

The Rural Virginian

news

Grant Boosts School Readiness in Fluvanna and Louisa Counties

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Richmond — Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa, an initiative launched in 2009 to enhance school readiness among the area’s youngest citizens, has received a \$100,000 grant from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF).

This represents the second phase of funding for the Smart Beginnings initiative, following the startup phase to conduct a community needs assessment, to establish a leadership council and to create a long-range strategic plan for early childhood development in the two counties. United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area serves as fiscal agent to manage the grant.

The new grant, which extends from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2013, will enable Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa to implement the Ages and Stages developmental screening program, a nationally recognized tool to identify children with developmental delays that would hinder their ability to start school healthy and ready to learn.

Mozell Booker, a member of the leadership council for Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa, as well as a member of the Fluvanna Board of Supervisors, noted that other uses for the VECF’s grant funds will be to hire a Smart Beginnings coordinator, to provide educational resources and materials to parents, and to increase public awareness about the importance of school readiness.

“We are working closely with the Fluvanna and Louisa county school systems, along with Jefferson Area CHIP, Head Start, social services agencies and child care centers to help families improve school readiness skills for their children,” said Booker. “We are also developing new partnerships in order to identify young children who would benefit from extra help in their preschool years, so they’ll be ready to succeed in a kindergarten classroom.”

“The VECF grant is vital for our region and for Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa,” said Chris Fairchild, CEO of National Filter Service, as well as a member of the Fluvanna Board of Supervisors and the leadership council for Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa. “Economic development reports indicate that workforce readiness is the single most important factor when businesses are considering a relocation. Having owned a business in Fluvanna for twenty years, I know that a skilled workforce is essential for our growth

and success. When young children have a smart beginning in the preschool years, they are better prepared to embrace the American Dream.”

Tracy White, Virginia Cooperative Extension agent and co-chair of the Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa initiative, added, “The Smart Beginnings grant from the VECF will provide a great boost for children to succeed in school. Our partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, schools and others will give us a tremendous opportunity to support young children and their families in Louisa County.”

Miriam Rushfinn, program officer for the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, praised Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa and the community partners for their enthusiastic commitment to invest in early childhood development efforts that will benefit both counties. “Providing our youngest citizens with quality early learning experiences in the first five years will build the foundation for a smarter workforce and impact future economic prosperity in Virginia,” she said.

Smart Beginnings Fluvanna Louisa is a collaborative partnership of public and private agencies, businesses and individuals serving Fluvanna and Louisa counties, working to enhance the quality of services for young children. For more information, contact the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area at (434) 972-1701.

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation is an innovative leader in creating results-oriented initiatives and collaborative partnerships to help the commonwealth’s young children achieve lifelong success, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) acts as a catalyst for workforce development and economic prosperity. To learn more about the VECF and its many initiatives designed to transform future prospects for economic growth in Virginia, such as Smart Beginnings and the Virginia Star Quality Initiative, visit <http://www.smartbeginnings.org>.

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