

THE MONTESSORI TRAINING CENTER OF MINNESOTA(MTCM) AWARDED A \$620,000 GRANT TO TRANSFORM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(February 2, 2010)

The Montessori Training Center of Minnesota (MTCM) and Bright Water Montessori School announce a \$620,000 award from the Hiawatha Education Foundation of Winona, Minnesota to transform early childhood education for children and families living in poverty.

The MTCM will lead a multi-sector collaborative to co-develop more than 10 schools over the next five years based on the Montessori education method. More than 40 teachers and assistants will be trained through this project, resulting in approximately 1,000 low-income children annually receiving access to a world class education.

Molly O'Shaughnessy, Executive Director of the MTCM states, "Montessori education has historically been primarily available to the affluent in the United States, but it began with children living in poverty. It is time to return the method to its roots. This project will move Minnesota closer to ensuring that all of our children, regardless of family income, receive access to a quality education. We thank the Hiawatha Education Foundation for their vision and commitment to improve access to high quality education."

The first school co-developed through this grant will be in partnership with Little Earth of United Tribes, an urban Native American community operating an affordable housing program in South Minneapolis. The MTCM has successfully helped establish Montessori schools in the Midwest reaching low-income communities. This includes a project with Red Wing Public Schools and the Jones Family Foundation, and a partnership with Sitting Bull School, at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in South Dakota.

Leaders and educators from the local community have committed to providing technical support for the project, including our grant partner Bright Water Montessori.

Background Information

This initiative is the result of a major campaign at the MTCM to increase access to quality early childhood programs for low-income and diverse communities. The center recently expanded beyond original offerings of teacher training. A comprehensive educational center was built next to a large scale affordable housing community on the east side of St. Paul. This includes the opening of Cornerstone Montessori, a school for children targeting enrollment for low-income families from the east side.

MTCM programs are recognized internationally for their quality and rigor and the center is accredited by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), the organization founded by Dr. Maria Montessori. MTCM is one of just 13 AMI teacher-training institutions in the U.S. and one of 35 worldwide.

Bright Water is a nationally accredited, authentic Montessori program providing early childhood education and childcare services. Bright Water was created specifically to provide the benefits of Montessori early education to low-income families in and around North Minneapolis. A scholarship program helps families offset tuition costs, so Bright Water is financially accessible to all.

MTCM and the project is the life work of Executive Director Molly O'Shaughnessy, whose experience and passion for Montessori education has led her to become an international leader and role model. Interviews with Molly or program partners can be arranged independently upon request. To learn more about the project, please contact Carol Gronfor at 651.298.1120 or carol@mtcm.org.

Further information

Hiawatha Education Foundation leader, Bob Kierlin, stated why he has chosen to direct giving to the project:

My interest in Montessori started when my late wife and I enrolled our two daughters in the pre-school Delahanty Montessori School in Winona. As a volunteer-run school, I participated at the board and officer level. When our kids grew up, I realized that all of the children who had been with them in the Montessori pre-school program had excelled, regardless of what schools they later attended.

My interest grew further when I served in the Minnesota State Senate. As a member of the Early Childhood Education Committee, I got to know many of the people who were involved at the time with pre-school programs.

The Hiawatha Education Foundation was started in 1987, but it wasn't until the other founders had left to set up their own family foundations that my daughters and I decided to concentrate the HEF resources on giving more Minnesota at-risk kids a chance at a Montessori experience. We believe that the self direction of the Montessori method is a huge advantage for these children in their early years.

Where to find further information about the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota. www.mtcm.org

Where to find further information about Bright Water Montessori. <http://www.brightwatermontessori.org/>

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