

For Immediate Release
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Welborn Baptist Foundation Making Great Strides in Early Child Development

The Welborn Baptist Foundation announced today at a news conference that they have created a new early child development initiative called BetterMorphosis.

The first five years of life are crucial to a child's lifelong development. Young children—even toddlers and babies—earliest experiences set the stage for their future development and ability to learn. It can never be too early to become involved in a child's development, but it can easily be too late.

In recognition of the importance of Nature and Nurture on the development of our next generation, the Welborn Baptist Foundation has chosen to develop a multidisciplinary initiative for the improvement of early child development in our community. "Our goal is to provide our community with the latest information on early child development," explains Marjorie Soyugenc, Executive Director of the Foundation, "and to stimulate community action. It is critical that caregivers—parents, relatives, childcare providers, and educators—understand their role in helping each child develop to his or her fullest potential."

The arm of the Welborn Baptist Foundation dedicated to early child development has been named BetterMorphosis—a takeoff of metamorphosis, the process of turning a caterpillar into a butterfly. "When something changes into something better, reaching its full potential, that's metamorphosis," explains Ted Sheppe, Foundation board member and chairman of the early child development initiative. "The BetterMorphosis early child development programs will help children be better prepared for life." The BetterMorphosis motto is "Start Early. Watch What Emerges."

Research has shown that, starting at birth, a child's brain develops in response to the child's experiences, literally building neurological networks in reaction to the environment. The brain's self-construction continues through life, but the foundation is built in the very early years.

- A 3-year-old's brain is 2.5 times more active than the brain of an adult.
- The capacity to control emotions and make social attachments begins at Age 2.
- By the age of 3, children develop most of their capacity to acquire vocabulary, the foundation for literacy.
- 85% of a child's capacity to learn is determined by age 5.

Unfortunately, 95% of public investment in education occurs after age five, and Indiana is one of only 12 states which have no public funding for preschool education. BetterMorphosis will provide leadership and funding for community programs which support improving early child development.

Already, Welborn Baptist Foundation has supported the Southwestern Regional Perinatal Advisory Board for three years in its quest to understand and improve infant morbidity and mortality. The Foundation is also in the beginning phases of a pediatrician-based brain development program. Announced today at the news conference, the Foundation has committed its support to a childcare facility accreditation program called Paths to Quality. This program provides a quality rating system for child care facilities, education for care providers, and materials that support the on-going program at the accredited facilities.

According to Erin Ramsey, Executive Director of 4C of Southern Indiana, Inc., the organization managing the operations of Paths to Quality, “Seventy-two percent of our children are enrolled in formal daycare. Early childhood education for children’s caregivers is minimal because most daycare facilities lack the resources to compensate and credential staff.”

In our eight surrounding counties, the number that actually receive credentialed early childhood education is staggering:

- 34% of licensed childcare centers
- 13% of registered ministries
- 13% of licensed family care
- Only 2% of non-licensed homes

The Paths to Quality program intends to improve those numbers. “Parents, for the most part, are not aware there are quality indicators that rank daycare facilities,” explains Ramsey. “We want the facilities to consider caregiver training an important aspect of their operations and staff development.”

“Our goal with this program,” clarifies Soyugenc, “is to empower parents, grandparents and all caregivers with knowledge about the research-proven teaching methods which can optimize a child’s potential. As parents, we’re our children’s first teachers and we set the stage for all learning in the future.”

For more information on the Welborn Baptist Foundation, BetterMorphosis, and Paths to Quality, contact the Welborn Baptist Foundation at 812. 437.8260.