NCIT Data Case Story

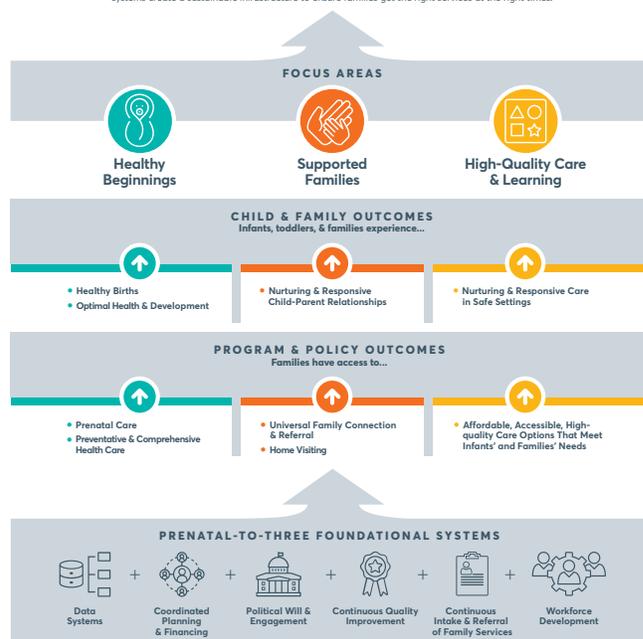## The Importance of Data Sharing to Support Strong Outcomes for Infants and Toddlers

The National Collaborative of Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) is committed to advancing promising policies and programs that ensure every parent has the support they need to give their children a strong start in life. To guide communities in their efforts, NCIT created the _Prenatal to Three Outcomes Framework_—a roadmap for communities to identify a common set of outcomes that support infants and toddlers on their pathway to prepare for kindergarten.

The Outcomes Framework guides communities in their efforts to develop action plans that lead to their identified outcomes and support the assessment of their progress.

These case stories show how communities are bringing the NCIT Outcomes Framework to life through their own efforts, and how they are tailoring their approach to meet the unique needs of the children, families, programs and services in their areas

Measuring Success: Healthy Child Development By Age 3

With a focus on equity, states and communities can build and sustain locally responsive programs, policies, and systems that meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families. Policy outcomes support child and family outcomes, and prenatal-to-three systems create a sustainable infrastructure to ensure families get the right services at the right times.

FOCUS AREAS

- Healthy Beginnings
- Supported Families
- High-Quality Care & Learning

CHILD & FAMILY OUTCOMES
Infants, toddlers, & families experience...

- Healthy Births
- Optimal Health & Development
- Nurturing & Responsive Child-Parent Relationships
- Nurturing & Responsive Care in Safe Settings

PROGRAM & POLICY OUTCOMES
Families have access to...

- Prenatal Care
- Preventative & Comprehensive Health Care
- Universal Family Connection & Referral
- Home Visiting
- Affordable, Accessible, High-quality Care Options That Meet Infants' and Families' Needs

PRENATAL-TO-THREE FOUNDATIONAL SYSTEMS

- Data Systems
- Coordinated Planning & Financing
- Political Will & Engagement
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Continuous Intake & Referral of Family Services
- Workforce Development

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Child TRENDS

DATA SHARING SUPPORTS EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING FOR INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Outcomes Framework identifies six components of a comprehensive early childhood system that provide the foundation for prenatal to three program, policy, family, and child outcomes. One of these components includes data systems, which involves the connection, coordination, and/or integration of data sets or data platforms that track the needs and provision of services for children from prenatal to age three.

Data sharing is an essential component of a robust data system. Data sharing allows community leaders to connect information about the programs and services families are using and to have a better understanding of what programs and policies are working well to address the needs of their community.

While it is typical for stakeholders to agree about the benefits of data sharing, there are a number of legal, logistical, technical, and financial barriers that can challenge data sharing efforts. Many NCIT communities have experienced and overcome challenges with either sharing their own data or creating a data sharing agreement with another entity. The following case stories highlight innovative approaches that NCIT communities have executed to promote data sharing across partners. Early lessons learned from these efforts include:

- **Data sharing takes time and resources.** Building rapport, trust, and understanding among key partners is an essential starting point for any data sharing effort, and this process takes time. Each partner's data collection strategies and systems must be understood so that existing connection points can be identified and leveraged. It also takes time to make potentially necessary changes to data collection processes and to obtain all the requisite permissions from families or stakeholders to access needed information. To help document progress along the way, identifying and monitoring key milestones may be an important strategy for demonstrating interim results of data sharing efforts.

- **Though size and scope may vary, all efforts to promote data collaboration to inform decision making have merit.** Data sharing efforts are unique and can differ widely. For example, some efforts may include multiple partners agreeing to use a common assessment or screening tool and contributing those data to a shared data platform. Other efforts may include developing a data sharing agreement to support a shared understanding of existing data. All of these efforts, no matter the size and scope, are important steps to create a culture of data sharing.

- **Building a culture of data sharing may create new ways of working and new beliefs about the importance of collaboration.** Creating a culture of data sharing and cultivating a shared set of beliefs about data sharing and collaboration across partners will support the long-term sustainability of these efforts. These efforts have created opportunities for partners to realize that despite the inherent challenges, collaborating on common goals and sharing data and information is not only essential, it is the only way to truly be successful in addressing the needs of children and families in meaningful ways.

BOONE COUNTY, MO

Boone County's Cradle to Career Alliance, an educational non-profit organization, the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, and Boone County Department of Community Services are working together to lead "Brilliant Beginnings." Brilliant Beginnings is a two-phase initiative that aims to first ensure healthy births by connecting pregnant mothers to various services, and second, to connect mothers of young children (zero to five) to early intervention services they may need to support their children's healthy growth and development. For Brilliant Beginnings, coordinating efforts between partners has been key for the success of this work.

The foundation for data sharing starts with engaging partners, building trust, and cultivating knowledge sharing. Before getting to the point of being able to track if pregnant mothers are connected to the services they need, Brilliant Beginnings first identified approximately 20 entities—community health partners and stakeholders—in their county that provide prenatal services. In the initial outreach to these partners, the goal was to understand the common risk factors these entities encounter among the families they work with that inhibit prenatal health and the screening tools each partner uses to identify these risks. By engaging partners in the collective goal of better coordination, Brilliant Beginnings was able to develop a better understanding of their shared goals. They have also been able to explore the feasibility of using and coordinating data from the screeners that are already in use in their community, and the potential for implementing a common tool across partners.

The next step will be to co-create a coordinated plan of action for a common data platform. In the next phase of their work, Brilliant Beginnings and their partners will map scenarios of prenatal care entry points into the universal referral system. This will include developing a workflow and operations guide for all the community partners who engage with individuals during pregnancy (including Medicaid offices that provide referrals to all applicants). In addition to coordinating the universal referral system, the partners in Boone County will also work with pediatric health care providers who interact with infants and toddlers to expand the use and reach of a universal screening tool. After a common consent form is implemented, prenatal to three providers will be able to share information about referrals and system engagement, which can then be tracked electronically.

KENT COUNTY, MI

Data systems partners in Kent County are seeking to cultivate a data sharing culture that builds trust and enables reciprocal benefits among community stakeholders while also equipping the community to eliminate disparities. There are numerous data system efforts underway in Kent County that touch early childhood in some way from large institutions to small programs. In order to fully understand the current state of the early childhood system in Kent County, and to effectively leverage these existing efforts, the county is working to increase their capacity to connect data across systems and ensure data can be disaggregated and impact-focused. An increased capacity to collect and use meaningful data will improve the community's ability to channel their collective efforts to increase equitable outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families.

Kent County is working to leverage three existing opportunities to build a culture of data sharing and coordination:

1. **Kent County's Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.** First Steps Kent serves as a systems convener for early childhood coordination and as the fiduciary for the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage that was passed in November 2018. As the millage fiduciary, First Steps Kent is uniquely positioned to support data capacity growth among early childhood service providers through the design of the funding proposals and the grant reporting requirements. First Steps Kent is building data sharing expectations into the funding requirements and supporting funded programs to ensure they are able to compile data that can be used and analyzed across the county.

   Ready by Five is working towards collecting standardized data fields from all grantees that will allow for data disaggregation and enable better interpretation of who is being served and how. First Steps Kent and the Ready by Five team are also working with the Kent Intermediate School District to determine a methodology and data sharing agreement structure that will allow Ready by Five data and K-readiness data to be linked.

2. **Kent County's Help Me Grow model.** Kent County is preparing to implement a Help Me Grow model that will focus on early childhood systems navigation. Kent County's Great Start Collaborative is partnering with the Kent Intermediate School District to develop the back-end infrastructure needed to support Help Me Grow. The Help Me Grow model will be another opportunity to enhance data sharing capabilities and connect data across the sectors engaged in early childhood. Help Me Grow is part of the Ready By Five Navigation and Outreach initiative and is currently funded by Ready By Five Early Childhood Millage.

3. **Pilot project for the locally developed conceptual framework known as the *Community Data Trust*.** The five primary home visiting providers in Kent County have agreed to pilot a shared and integrated data system using the Quickbase platform for data collection and the Tableau platform for data visualization. The model developed through this pilot will inform the broader plan for shared and integrated early childhood data systems in Kent County. The goal of this plan is to create a Community Data Trust, which would be a permanent governance and support structure that coordinates and facilitates data sharing and shared measurement in the county.

Kent County efforts to build a shared and integrated early child data system are complementary of one another and designed to be connected and coordinated. Having accurate data that spans the entire system provides a true picture of the system's strengths and challenges. It also helps tell the story of where there are gaps and informs responsive action. Kent County is committed to this work knowing that data sharing is essential for any effort that seeks to increase equitable outcomes and create environments where all children can thrive.

RAMSEY COUNTY, MN

Led by the Ramsey County Health and Wellness Service Team, the Early Childhood Initiative's (RC-ECI) primary goal is to develop a customized universal family connection and referral system in partnership with internal and external agencies focused on families with children under age three who need to be connected to supportive early childhood services. To accomplish this goal, they are implementing wide-reaching system changes that allow for enhanced data collection, records linkage, and reporting within the county departments and external agencies.

This effort is supported by a Parents Voice Survey. Interim findings from the survey revealed that 91% of the county-involved parents interviewed agreed that Ramsey County should be more efficient in connecting them to early childhood resources by sharing information about their child, the assistance program they are involved in, and contact information internally with other departments. Similarly, 82% agreed to sharing information with external trusted partners to connect their child to resources.

Implementing records linkage efforts first requires buy-in from parents, families, and other stakeholders, as well as the collaborative expertise of content, technical, and legal experts.

To accomplish their records linkage vision, RC-ECI convened a Data Sharing Workgroup led by a County Attorney and researched relevant Minnesota laws to understand how those laws might facilitate records linkage among multiple internal departments and with external agencies. RC-ECI has a goal of developing and strengthening effective referral, data collection, and records linkage practices and protocols to enhance participation in Public Health programs and other pertinent early childhood resources. In the long run, this will unite four county departments—Financial Assistance Services, Public Health, Social Services and Workforce Solutions—while partnering with up to ten external organizations (i.e. Early Head Start/Head Start, housing providers for persons experiencing housing instability, St. Paul Public Schools, Help Me Grow, etc.) by 2021.

During the pilot phase of 2019, the efforts focused primarily on increasing participation in the Public Health Child & Teen Checkup and Home Visiting programs by families who receive assistance from multiple programs throughout the county agency.

As they pursue the benefits of records linkage to better connect families with early childhood resources, RC-ECI has also taken into account HIPPA privacy requirements since the Public Health Department will intersect with non-HIPPA covered departments, such as Child Protection, and exchange some limited information. The RC-ECI still needs to establish a platform and processes to aid in extracting information efficiently and in a timely manner to keep departments informed of their goal progress for families and evaluate needed modifications.

The County will also continue additional community engagement activities such as surveys, focus groups, and facilitated conversations to better understand families' concerns and ideas about records linkage and which early childhood services are most needed. These strategies align with the nationally recommended Trauma Informed Care practices that ask governments and providers who work with children to use the principles of safety, transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

The RC-ECI hosts an Early Childhood Advisory Committee that includes school districts, Head Start, state agencies, county commissioners, and elected state and city representatives. The objective of this committee is to obtain the support of these stakeholders in working within their entities to develop ways to address these issues and to support legislative efforts, if necessary, to achieve goals—especially regarding records linkage for referral and tracking purposes.

The County has also started strategic discussions with key community organizations and state agencies about how to create a collaborative process with community members around the issue of records linkage that might positively affect state government efforts that are being planned independently. In particular, collaboration has begun with a Strive Together network partner, Generation Next, which is a coalition of civic, business and education leaders from across Minneapolis and Saint Paul dedicated to closing achievement and opportunity gaps. Their expertise in data analysis and community engagement will help identify what works and how the most promising practices can be replicated.

SUMMARY

Developing strategies to promote data sharing across the programs, services, and entities that support young children and families can serve multiple purposes. Data sharing can help to ensure that the right constellation of services are provided to the children and families who need them most in a coordinated and timely manner. Data sharing can also support the efficient use of time and resources by reducing duplicative efforts. Ultimately, decision-makers at the state and local levels need access to real time data about the needs of the children and families they serve and information about the provision of services to support their community. This type of information can only be provided by a coordinated data effort, which requires time, trust, and the expertise of multiple stakeholders.

The National Collaborative of Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) is committed to advancing promising policies and programs that ensure every parent has the support they need to give their children a strong start in life. NCIT is working to do this by supporting communities in pursuing efforts that ensure infants and toddlers have: 1) healthy beginnings; 2) supported families; and 3) high-quality child care and learning. With this vision, there are two main goals of NCIT: 1) to increase the number of families with children prenatal to age three who are connected to essential health, development, and social emotional support services and 2) to increase the number of low-income infants and toddlers receiving affordable, high-quality child care. Reaching these goals requires support systems for both parents and children, at or before birth, and expanding access to affordable, high-quality infant and toddler care and learning environments in settings that meet the families' needs.

To guide communities in their efforts, NCIT created the Prenatal to Three Outcomes Framework. The purpose of the Outcomes Framework is to serve as a roadmap for communities to both identify a common set of outcomes that support infants and toddlers on their pathway to preparing for kindergarten. The Outcomes Framework also helps guide communities in developing action plans that lead to their identified outcomes, and supports their assessment of their progress. The Outcomes Framework acknowledges that community efforts to promote the kindergarten readiness of infants and toddlers is dependent on: 1) developing a prenatal to three system with a focus on equity; 2) supporting families' access to high quality services; and 3) promoting outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families. There are eight key outcomes in the framework that collectively work to support children's readiness for kindergarten entry, with associated indicators communities can use to track their progress.

The production of this brief would not be possible without the time and input from several NCIT members. These individuals include Crystal Kroner and Kelly Wallis (Cradle to Career Alliance, Boone County); Nancy E. Lee (Ramsey County); and Annisa Eddie (KConnect, Kent County).