

**Application to Serve as AmeriCorps HealthCorps Placement Site  
June 28, 2011**

**Amended July 1, 2011**

The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) submits this application to the Iowa Public Health Association to host an AmeriCorps member who will work on reducing preventable chronic disease and obesity in Polk County, Iowa., and, in particular, target childhood obesity in the county.

**1 & 2. Funding and organizational capacity**

CFPC will contribute a cash match of \$8,700 upon execution of the contract with IPHA. CFPC has a budget of \$1.2 million and currently manages both foundation and government contracts and has the fiscal and management capacity to comply with all the duties of a supervisor site. All CFPC staff involved with this project have read, understood, and will comply with the Site Supervisor Responsibilities. CFPC manages over twenty grants annually, with varying degrees of requirements covering many of the same provisions, as well as often providing supervision to a master's student in social work. CFPC is well-equipped to be a site supervisor.

**3. Work plan**

CFPC recently celebrated its 20th anniversary as Iowa's leading child policy and advocacy organization, nationally recognized for its work on developing comprehensive, community-based services to improve outcomes for children and families. CFPC has led state efforts to develop child-health services that are preventive and developmental in nature, focusing upon early identification of concerns and addressing social and environmental determinants of health, as well as bio-medical ones. CFPC would like to extend its work, both in family-centered program implementation and in policy design, to address children's healthy nutrition and exercise and avoidance of obesity.

In 2010, CFPC produced the *Polk County Health Chartbook* for the Polk County Department of Health. That publication included available information on obesity among adolescents and adults. While it was limited in terms of county-specific obesity data, it did show the growth in childhood obesity in Iowa and its correlation to other social and educational outcomes. There is growing concern about the problem of childhood obesity, concern that is now reaching the salience for engaging parents and community members to address the issue. Many associate it as a problem primarily with adults and older youth, but nutrition and exercise patterns are developed early, and the preschool and elementary years are very important opportunities for action to address lifelong health and appropriate weight.

Many families struggle to provide proper nutrition for their children and also do not have some of the basic information and opportunity to provide more healthy environments. The AmeriCorps member will offer that information directly to families, and will work with other

family-centered programs in Polk County – many of which do not have an explicit nutrition or exercise component – to help them incorporate those elements into their work. A second part of the AmeriCorps members' work will be to identify barriers that children and their families face to having a healthy lifestyle, update information on the prevalence of issues and concerns around childhood obesity and its impact on overall health, and convey that information to community stakeholders who can take action.

#### **4. Data collection and documentation**

CFPC is both a research and policy organization and does many evaluations of community programs, stressing an interactive approach to evaluation that provides for continuous learning. As an AmeriCorps HealthCore placement site, CFPC will work with the AmeriCorps member to create a record-keeping and documentation system that collects information on attendance and participation in health education, literacy, nutritional and physical activity programs by the type of program the member conducts and collect consumer response information regarding program impact. CFPC and the AmeriCorps member will also make regular use of the information collected to review progress, identify strengths and limitations of different strategies, and continuously refine and improve practices within the member's work. This regular review and assessment will be part of the supervision and learning and growth experience for the Americorps member.

#### **5. Use of community infrastructure**

The AmeriCorps member will work under the direct supervision of Melissa Gradischnig-Nelson, who leads CFPC's community outreach and engagement work in Polk County. Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson was the School Readiness coordinator for the Making Connections Project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and has strong working relationships with the Des Moines Public School District, Polk County neighborhood associations, United Way of Central Iowa, and the Early Childhood Iowa – Polk County chapter, serving in a primary capacity of parent engagement and leadership on the healthy development and education of their children.

As a result, CFPC has connections to a diverse array of programs and activities within Polk County to engage and support families of young children. Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson will provide the member with an introduction to key organizational leaders and to different parent and family groups that currently exist, most of which are very receptive to additional information, meeting presenters, and people who can provide programs for the families they serve. Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson has facilitated a number of peer support and self-help groups in the Polk County community and supported volunteers as they took on leadership roles. She has worked with literally hundreds of volunteers over the course of the last five years in her work with Making Connections.

#### **6. Experience with diverse populations and faith-based communities**

Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson has significant experience working with communities of color and faith-based organizations in Polk County. She initiated a parent ambassador program in

some of Des Moines' poorest elementary schools, including Carver, Moulton and Findley, building the capacity of parents to reach out to and engage other parents in their children's education. This work involves recruiting and mentoring diverse parent leaders, as well as working directly with families on employment, health and education issues. The effort has increased parent involvement in these schools – a particular success for the schools' many low-income families, families of color, and families for whom English is a second language, many of whom have had little or negative school experiences of their own.

She also has worked for the last four years with a diverse number of faith-based groups in Polk County, helping them open the doors to their communities for a wide variety of events, including parenting classes, GED and ESL instruction and family book clubs.

## **7. Supervision**

In addition to ongoing supervision and mentoring from Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson, the AmeriCorps member, as part of CFPC's staff, will have access to senior staff members working in policy and research areas.

One of CFPC's greatest strengths is its work in "linking research and policy" and providing policy recommendations and options that are evidence-based. CFPC has credibility throughout the state, and particularly in Polk County, for its work in this area. Providing the best available information – including that which can be gathered through focus groups and interviews as well as administrative data – is a role in which CFPC excels, often working with community groups seeking change. In this area, the AmeriCorps member not only will work with Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson but also will have the benefit of CFPC's research and policy team, including executive director Dr. Charles Bruner, senior editor and research associate Anne Discher and Sheila Hansen, policy director of Every Child Counts, CFPC's advocacy arm.

Ms. Gradischnig-Nelson also directly supervised parent ambassadors at six Des Moines elementary schools over the last number of years and, prior to joining CFPC, managed a small business where she was the boss and director supervisor of a small but loyal set of employees.

## **8. Past experience with state and national public service programs**

This will be the first AmeriCorps member that CFPC has supervised, but CFPC has a long history of engaging interns to work on policy issues and has also engaged a diverse set of policy fellows to provide educational as well as employment opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Bruner  
Director  
Child and Family Policy Center