For continued support of the Baby Steps Boutique in Itasca County

Itasca Community Television \$150,000
For continued operating support through 2012 in Itasca County

Itasca Economic Development Corporation \$5,000
Study the feasibility of creating a leadership education economic opportunity in the local community

Itasca Economic Development Corporation \$38,000
Project support for a leadership education economic training program in Itasca County

Itasca Economic Development Corporation \$200,000
For continued operating assistance to promote economic development opportunities throughout Itasca County

Itasca Ski And Outing Club \$5,000
Support for hosting the biathlon and ski jumping Olympic trials

Koochiching County \$15,000
Maintain services at the Northome Resource Center in 2010

KOOTASCA Community Action \$51,000
For crisis housing activities in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action \$95,000
For continued support of the Itasca Area Crisis Nursery program in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action \$118,000
For continued support of the Teenage Parent Program in Itasca County

MN Assistance Council for Veterans \$10,000
Programming and services for veterans and their families in Itasca County

MN Council on Foundations \$5,616
Subscriptions for 24 area grantees to Minnesota Grantmakers Online

Minnesota D.A.R.E., Inc. \$2,500
Programming support for northern Minnesota

NE MN Area Health Education Center \$5,000
A public education program focusing on germ awareness in Itasca County and surrounding schools as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Nonprofits Assistance Fund \$75,000
Project support to build nonprofit capacity, promote partnerships and strategic alliances among Itasca County area nonprofits

Northern Community Radio \$5,000
Documentary production training

Northern Itasca Joint Powers Board \$5,000
Support to conduct a comprehensive community plan for the City of Bigfork

Northland Area Family Service Center \$25,000
Support for the home visiting program for families with children 0-3

Northland Counseling Center/Itasca County \$9,500
Support for training costs associated with the Certified Peer Specialist program in Itasca County.

Pengilly Booster Club \$3,000
Fencing and playground equipment

Reif Arts Council \$310,000
For continued support for operations and programs in Itasca County

Second Harvest North Central Food Bank \$3,000
Kids Packs to Go backpack program in Itasca County

Second Harvest North Central Food Bank \$2,500
Kids Packs to Go backpack program in Itasca County

Invest in Leaders

Rural Minnesota Grants

Cambridge Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation \$1,800
Support for the Isanti County Leadership Program as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Center for Sustainable Living \$2,100
Understand the economic implications of climate change and fossil fuel dependence on rural communities as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Headwaters Regional Development Commission \$5,000
Technical assistance for the community of Marshall to begin a stewardship process as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Hmong Arts Connection \$5,000
Initial organization and start-up expenses for the Southwest Minnesota Hmong Community Center as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Independent School District 659 \$5,000
Project support to build inclusion and leadership among diverse populations in the Northfield School District as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Nicollet County \$5,000
Technical assistance with the development and implementation of a countywide leadership/network program in Nicollet County as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Growing and learning together

Deer River early childhood program benefits mother and daughter alike

Students named class valedictorian have achieved academic success. But Felicia Shadley, valedictorian of the Deer River High School class of 2010, has successfully met more than academic challenges.

At 16, Shadley found herself pregnant and in need of a plan to balance school and raise her daughter, Aleigha.

"I was desperately in need of daycare, and I wasn't working because I was in high school," she said.

When Shadley began her senior year, her not quite one-year-old daughter was accepted into Deer River's Invest Early™ program, a program that focuses on early childhood care and education and offers a wide variety of services to children and families in Itasca County. She enrolled her daughter in an Invest Early early childhood center just blocks from the high school. But Shadley discovered that being close to school was only one of the program's advantages.

"I see a lot of improvement with Aleigha's vocabulary and manners," Shadley said. "She used to have a lot of anger problems. They have been helping her with calming techniques, and it shows at home."

Melanie Storlie, lead teacher with Invest Early in Deer River, explained

that the program addresses many facets of a child's development.

"We help children learn to regulate emotions, make sure they understand the teaching, and make sure they are learning and comprehending language while reaching developmental milestones," Storlie said. "So for Aleigha, as with other children, we adjust our teaching to her developmental stage, not her age. We allow her to explore and grow her developmental skills."

Shadley also has seen the benefits of Invest Early in her post-secondary education. She began the LPN program at Itasca Community College (ICC) in Fall 2010. After Shadley completed her first year of classes at ICC, she was named to the Dean's List for achieving a 4.0 grade point average for the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters.

"They (Invest Early) are really flexible with me, and if I need more time to study or if I am at school after the time I am supposed to pick her up, they don't mind," she said.

Shadley said she'll continue to utilize Invest Early for Aleigha's care while she completes the LPN program, then spends one more semester earning her associate's degree. She credits Invest Early with helping her be successful



Felicia Shadley and her daughter, Aleigha, have been involved with the Invest Early program since 2009. While Felicia completes the LPN program and an associate's degree at ICC, Aleigha is getting a solid foundation of developmental and educational skills for her young life.

academically, but says Aleigha's benefits in learning key life skills are just as important.

"I tell her she's going to school, because it is educational based, and the children learn and acquire different skills," Shadley explained. "The staff is so involved with the kids, teaching them to treat each other with respect, sharing and working together. It has helped a lot."

Blandin Foundation's support of Invest Early is part of its commitment to the Itasca area, its home community. The initiative, which receives about \$1.5 million in grants from the Foundation annually and is in its sixth year of operation, is making strides in supporting families with young children, and in preparing children for school. For details on Invest Early, visit www.investearly.org or call 218-327-5850.

Offering hope through leadership

Community change seems to be a theme for Dave and Jeff Roerick of Grand Rapids. Together and separately, father and son are providing leadership on key issues facing Itasca area communities.

Jeff is a single father with custody of his two children. His passion for community change was ignited when his son was abused, and the sentence given didn't seem to fit the crime. At that point Jeff vowed to make a difference. He began working towards his goal of achieving a degree in criminal justice. In May 2011, he fulfilled that goal, graduating from Bemidji State University.

As Jeff pursued his degree, he realized tackling change of the

criminal justice system as a whole was impossible. Instead, he felt the only way to make a difference was on an individual level.

"It's not the system's problem," he said "It's a citizen's problem."

Dave, Jeff's father, is involved with Circles of Support and Advocates for Family Peace in Itasca County. His community involvement opened up an opportunity to take part in Blandin Foundation's Leaders Partnering to End Poverty (LPEP) program in summer 2010. When another spot opened for LPEP training, Dave suggested Jeff be involved, too, not realizing they would end up working together on an LPEP community project team

whose goal is to work alongside people to navigate the legal system in ways that help them move their lives forward.

Both the training and project team work connect two of Dave's and Jeff's clear passions: poverty and the legal system. They realized that poverty and unemployment present unique challenges to navigating the legal system and services. And they again vowed to catalyze change. They're currently working with the court system, probation and other agencies to create a new program that gives a leg up to people in poverty leaving incarceration and re-entering Itasca County.

"Our main goal is to close the revolving door of the criminal justice system," said Jeff, who understands how overwhelming issues of poverty can be. "I've been on assistance programs. I want to tell people that they can get through this, and that life will be better. I want to be that guiding light for someone."

This means working alongside someone as they navigate their future.

"I hope to see a combining of all the resources for someone who has hard times and was incarcerated and has served their time," said Jeff.

"My dad's work ethic gave me opportunities," he continued. "I think I picked up that gene. I have that passion he has for giving back."

Blandin Foundation has offered LPEP in Grand Rapids twice in recent years, as part of its strategy to invest in community leaders. LPEP is designed to empower community leaders from all income levels to reduce barriers for people living in poverty in their community. Blandin Foundation encourages all communities to recognize that leaders are everywhere, and that leadership matters.

David (left) and Jeff Roerick are two of the numerous Itasca area leaders working to address the impacts of poverty in the Itasca area. The Grand Rapids men are working on a program to assist people making the transition from incarceration to community life.

