

Thank you, Denise and the Start Early Funders for this great honor.

I want to thank all the women in my life who have contributed to my ability to do the work I am honored and lucky to do every day.

My grandma Jost encouraged me, a shy farm girl, to read, become educated and to travel. She wanted me to see the possibilities for myself in the big world.

My mom nurtured me, my 7 siblings, my cousins, and friends into adulthood. My mom also showed me how important education was by getting her GED when we were young children. When I was 5, I asked my mom one day while she was ironing, where babies came from. She told me that I had a seed in my tummy that would turn into a baby when I got married. Even as a 5 year old, I loved babies and so, I often rubbed my tummy and talked to my seed baby. Even after I learned the real story of how babies were made I still thought about my body as a seed growing vessel. This often helped me in my teen years to make good decisions about risky behaviors like drinking and smoking because I had to take care of the vessel for the seed in my tummy that would eventually become a baby. My mom's sweet nurturing story took hold in my mind for much longer than I'm sure she ever imagined. As the mother of Matthew and Emily, I hope I was as nurturing to them as I was taught by my mother. As the grandmother of

Amayah, Antoine, Otto, Ivan, Millie, Michael and Moses, I get to continue loving and learning.

My aunts and the neighbor ladies all had many children and from them I also learned about being warm and nurturing and being involved in your child's school and life including volunteering many hours for things like 4H. Feeding people was also a way to show love for my mom, grandmas, aunts, and neighbor ladies; which I also learned from them. But I also learned that women were moms almost exclusively, and they surely didn't choose careers.

My dad, who obviously doesn't fit into the category of women in my life, was also a role model for me. He always fought for the underdog even when it was not the popular stance. When I was young my dad was involved in a milk dumping protest to try to improve prices for milk. My mom and dad were arguing about it, my mom thought it was wasteful and was taking milk from children and my dad thought you had to fight for what you thought was right. I remember listening to them and thinking my dad was so right – you must stick up for what you think is right. As long as I am talking about men, I would like to thank Governor Dayton for believing in me enough to appoint me as the Governor's Early Learning Council

Chair and more importantly for believing in the importance of educating our collective children.

And then I got out into the world outside of the farm by Alberta, MN and I saw that women could also be college professors, nurses, secretaries and even protestors, and as the world has changed (thank heavens) and I have gotten older I see that women can be anything they want to be and they are.

Another group of women I owe my gratitude to are early childhood professionals, including family child care providers. They showed me how to care for, nurture, and educate our youngest children. I am a mother and grandmother, and I have also been a legally un-licensed provider, a licensed family child care provider, a child care center teacher, an Early Childhood Special Education para, a preschool teacher, a parent educator, an ECFE and School Readiness assistant administrator, and worked for Child Care Aware before coming to work at West Central Initiative as the Director of EC. In my current position I have learned from and been honored to work with my MIF/ECI partners, staff at MDE, DHS and MDH, foundation partners, and other non-profit early childhood people.

For a short but influential time I was honored to work with Nancy Latimer at the McKnight Foundation, who opened the world of philanthropy and advocacy to

me. She was a strong, gentle giant in changing the early childhood landscape in Minnesota. I have also had the honor to work with the Wonderful Women of West central MN, the ECI coordinators. They nominated me for this award, but they are the ones who do the work in our local communities and so I want to give a special thank you to Carolyn Strnad, Connie Fields, Casey Francis, Deb Hengel, Diane Strobel, Fran Rethwisch, Jeannie Pederson, Julie Smith, Kristi Maas, Marsha Erickson and Jane Neubauer. My two bosses at West Central Initiative, Nancy Straw and Anna Wasecha, have also been important and encouraging to me. One person can make a difference but together we can make an even greater difference!

My journey, my career lattice, mirrors the journey of women in general. When I was little I had never heard of child care, moms stayed home. Then when women started working outside the home we had child care providers and many of them. But now that women can choose to be anything and get paid well for many of their choices, we have fewer and fewer women going into child care. Child care is an honorable career but it is not valued by society and is woefully underpaid. This is where I hear the voice of my dad: we must stick up for what is right. And what is right is that our children get the important early care and education they need to become the best they can be. And what is also right is that the women, and

men, who care and educate our young children have support and compensation so they can be the very best they can be. Low milk prices are one thing but little children are the number one priority for standing up and fighting! Children are living with toxic stress, malnourishment, racism, poor quality early childhood experiences, violence – this is not the Minnesota I want for our children – this is not the country I want for our children! As Paul Wellstone said we must Stand up and Keep Fighting! You and I and every adult must continue to stand up and keep fighting for children!

As a society we must see that children deserve the best from us adults, that women are not the only nurturing gender, that people in the early childhood field deserve to be valued and well paid. Early childhood should be a career as valued and well paid as any other teacher and many other professionals. Early childhood professionals are partners with parents in raising the next generation of parents, workers and citizens – our society depends on us, our children depend on us – our future depends on us! We must do better!