



improving lives, strengthening communities

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Music for Their Ears and Minds Grant Funds Launch Head Start Music Program

Helena MT The Rocky Mountain Development Council (RMDC) Head Start program inaugurated their special music curriculum with the 2009-2010 school year. A \$10,000 Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation grant and matching grants of \$4,000 from the Head Start Parent Council and of \$3,000 from The Montana Arts Council Artist in Schools/Communities program support this new initiative.

Research demonstrates a link between music education and children's abstract reasoning skills. Early music training strengthens connections between the neurons used for spatial-temporal reasoning tasks. "That means," notes Patty Dahl, Head Start Director, "that a child with music skills acquires better math and science reasoning skills." Music and movement also improve children's hand-eye coordination, self-esteem, and their ability to play together. "Years ago parents scrimped to pay for piano lessons," said Dahl. "But circumstances have changed. And for our Head Start families, most of whom live below federal poverty levels, music education is a luxury."

Washington Foundation Program Officer Kelly Hughes Milodragovich said, "This innovative approach to early learning aligns with the Foundation's involvement education, particularly early childhood education. Studies continue to show that investments in quality early childhood development contribute significantly to a more successful and productive workforce in the future. Consequently, this is a critical issue for families, business, and communities. We are pleased to partner with RMDC's Head Start.

Head Start contracted with retired Helena School District music teacher, Angie Lephron. Through the year, Lephron will provide group and one-on-one professional development to all 15 Head Start teachers in Lewis & Clark, Jefferson, and Broadwater counties. Grant dollars funded the purchase of rhythm sticks, wooden blocks, maracas and a xylophone for each classroom. Children will make their own drums and shakers from coffee cans donated by Helena Senior Center seniors to support the project.

Head Start parents will be included in the music activities. “During our Holiday Tour of Lights and National Family Literacy Week, we’ll invite parents to join their Head Start students,” said Wendy Studt, Education/Literacy specialist. “Angie can inspire our teachers, our students, and their families with a passion for music. We are very grateful to the Washington Foundation, along with the Montana Arts Council and our Policy Council, for understanding and supporting this great addition to our program.”

For additional information about the Head Start music grant program, contact Head Start Program Director Patty Dahl, 457-7335, pdahl@rmdc.net. ###