



Press Release - For Immediate Release

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Contact: Robert Borremans, telephone - (608) 751-8604; email – rtb3629@gmail.com

Local Group's Efforts Selected for Wisconsin Top Rural Development Initiative Honors

Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESSN) – Vernon and Monroe Counties has been selected to receive the 2020 Wisconsin Top Rural Development Initiative award, one of two awards presented in 2020 by Wisconsin Rural Partners, Inc. The presentation was made at a private ceremony following the cancellation of the Wisconsin Rural Summit due to the COVID virus.

Kickapoo Conversations launched Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESSN) with childcare providers in January of 2019. Technology was used to help child care programs become more efficient and effective, with an embedded professional development model (so required continuing education can be responsive and done onsite, reducing travel and registration expenses) and creation of a highly qualified child care substitute teacher pool - Relief Squad – to address one of the biggest needs identified by providers. The goal of WEESSN is to reduce program closure and turnover during a time of unprecedented decline in regulated childcare programs. By saving programs time and money, by streamlining services through technology, by providing qualified substitute care, and offering site-specific needed supports, childcare programs can thrive so children, families, and communities can also flourish.

More recently, two other communities (Dane and Milwaukee) launched the Shared Services Network as part of WEESSN. Including the Vernon-Monroe County programs, the WEESSN is serving 60 childcare providers and over 900 children.

The group believes that when childcare is strong and stable, communities thrive. Communities with high quality childcare that is affordable and easy to access experience strong economic development because all interested parties can be in the workforce.

“Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) recognizes the need for quality child care services in rural communities and applauds Kickapoo Conversations and the WEESSN program as an outstanding example of the many local efforts across the state to improve the lives of citizens in rural Wisconsin,” said Sandy Decker, WRP president. “These types of projects are notable, showcasing the variety and breadth of successful local efforts to enhance the quality of life in the rural areas of our state.”

A second project receiving recognition as a 2020 Top Rural Development Initiative is the The Grantsburg Revitalization Operation (GRO). The GRO organization was formed in the spring of 2014 and is focusing on the renewal of Grantsburg WI. The efforts of GRO are multi-faceted. While working on growing community resources for a diverse population, the goal is to grow the population and provide housing for these individuals once they decide that Grantsburg is a good place to live.

Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) is the state's federally designated rural development council. Committed to improving the quality of life in rural Wisconsin, WRP is a non-partisan forum for identifying, discussing, and addressing rural issues. Through collaborations with a wide array of partners, including local, county, state, tribal, and federal governments, as well as for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and rural citizens, WRP fosters and promotes locally based solutions to rural needs and issues.

This is the twentieth year that WRP has recognized Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives. "The program is designed to identify, highlight, and share innovative models, practices and programs that have a positive impact on rural Wisconsin communities," said Errin Welty, WRP Past President. "WRP created the program to provide a mechanism for rural communities to learn from each other and we are pleased to report that many of the award winners are still actively operating in their communities."

Additional information about Wisconsin Rural Partners and the Top Rural Development Initiatives can be found at www.wiruralpartners.org.