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PRESS RELEASE

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Innovative New Initiative to Coordinate Efforts in Issues of Financial Stability – For Nebraska Families, Communities, Businesses and the State

Lincoln, NE - With rising costs in areas such as transportation, health care, and child care, working families and local businesses suffer the consequences of work no longer ensuring the ability to make ends meet. Leaders in the business, human service, philanthropic and non-profit fields came together today to announce a new initiative called 'Opportunity@Work' – a coalition creating innovative partnerships to address issues of economic stability for all Nebraskans. Funding for this effort has been made possible through a collaborative effort between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Sherwood Foundation.

The initiative was announced in simultaneous press conference in Omaha and Lincoln. Lincoln Action Program hosted the Lincoln Press Conference which was attended by coalition stakeholders statewide. The initiative will combine research, education, legislative advocacy, and effective business programs as strategies to create opportunities for low-income Nebraskans. A website, <http://www.opportunityatwork.org>, is also going live today. In Lincoln, participating organizations include the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, the Community Action Agencies of Nebraska, Voices for Children in Nebraska, Quality Living, Inc., Waddell & Reed Financial Services, the Human Services Federation, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and the WealthSpring Fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation.

“It is our intention to address the increasing gaps between work, the costs of goods and services and the ability to meet the needs of families and businesses. We are thrilled to move forward together to best address the issues of financial stability and poverty in our state and to identify solutions,” says Annemarie Bailey Fowler, Opportunity@Work Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska.

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“Often the response to families struggling financially or living in poverty is: ‘Go get a job.’ While that sounds simple enough, the reality is Nebraskans are already working, and in many instances working more than one job,” says Becky Gould, Executive Director of Nebraska Appleseed. In fact, for several years in a row, Nebraska has ranked number one in the United States for the number of children living with working parents, yet child poverty still increased by fifty percent in just five years. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 88% of low-income children in Nebraska have at least one working parent.

The Opportunity@Work coalition also cites research that illustrates significant connections between employee stress – particularly financial stress - and productivity. Several studies have shown that financial stress can result in high costs for companies through employee absenteeism, turnover, wasted time at work, and health problems among employees. Mabelle Kenton, Coordinator of Financial Wellness at Quality Living, Inc. in Omaha, knows first hand the benefits of providing financial literacy courses to employees. Quality Living, Inc. has been providing financial wellness courses to their employees for nearly two years and continues to experience positive outcomes.

Opportunity@Work knows that financial stress and poverty are not just burdens on children and families but on businesses as well – and ultimately, the consequences are negative for us all. As Jan Fitts, Executive Director of Panhandle Community Services, explains it, “In the end, this coalition is not about Nebraskans just getting by, it is about all of us getting ahead.” Panhandle Community Services is one of nine Community Action Agencies across the state that is partnering in the Opportunity@Work coalition.

Opportunity@Work was initiated by Voices for Children in Nebraska and encompasses organizations across the state working to provide for families’ day-to-day needs, others working to identify long-term solutions, and business leaders invested in employee well-being. Slated activities will include research, report publications, continued community dialogue and identifying solutions. Anyone interested in participating with or becoming a partner of Opportunity@Work may e-mail info@opportunityatwork.org.

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