

Educators look into helping your kids earlier

By **Melissa Jenco**

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Posted Friday, April 06, 2007

Area educators are studying ways to provide more early education and child care programs in DuPage County, especially to low-income families.

Starting with Woodridge, the Illinois Facilities Fund and Positive Parenting DuPage are creating an action plan for several communities where availability of such programs falls short.

The Illinois Facilities Fund is a private, non-profit group which provides financial and real estate resources to non-profit organizations.

It did a statewide needs assessment in 2003 and ranked DuPage in the top 10 counties in need of early childhood care and education due to the short supply of these programs serving low-income children.

The group has partnered with Positive Parenting DuPage to start the DuPage Early Learning Planning Initiative, which will address these findings. The program will be funded through a grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation.

Group leaders met Thursday with representatives from schools, day-care centers and other community groups to discuss the challenges Woodridge faces and how to overcome them.

“There really is power in these reports, even just this process of your having been identified as a community by IFF as one where attention needs to be focused,” said Theresa Hawley, a consultant for the group. “We hope you’ll be able to take advantage of that.”

In the Woodridge School District 68 area, there are an estimated 950 children in need of full-

day, full-year care but only 900 slots available in local centers. There are also shortages in several types of programs, such as Head Start, that serve low-income families.

Community educators said in addition to income, language and transportation also are barriers when trying to meet the early education needs of all families.

The groups discussed ways to reach out to families affected by the shortage and will look for ways to share space and resources.

They will meet again in May and June to continue creating a plan for the community.

In addition to Woodridge, the Illinois Facilities Fund is meeting with educators in West Chicago. Later this year, it will also work with Addison, Glendale Heights, Carol Stream and possibly two additional communities.

Heather Heaviland, senior project manager for the fund, said each community's plan will be tailored to its needs.

"One of the things we kind of pride ourselves on is the flexibility in our approach," Heaviland said. "This isn't a cookie-cutter approach looking at a community ... we want this to be interactive."

[dailyherald.com](http://www.dailyherald.com)