

Colorado Early Childhood Councils Quarterly Report: SFY2011—Third Quarter



SFY2011, Third Quarter (January 1–March 31, 2011)

June 2011

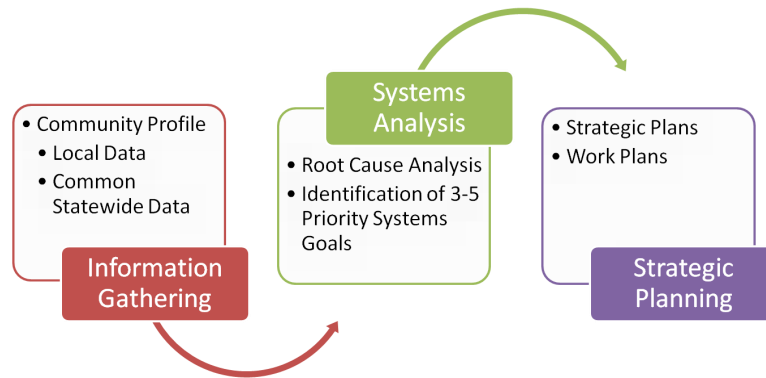
NEW Local Systems Assessment Process Launched

Early Childhood Councils have always produced strategic plans as a key part of their work under state systems-building grants. Typically, these plans have been based on local community assessments and have been updated every three to five years.

This year, the Colorado Departments of Human Services (CDHS) and Education (CDE) introduced a new Local Systems Assessment (LSA) process for use by Councils to inform the upcoming 3-year grant application. Designed to emphasize best planning practices and core foundational systems efforts, the LSA provides a structured process for Councils to:

- Gather local early childhood information;
- Analyze factors impacting the system of early childhood services; and
- Identify Council priorities to strengthen that system.

The graphic of the LSA process on this page illustrates the process visually. The green box in the middle of the graphic



Graphic of Local Systems Assessment Process

shows what was previously the “missing link” in the planning process — systems analysis.

What the new LSA adds to the previous process is an explicit analysis of the early childhood system. It asks Councils to focus on the four systems concerns spelled out in the original Councils legislation (HB07-1062): availability; quality; capacity; and accessibility. Using these areas as a launching pad, Councils will examine the underlying root causes for any gaps or concerns, and then select foundational strategies for addressing them. Foundational strategies are those approaches to supporting a strong early childhood system identified in the

Early Childhood Colorado Framework (see graphic, below).

Several webinars have been conducted over the past two months to introduce specific elements of the LSA process to Council coordinators. All webinars were recorded and are online on the Early Childhood Councils toolkit for review. Please visit www.eccounciltoolkit.org.

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Foundational Strategies from EC Colorado Framework

Alignments in Action

What difference do alignments make? Do efforts to coordinate some aspects of services to children and families within the system really help anyone?

The answer is a resounding **yes!** Cross-system alignments make the local early childhood system more accessible to families with young children.

Take the case of referrals. When young children are in need of new or additional services to support their development, their families often have to negotiate a complex and fragmented system of health, mental health, early learning and family support options. They may already be connected with an early learning facility, but need support accessing health insurance. Or, they may have applied for a spot in the Colorado Preschool Program, but also be eligible for a separately administered tuition scholarship program.

When Councils help align referrals across the system, they are making it easier for families to access the services that the system has to offer them. Sometimes this can affect how *quickly* a family accesses services and sometimes it can mean the difference between receiving the service at all or going without.

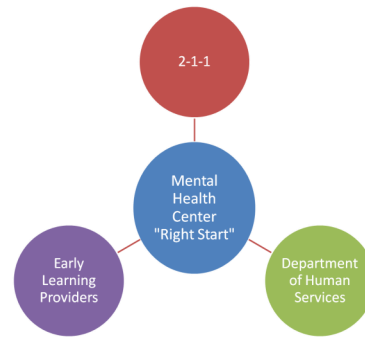
This past quarter, six Early Childhood Councils in

Colorado worked to coordinate formerly fragmented referral processes within their local early childhood systems so that families' access to services improved. These referral alignments collectively connected families and children more seamlessly to health, early intervention and mental health services in mountain, Front Range and Metro portions of the state. Three of these instances are highlighted here.

Denver Early Childhood Council

When the Mental Health Center of Denver (MHCD) introduced its new *Right Start for Infant Mental Health Program* to the Denver Early Childhood Council (DECC), the DECC was eager to learn more. Their Mental Health Actional Alliance (MHAA) Strategic Planning process had identified a service gap in the local referral system for infant mental health and maternal depression services for prenatal and new mothers.

The *Right Start* program is specifically directed at pregnant women and young children who might have multiple risk factors for social or emotional problems. The DECC saw an opportunity to help align the formal referral system with this new program. In addition, they knew they had the relationships with local early learning



Aligned infant mental health services in Denver.

providers in the city to connect these professionals with the program as well. Providers are sometimes some of the first people to recognize a need for social-emotional services.

In addition, because of a relationship that had already been established between MHCD and the Denver Department of Human Services (DDHS), a process was also developed to have programs serving young children and parents at DDHS make referrals to the new program as well.

Without the creation of these cross-system referrals, at-risk families with young children in Denver would have been on their own to seek out and find the *Right Start* program for their children. However, with the connections facilitated by the DECC (see graphic) families can now access these services through their child care provider, TANF services, or the 211 system (in addition to some existing health and intervention referral channels). For families that are already under stress, this is a huge

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“YOUNG CHILDREN, THEIR PARENTS AND PROVIDERS HAVE ALL BENEFITTED FROM THE REFERRALS. PARENTS AND PROVIDERS CAN ACCESS LOCAL SERVICES, REFERRING PARTNERS ARE NOW CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER, AND CHILDREN WITH DELAYS ARE BEING IDENTIFIED AND SERVED.”

JANINE PRYOR — CHAFFEE COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL

Alignments in Action — Denver, Chaffee, and Routt

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL CROSS-SYSTEMS ALIGNMENTS

- CONNECTIONS ARE **FORMALIZED** SO THEY CAN BE SUSTAINED BY THE SYSTEM — NOT JUST BY WILLING INDIVIDUALS
- CONNECTIONS ARE **ONGOING**, NOT JUST ONE-TIME PARTNERSHIPS
- PARTNERS IN THE SYSTEM ALIGNMENT HAVE A **SHARED VISION** OF SERVING FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.

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relief and efficiency in the system.

Chaffee County Early Childhood Council

In Chaffee County, the adoption of the Ages and Stages screening questionnaire has been an important tool for aligning various community referrals to the early intervention systems in that community.

The Chaffee Early Childhood Council provides the tool itself as well as targeted trainings to new referring partners in the community. To date, referring partners include physicians, Women Infants and Children (WIC), Nurse Family Partnership, pregnancy centers, early learning providers, and churches. When these partners identify a child that they suspect might have a developmental delay, they are now referring these families to the local Child Find office for further evaluation and identification of appropriate services.

The process includes information release forms that

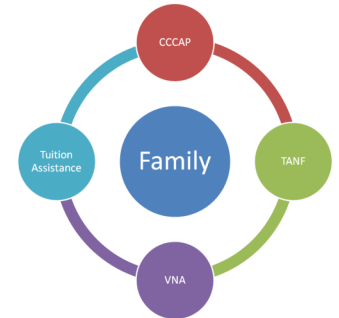
allows physicians and service providers to also receive follow-up information about the children, so they can continue to provide the highest level of services possible.

The result has been a strengthened local early childhood system that can better connect families to a full range of community supports. This past year, 23 children (birth to 3) are receiving intervention services, up from a previous annual average of eight .

First Impressions of Routt County

The size and intimate community structure in Routt County have enabled the development of multiple cross-system referrals opportunities in that county.

Recently, the Department of Human Services out-sourced a Self-Sufficiency Case Manager to work 20 hours per week out of the Northwest Colorado Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) clinic. Now, when an uninsured family goes to the VNA for services, an application can be easily



Family-focused referrals in Routt County

processed for Family Medicaid, CHP+, or even Human Services benefits they may qualify for.

Similarly, First Impressions has worked to align early learning referrals in the community so that families whose incomes make them ineligible for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) can be automatically considered for a locally funded tuition assistance scholarship for at-risk children and families.

These are just three of the many examples of Councils who are creating cross-system alignments in their communities. And referrals are just one way of creating those alignments. What they all have in common are the efforts of local Early Childhood Councils to facilitate more connections within and across the system of services for young children so that families have better access to high quality early childhood supports.

Visit us on the web at:

www.cde.state.co.us/early/ECC.htm

Colorado's Early Childhood Councils integrate services delivered through a comprehensive early childhood system that includes early learning, family support, health and mental health programs. Authorizing legislation calls on the Councils "To develop and ultimately implement a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children five years of age or younger." (HB 07-1062)

The Early Childhood Councils initiative is funded by Child Care Development Block Grant/Child Care Development Funds and is administered at the state level by a partnership between the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education.