



BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment



2010 :: REPORT *to* ALASKANS

LETTER *from*
THE EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

EARLY LEARNING: AN INVESTMENT *without* RISK

Abbe Hensley, *Executive Director*

In finance, the biggest rewards carry the highest risk. When it comes to early learning, the bigger the investment, the greater the rewards, and the lower the risk. The more we do, the more likely we are to reap success on a grand scale. Doing nothing is the riskiest “strategy” of all. The components of quality early learning – positive and purposeful parenting, high quality and accessible child care and early education programs – build strong brains during the critical years from birth to 5.

Quality early learning is a guaranteed investment in Alaska’s future. It’s an opportunity we can’t afford to pass up. Growing children into thriving, contributing adults requires a whole lot of work at the front end, in the earliest years of life. What happens in a child’s earliest years has profound impacts on cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.

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It’s an opportunity we can’t afford to pass up.”

More and more, we read and hear about the gains to be made from investing in young children. Research on brain development in the earliest years is capturing attention far beyond neuroscience circles. And economists and business leaders are becoming some of the most articulate and influential proponents of investments in early childhood.

Here in Alaska, momentum is building, and Best Beginnings is proud to be an instigator of positive developments and a strong supporter of good works by others. The momentum shows in numerous ways:

- Imagination Library is expanding to more communities, engaging families in the fun of reading.
- More tools are available to support parents as they help babies’ brains grow in positive ways.
- Business leaders are realizing the high stakes, in terms of employee productivity today, the skills needed for tomorrow’s workforce, and the implications of global competition.
- The State of Alaska is conducting a pilot project for state-funded preschools, an important step toward high quality and affordable preschool accessible to all.
- Alaskans are forming early childhood partnerships to determine how best to meet the needs of young children in their own communities.

As with most investments, it requires patience. Important change doesn’t happen overnight and this one is no exception. We have plenty of work yet ahead – and many allies to share the challenges.

MANAGEMENT
and STAFF

Best Beginnings is governed by the Early Learning Council, a panel of community leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

SUSAN ANDERSON, President & CEO, The CIRI Foundation
MARGARET BAUER, Director, Work Life Services, Providence Health & Services Alaska
MICHELE BROWN, President & CEO, United Way of Anchorage
LESLIE ELLIS, CEO, Credit Union 1
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CATHRYN RASMUSON, Trustee, Rasmuson Foundation
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SARAH SCANLAN, Deputy Director, RurAL CAP
DAVID WIGHT, President & CEO, Retired, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company
CANDACE WINKLER, CEO, thread: Alaska's Early Care & Education Connection

CIRCLE OF CHAMPIONS

DEBORAH BONITO, President, Sourdough Mercantile, Inc.
CAROL COMEAU, Superintendent, Anchorage School District
SHARON GAGNON, PH.D., Advocate, Early Childhood Literacy and Learning

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BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

ABOUT BEST BEGINNINGS

Number *of*
children in
Alaska,
birth *to* 5
49,670



Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership organized in 2006 to mobilize people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed. Best Beginnings receives funding and support from businesses, foundations, nonprofits, government, and individuals. United Way of Anchorage provides financial management services.



KEY OBJECTIVES

- Parents and extended family are engaged in their children's learning from birth on.
- Child care and early learning programs are high quality, affordable, and accessible to all families who want them.
- Alaskans understand that early childhood learning is important and that investments in early childhood pay big dividends to the state as a whole.
- Sufficient funds are committed – from public and private sources – to ensure every Alaska child has the opportunity to begin school ready to succeed in school and in life.
- A comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system is in place in Alaska.



CURRENT
PORTFOLIO

BOOKS *for* KIDS: IMAGINATION LIBRARY

About 40% of Alaska children begin school unprepared to succeed. Children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out later. Alaska's dropout rate is among the highest in the nation.

Having new books of their own is a powerful way for children and their parents to become more engaged in positive learning experiences. The more children know and understand about "book reading" and what it represents before they enter school, the better prepared they will be for success.

“Having new books of their own is a powerful way for children and their parents to become more engaged in positive learning experiences.”

Best Beginnings has become the Alaska statewide coordinating entity for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which mails a high-quality age-appropriate

book each month to children from birth to age 5. There is no cost to the family.

Since Best Beginnings first became involved in Imagination Library in 2008, Imagination Libraries have expanded and sprouted all over the state. As of November 2009, funding was in place to enroll 10,322 babies and young children in Imagination Library.

In communities that already have an Imagination Library, Best Beginnings helps expand their capacity to send books to more children. In other locations, Best Beginnings provides technical and administrative assistance, and grants to establish new Imagination Libraries. Statewide grants to Best Beginnings leverage matching contributions – \$157,000 in 2009 – from within the communities. In addition to raising local funds, volunteers promote the program, register the children, and maintain a database.

As of year-end 2009, 16 Imagination Libraries were serving 31 communities: Anchorage, Angoon, Craig, Eagle, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Juneau, Kake, Kenai/Soldotna, Klawock, Koliganek, Little Diomedea, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Mentasta, Moose Pass, Nanwalek, Nome, Northway, Old Harbor, Seward,

Children funded
for Imagination
Library *in* 2009
10,322



Communities
participating *in*
early childhood
partnerships
20



Sitka, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Toksook Bay, Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, Wasilla, and Wrangell. Best Beginnings is also working with the Kuskokwim Education Foundation to establish an Imagination Library for 10 villages on the Kuskokwim River.

In a related program, board books are being distributed to Alaska Native families through Nutaqsiivik, a home visiting program of Southcentral Foundation. Babies in those homes, as well as children in two Head Start programs for Alaska Native children, have also been enrolled in Imagination Library.

Best Beginnings' Imagination Library work is supported by grants from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Rasmuson Foundation, ConocoPhillips Alaska, and The CIRI Foundation.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

When business and community leaders, parents and child care professionals, service providers and educators work together on early childhood issues, they can make a powerful difference in the lives of young children and their families. People at the local level understand and are most familiar with the issues, assets, needs, and challenges of their children.

Local partnerships organized around early childhood bring decisions closer to those being served, pinpoint actual needs, respond to cultural considerations, and ensure the best outcomes in each community for young children. Local partnerships bring people together to solve problems. They cross traditional boundaries and power structures to combine resources and focus on solutions, not turf.

Best Beginnings is leading efforts to build a network of local early childhood partnerships in Alaska. Adapting a model successful in other states, Best Beginnings awarded small one-year grants to nine communities to organize partnerships or build on partnerships already in place. Best Beginnings' work in this area is supported by grants from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, ConocoPhillips Alaska, and BP Alaska. In addition, local sources have contributed financial and in-kind support that exceeds the state and corporate contributions.

“People at the local level understand and are most familiar with the issues, assets, needs, and challenges of their children.”

Best Beginnings seed grants were awarded to partnerships in Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Gustavus, Hoonah, Juneau, the southern Kenai Peninsula, Ketchikan, Kodiak, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

The partnerships are assessing local needs and assets, identifying local priorities, and developing two-year strategic plans for meeting those priorities.

BUILDING BRAINS *in* MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Best Beginnings has published a series of guides with fun, brain-building activities for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. All activities described in the guides are based on the State of Alaska's Early Learning Guidelines and are designed to prepare young children to succeed in school and in life.

Spanish-language activity guides were published in 2008, followed by a Yup'ik version in 2009. The Spanish and Yup'ik guides were developed with assistance from Spanish-speaking and Yup'ik advisers to ensure the activities are culturally and geographically appropriate. Best Beginnings also assisted with the publication of English guides. Many of the activities are available on the Best Beginnings Web site.

The guides were funded by grants from the Alaska Children's Trust and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, with additional support from BP and ConocoPhillips Alaska.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Best Beginnings is working on several fronts to encourage Alaskans to help ensure all children begin school ready to succeed.

Public service announcements are produced and broadcast statewide on radio and TV with a wide range of messages. Topics include the importance of reading and other learning experiences, how to play and interact effectively with babies and toddlers, and the effects of early learning on workforce productivity and the economy.

These PSAs are a collaboration with Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc., parent company of public stations KAKM TV and KSKA-FM. Best Beginnings also has produced television PSAs and paid spots through collaborations with the Alaska Children's Trust, KTUU, and GCI.

In other public outreach efforts, staff and volunteers give presentations and participate in panels. In 2009, they spoke at more than 30 events on topics ranging from Imagination Library and early childhood partnerships, to the business case for early learning and legislative priorities. Best Beginnings'

representatives have been featured guests on in-person and radio discussion forums, locally and statewide.

Best Beginnings continues to use conventional media and information channels of other organizations to publicize events and activities.

Traffic to Best Beginnings' Web site is growing every year. Visits and unique visitors in 2009 jumped 101% and 111%, respectively, over 2008. Best Beginnings also started a Facebook page.

OUTREACH *to* BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Best Beginnings is building relationships with Alaska's business community through small meetings and larger presentations to business and civic leaders across the state. Initial meetings have been held in Barrow and Bethel. Additional small gatherings are planned in 2010.

“Best Beginnings spoke at more than 30 events on topics ranging from Imagination Library and early childhood partnerships, to the business case for early learning and legislative priorities.”

To engage business leaders statewide, Best Beginnings convened an Alaska Business Leader Summit on Early Childhood Investment. Forty Alaskans participated in the summit, which was co-hosted by Providence Health & Services, Northrim Bank, Alaska State Chamber of Commerce, and Doyon Limited. Funding was from the Partnership for America's Economic Success and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Providence Health & Services and ConocoPhillips provided in-kind support for the event.

The summit shared information about the importance of early childhood programs in raising future employees competitive in the 21st Century workplace; provided opportunities for business leaders to connect with peers who share their commitment to the future; and engaged business leaders in advocating for additional investments in strategies proven to encourage the successful development of young children.

Households
reached by
Best Beginnings
TV PSAs
150,000+



National speakers were Bill Millett, President/CEO of Scope View Strategic Advantage, and neuroscientist Dr. Pat Levitt. Millett presented the business case for early childhood learning. Dr. Levitt, from the Keck School of Medicine at USC, addressed early brain development and the relationships between positive learning experiences and future success. Mr. Millett and Dr. Levitt also spoke at public venues.

BUILDING *an* EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Services for young children are uncoordinated. Each program or service has its own objectives, rules, funding sources, and paperwork requirements. Without coordination and alignment, the nearly inevitable result is gaps in service, overlapping missions, and confusion among the families such services are designed to serve. Too often, parents don't know what's available or how to access services.

Early learning is entwined with other facets of early childhood development. A child's brain growth is bound to suffer if he is hungry or chronically sick or in front of a TV for hours at a time for lack of high-quality child care.

Young children do best when they are served by a statewide early childhood system that empowers families, links service providers, and engages communities on behalf of young children.

That is why it is so important that early learning partnerships are organized locally. The partnerships are laying the foundation for a statewide coordinated effort to help citizens, community leaders, and institutions recognize the importance of early childhood and become involved in supporting policies and investments for young children in Alaska. The

value of such a network has long been recognized by policy makers and early childhood advocates.

Best Beginnings is working with state agencies, other nonprofit organizations, parents, foundations, and corporate partners to develop a statewide early childhood system that is culturally responsive, comprehensive, and accessible to all.

“Young children do best when they are served by a statewide early childhood system that empowers families, links service providers, and engages communities on behalf of young children.”

Best Beginnings has been a major catalyst in the effort to organize an Alaska Early Childhood Advisory Council. The council's purpose will be to promote positive development, improved health outcomes, and school readiness for Alaska children, prenatal through age 8. The council will support creation of a unified, sustainable system of early care, health, education, and family support for young children and their families.

INVESTORS 2009

All Alaskans have a stake in building a statewide system that provides and supports quality early learning at home and in away-from-home programs. Many of our most prominent corporations, as well as nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, small businesses, individuals, and government understand the implications of success and the consequences of inaction. Their support makes our work possible.

MAJOR SUPPORTERS (\$50,000+)

- Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- Alaska Humanities Forum
- BP Alaska
- Rasmuson Foundation

SUPPORTERS (UP to \$25,000)

- Alaska Children's Trust

- ConocoPhillips Alaska
- Partnership for America's Economic Success
- The CIRI Foundation

IN-KIND SUPPORT (\$75,000+)

- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc.
- Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center
- United Way of Anchorage

The following organizations provide financial assistance or other valuable forms of support to Best Beginnings.

FRIENDS

- Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children
- Alaska Department of Health & Social Services
- Alaska Head Start Association
- Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
- Buster Consulting & Communications
- Doyon, Limited
- Northrim Bank
- Providence Health & Services
- Raven Management Consulting
- Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.
- Safeway, Inc. in honor of Steve Brezenksi
- thread: Alaska's Early Care & Education Connection
- University of Alaska Anchorage

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

- Michele R. Farnam

- Willie & Abbe Hensley
- Patricia McDaid
- Brad & Kay McKim
- Chris & Melinda Myers
- Michael Oblath
- Susan Ruddy in honor of Tina & Ralph Lynch
- Matthew Streiff
- Lance E. Throp
- Nancy Wagner

MEDIA PARTNERS

- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc.
- Aleutian Peninsula Broadcasting, Inc.
- GCI Communications Corp.
- KINY Radio – Juneau
- KNOM – Alaska Radio Mission
- KTOO Public Radio, Juneau
- KTUU, Channel 2

IMAGINATION
LIBRARY –
LOCAL INVESTORS
(\$100+)

Community support is a basic principle of Imagination Library. Volunteers run each program and solicit financial contributions within the community. As a statewide coordinator for Imagination Library, Best Beginnings provides technical assistance and leverages direct funding to promote community support. Individuals, businesses, and organizations all over Alaska have invested in their local Imagination Libraries. In addition to those listed below, hundreds of individuals have contributed up to \$100. We thank all of them for their support.



ANCHORAGE :: \$1,000+

Communities In Schools
Fred Meyer Foundation
Nordstrom
Target
United Way of Anchorage

Anne Wien Elementary School PTA

Auto Service Co.
John & Kelly Brown
Bucher Glass, Inc.
C&A Cleaning Service
Charlie & Jan Cannon
JB Carnahan

ANCHORAGE :: \$100 to \$999

GCI

Jim Cerney, DDS, PC

Gail Chagnon
Silver Chord

FAIRBANKS :: \$1,000+

ConocoPhillips
Downtown Rotary of Fairbanks
Doyon, Limited
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital
Golden Heart Rotary Club
David Hollingsworth
Sue & Robert Hull
Kiwanis Club of Fairbanks
McDonalds Ambrose LLC
Span-Alaska Transportation
Sunrisers Rotary
Toyota Auto Service Co.
Russ & Nancy Wagner

College Rotary

Lt. Col. Harry & Katie Cook
Gary Corrick
Barbara Day
Delta Kappa Gamma
Design Alaska
Dimond Fence Co., Inc.
Angela Dowler
Denise Edgerton
Fairbanks Educational Assoc.
Fairbanks Emblem Club #109
Bev Fantazzi
Fort Wainwright OSC
Denis & Patricia Fox
Suzanne Graves

FAIRBANKS :: \$100 to \$999

3 Tier – Alaska Engineering
Alpha Delta Kappa Zeta
Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.
Louise Anderl
Betty Anderson

Gulivers

Jennie Hafele
Leslie Hajdukovich
Jimmy & Barbara Hameister
Dr. Christopher Henry, DMD
Kay Hinckley

Local funds
leveraged for
Imagination
Library *in* 2009
\$156,716



Hops Hallmark
Rodger & Sue Hughes
Ronald Inouye
J.P. Jones Community Development Center
Montean Jackson
Kevin Jelinek
Colleen Johnston
Julie Scott Retirement Plans
Scott Kawasaki
Cheryl Keepers
Kiwanis Club of Chena
Judy Krize
Sandra Lachman
Eric Madsen
Michael Mavencamp
Michael Miles
Mary Mitchell
Morris Tutorial
Mt. McKinley Bank
NTL Alaska, Inc.
Tanya O'Brien
Optimist Club of Fairbanks
Molly Palmer
Phyllis Pendeergrast, DMD, PC
Gayle Pierce
Powerhouse, Inc.
Jack & Suzanne Randolph
Tammy & Ed Randolph
Taber Rehbaum
Retired Teachers
Amy Richards-Weigers
Melissa Rickey
Tom & Bonnie Roberts
Brian Rogers
Katherine Sanders
Lynda Sather
Gary Sawdy, DDS
Bett Schaffhauser
Seekins Ford-Lincoln-Mercury, Inc.

Linda Setterberg
Shiffler Educational Services
Slayden Plumbing & Heating, Inc.
Patricia Stark
Lisa Sundborg
Lynda Tanner
Usibelli Foundation
Dale Verly
Vertex Insulation
David Weaver
Ellen Whitcher
Gary & Sue Wilken

JUNEAU, WRANGELL, CRAIG, KLAWOOCK,
ANGOON, KAKE, SITKA :: \$1,000+
AEYC
Bartlett Regional Hospital
Communities In Schools of Alaska
Communities In Schools of Juneau
Dornan Douglas Foundation
Friends of the Juneau Public Library
KTOO
United Way of SE Alaska

JUNEAU, WRANGELL, CRAIG, KLAWOOCK,
ANGOON, KAKE, SITKA :: \$100 to \$999
Alaska Glacier Seafoods
Alaska Pacific Bank
Beta Sigma Phi, Wrangell
Kathy & Doug Blanc
Elsa Demeksa & Peter Froehlich
Epsilon Sigma Alpha International,
Alaska Alpha Theta Chapter
ESA Foundation
Mary Claire Harris
Bill Jacoby
Juneau Public Health staff
Joy & Rich Lyon
PEO, Chapter G

Increase *in*
Web site visits,
2008 to 2009
101%



REFAX Inc.
Roland & Pam Machold
Albert Shaw
Anne & Doug Standerwick
Ed & Cathy Thomas
Wrangell Emblem Club
Wrangell Firefighters

KENAI :: \$1,000+
Soldotna Rotary

KENAI :: \$100 to \$999
Randy Daly
Chris & Sarah Hough
Kenai Peninsula Reading Council
Marion Nelson
Peninsula Health Center

MEADOW LAKES (MATANUSKA-SUSITNA
BOROUGH) :: \$1,000+
Communities In Schools
Wasilla Sunrise Rotary

MEADOW LAKES :: \$100 to \$999
Friends of the Wasilla Library
Sherri Rusher
Susitna Rotary

NOME :: \$100 to \$999
Alaska Airlines
Communities In Schools
Patrick & Paula Johanson
Morgan's Snow Mobile Sales
Nome Eskimo Community
Nome Literacy Association
Nome Public School District
Wells Fargo

SEWARD :: \$1,000+
City of Seward
Seward Community Foundation

SEWARD :: \$100 to \$999
Adelmann Family/Bear's Den B&B
American Legion Post 5
Jennifer Carrick
Duane Chase
Harbor Enterprises Inc./Petro Marine Service
Rhonda Hubbard
Jolund & Monica Luther
Moriarty Family/Dentistry
Linda Rae Olsen
Oriental Garden
Peking Restaurant
Qutekcak Native Tribe
Resurrection Bay Lions Club
Scenic Mountain Air
Seward Bike Shop
Seward Elks #1773
Seward Real Estate
Shoreside Petroleum
Ray Simutis/Ray's Waterfront
Train Lake View Luxury Cottage

TOK & TANACROSS :: \$1,000+
Tok Community Umbrella Corporation

TOK & TANACROSS :: \$100 to \$999
Conversify.net
Tok Community Clinic, Inc.

UNALASKA/DUTCH HARBOR :: \$1,000+
Unalaska City School District

CREDITS



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