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**Sixpence Early Learning Fund Awards 2 New Grants**

**Sixpence Childcare Partnerships grants connect child cares, public schools
to promote early childhood development**

LINCOLN, NE—The Trustees of the Sixpence Early Learning Fund announced this week that two new grants totaling $450,000 will be awarded to school districts in partnership with local licensed early care and education providers for at-risk infants and toddlers. Omaha Public Schools, in collaboration with Omaha Educare, and Loup City Public Schools, in partnership with ESU 10, were each selected for grant awards of $225,000 after a competitive application and review process. Sixpence, a collaborative funding structure involving the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Department of Education, and private sector investors, has issued grants to community partnerships statewide since 2008, totaling 47 communities.

Traditionally, these Sixpence grants are awarded to school districts working with other local agencies that meet the statutory requirements governing using Sixpence funds and provide center-based or home-based family engagement programs. This latest round of grants is the third time Sixpence funds have been made available for school districts to partner with licensed childcare providers, with a different set of statutory requirements supported explicitly by Nebraska's *Step Up to Quality* rating and improvement system. Sixpence Childcare Partnerships (CCP) are 100% federally funded through a sub-award from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to Nebraska Children and Families Foundation using Child Care Development Funds allocated to school districts.

The growing focus on Nebraska's early childhood workforce also created common ground between Sixpence Childcare Partnership grants and the *Step Up to Quality* childcare rating and improvement system. *Step Up to Quality*, a collaboration between the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Nebraska Department of Education, provides training and professional development, formal education, and coaching opportunities to participating childcare providers and their staff. The initiative assists providers in understanding and meeting accepted quality standards and conducts assessment and data analysis for quality improvement. *Step Up to Quality* also gives parents the information to identify and choose quality care environments for their youngest children. Licensed child care providers involved in the new Sixpence Childcare Partnerships must be enrolled in *Step Up to Quality* and achieve a Step 3 rating on a 5-step quality scale within three years.

According to recent data, approximately 30,000 infants and toddlers, or more than 40 percent of Nebraska children between birth and age 3, face risk factors threatening their chances of arriving at kindergarten developmentally on par with their peers. These children are more likely to struggle in the K-12 system, attain a lower level of education, enter the criminal justice system as offenders, develop chronic health problems, and earn less as working adults. Neuroscientific, sociological, and even economic evidence suggests that stimulating and supportive experiences in the first years of life encourage the emergence of cognitive skills, behaviors, and character traits that drive academic success and steer children toward healthier, more productive life outcomes.

While child development experts agree that parents play the most crucial role in children's earliest learning and developmental experiences, it is also true that child care is a reality for Nebraskans who must participate in the workforce to provide for their families. The new Sixpence Child Care Partnership grants ensure that more infants and toddlers are being cared for in environments that offer the kinds of early learning experiences known to narrow the achievement gap.

**About Sixpence**: Sixpence is the public name of the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, a public-private partnership established in 2006 to generate sustainable funding for high-quality programs serving children at risk and their families, prenatal-to-age-three. Sixpence issues grant awards and offers technical assistance to locally controlled early childhood partnerships under the supervision of a governor-appointed Board of Trustees. Sixpence is administered by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, which serves as the private endowment provider required by state statute. For more information, visit [www.SingaSongofSixpence.org](http://www.SingaSongofSixpence.org).

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