

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Elma's Vision: A safe, caring and united community with opportunities and respect for all.

What's the future for Elma, Iowa? With a population of 553, a poverty rate of 17.4%, and 70% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, what indeed? If actions taken since completing the Horizons Study Circles and Leadership Plenty programs in 2007 are any indication, the future holds much promise indeed.

"Horizons has opened the door for more volunteers and a greater commitment to Elma's future on the individual level. Rather than wait for others to act, the program provided the time, training and support for those with life interests and concerns to work together on a grassroots level. Of the 37 projects identified during the Horizons Program, over 25 have seen forward movement. This is because people are involved who have never been involved before," says Larry McGee, local citizen and regular reporter of Elma's progress on the Iowa Horizons Blog (iowa.communityblogs.us/).



The top priority was an early childhood center. Elma had no certified childcare providers and limited daycare options. Participants believed if dependable and quality childcare were available, parents could seek better paying first and second shift jobs available in the area.

Building a center adjacent to the local school (one of ten Iowa charter schools) was pursued. The broad support and in-depth work already in place allowed Elma to act quickly. A Head Start program to serve eligible three year old children began in September 2007. Elma Early Childhood Center, Inc. (EECC) was formed and the fast track continued. Working with the Howard Winneshiek

Community School District, funding was secured (\$50,000 USDA-Rural Development grant, \$15,000 McElroy Trust challenge grant, \$17,000 from Peoples Savings Bank, almost \$10,000 in local funding, with the school district funding the remainder). Ground was broken for the building in April. EECC opened for business June 5, using school facilities for the summer.

"There is success in Elma because people have come together in collaboration," adds school principal, Rob Hughes. Brenda Schmitt, ISU Extension Family Resource Management Specialist and Elma's Horizons community coach, continues to provide feedback and support to the community. She notes that many of Elma's projects require substantial commitment and a long-term "horizon."

The **Horizons** program helps communities build stronger leaders to address economic issues and find ways to implement change. Directed by Iowa State University Extension and funded by the Northwest Area Foundation, it targets small communities with more than 10% living at the poverty level.

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