



When the Right Step Is the First Step

By Lisa Poisso



When David M. Munson sees a need for action, he takes steps – in this case, Educational First Steps, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to improving the training of workers in many childcare facilities that serve the underprivileged. The EFS co-founder was lauded not once but twice this year for his tireless efforts. He received the T. Berry Brazelton Infant Mental Health Advocacy Award from the Texas Association for Infant Mental Health, as well as Father of the Year honors from the

local Father of the Year Awards, benefiting local children's charities.

The oil and gas producer/investor, who lives in Dallas with his wife of 50 years, continues to inject fresh ideas into causes that matter to him. We caught up with him long enough to ask what motivates his community involvement and what headway Educational First Steps is making for Dallas kids today.

Can you share with us how your involvement with Holy Family School in McKinney led to establishing Educational First Steps? In 1986, I stepped down as chairman of the Episcopal School of Dallas and was appointed along with others by the bishop to be new trustees of the Holy Family School in McKinney. The checkbook was out of balance. I expected to serve one year and solve the problem and retire. Once involved, I became aware of the tremendous positive impact they were having on poverty children ages 2, 3 and 4.

Holy Family was a mission that the diocese started in 1950, consisting of a preschool and church. It had a wonderful Hispanic priest but the financials were in a shoebox. They had 70 children ages 2, 3 and 4. They were doing a wonderful job of educating poverty children. In 1988, I suggested we contact McKinney Independent School District first-grade teachers and asked how the alumni children of Holy Family performed in first grade. They said they were attentive, well-behaved and ready and eager to learn. Many of the Holy Family children became valedictorians or salutatorians, out of proportion to their population of the high school.

In 1989 ... I started meeting(s) to see how we could replicate this early childhood success. In 1990, we started Educational First Steps with one impoverished day care that was basically baby-sitting children when we started with them.

What are some of the specific things that Educational First Steps does when it comes in to assist a day care facility? When EFS takes on a center, they sign an application expressing their desire for help in improving their program. (The program includes) mentoring the director and teachers, EFS (teacher) trainings ... working toward accreditation ... college scholarships for teachers, and materials and

furnishings for the center. During all of the above steps, field trips are offered for the children at our affiliate centers to the Dallas Arboretum, Museum of Nature and Science, Dallas Zoo and The Nasher Sculpture Center.

How many centers is your program currently working with? What areas of the Metroplex does your organization cover? Educational First Steps currently has 66 affiliate centers serving approximately 3,800 children. By May 2009, we hope to have over 100 centers serving perhaps 6,000 or more children. Our centers are located in low-income areas all over the Metroplex. The largest percentage is in south Dallas and southeast Dallas.

What's the state of day care and early childhood services for kids in Dallas? Where do we need to focus to help disadvantaged children move ahead and thrive? The “state of the union” in Texas day care is lousy. State standards are too low. The compensation level is too low – just above the minimum wage. This leads to high turnover and poorly trained personnel. Texas needs to raise the standards. Texas needs to increase the budget for early childhood to at least match and obtain all the federal funds that are available.

Is there an aspect of your work with Educational First Steps that's been especially challenging for you – something that makes you sad, angry or discouraged? Texas is spending \$50,000 per year on dropout children who have gotten involved in law violations – we are not educating these children for the \$50,000. They can't get a job when released. Recidivism is high. EFS costs just \$510.00 per child, and the child wants to learn, wants to succeed and get a job and be a taxpayer. I am distressed that I haven't been able to mobilize broad financial support for EFS. I haven't been able to get the connection made in the minds of the folks that can make the difference.

Tell us about the most personally rewarding side of your work, what really lights you up? What lights me up is seeing 4-year-old EFS children excited about learning, as you see them while on tours of our accredited centers.

Sidebar

Learn more: www.educationalfirststeps.org

Dallas Child is ©2008 by Lauren Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without express written prohibited.
Find this article at <http://www.DallasChild.com/showarticle.asp?artid=535>

"



Print Now

Close