



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
METROPOLITAN OMAHA EDUCATIONAL CONSORTIUM
MEETING OUR EDUCATION COMMITMENTS

Raise Me to Read's Knudsen Seeks to Foster Student Growth and Wellbeing

by Kyle Christensen

Kathleen Knudsen understands the importance of a positive, engaging influence on a child. As the facilitator for the Metro-Omaha Raise Me to Read Campaign for Grade Level Reading initiative, she works to ensure that families understand the importance of engaging with children early and often because parents are the most important aspect of their child's brain and behavior development.

Knudsen's work is multifaceted. She reviews research regarding early childhood development, raises awareness on the impact of adverse childhood experience, and meets with partners and allies in the community to enhance efforts in improving and understanding Early Literacy, School Attendance, and Out of School Learning.

All her endeavors within Metro-Omaha Raise Me to Read stem from a passion to help young children reach their potential. Knudsen knows how impactful early experiences are from her own childhood.

"I was raised in a house full of music and books," Knudsen says. "There was always someone singing, playing, reading, or discussing big ideas."



Knudsen's childhood experience eventually led her to study English and Music, and she earned three degrees from University of Nebraska Omaha, the most recent a Master of Science in Educational Administration. But it wasn't just the arts and humanities that influenced her future. She also played catcher on a AAA fast pitch team. Knudsen says she became aware of her ability to "see the field" and to develop her competitive edge as a

softball player. Using this talent to understand the whole child, family, and community is key to collective impact and community engagement. Early in her career, Knudsen enjoyed many different roles from teaching Honors English & Senior Project at Valley High School to conducting the choir at Duchesne Academy. She later became a School Administrative Manager (SAM) at Carter Lake Elementary.

During her decade at Carter Lake, she more fully realized the difficulties young children often face outside of the classroom. She is still haunted from the death of one of her students due to persistent child endangerment. This led Knudsen to search for alternative ways to help the children with whom she worked.

“I was looking for the Rosetta Stone to solve student behaviors and staff response”, Knudsen said.

She took steps to learn more, including attending the first US Trauma Informed Schools Conference and providing training for school staff which demonstrated that trauma and adversity affect a student’s ability to learn. Her experiences led Knudsen to understand that teaching and working with students is so much more than test scores.

“Great teachers understand that rigor and relationships are equally important, but you can’t get to rigor without first having relationships with students.”

A lack of awareness regarding these issues motivates Knudsen in her current role at Metro-Omaha Raise Me to Read, an initiative supported by the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC). Her ability to “see the field” helps her focus on what occurs in the lives of children that makes educational achievement possible. Knudsen’s experiences as someone who grew up in an involved and talented family – though also one with underlying circumstances that included four ACE’s – has equipped her to foster students’ growth and well-being.

Her goal, Knudsen says, is to “engage the community, spreading the message that parents and other caring adults are the first and most important teachers of children, and that reading by 3rd grade and showing up to school are essential for future school & life success.” Another important aspect is considering the 80% of time a child is awake and not in school, and responding by creating learning rich opportunities, places, and spaces.

In her free time, Knudsen enjoys walking, practicing Yoga, reading, writing, gardening and, most especially, precious time with her family.