

Early Childhood Task Force Retreat minutes 3-22-2021, 9:00 am – noon

This meeting was held via zoom with the following present:

Ginger Knisley, Missy Park, Carolyn Baker, Jolene Dilks, Malia Love, Melissa Daugherty, Arin Jones, Jamie Beskow, Amy Hayes, Kathy Osipowicz, Rachael Patterson-Rahn, and Chad Reckling

The agenda (with the addition of a break at 10:30) and previous meeting minutes were accepted as written with a motion from Jamie and a second from Kathy

Ginger gave an oral **administrative update** including CAPC/CPCC news, board representation needs, and an update on the EC website. Jamie shared that Brightbtext would be a good resource to add to the website. Ginger also asked if there was interest in joining the board for lunch at the end of their May 20th retreat. There was mixed answers regarding availability. Ginger will include ECTF in the notice of that meeting and ask for RSVP for the meal.

Legislation and Budgeting:

Much discussion took place around all the changes to funding and policies due to COVID. Of particular focus was impacts to programs, families and communities, as well as long term impacts once the stipends and supplemental funding stops. There is great concern for the lack of sustainability of the current situation. Chad specifically asked about the matching funds part to the WAGE\$ grant bill and Ginger shared that this is still up for interpretation.

Families do not appear to be utilizing assistance programs – perhaps due to stimulus money, increased unemployment benefits, and other special circumstances.

Many are still making more from expanded unemployment benefits than they would from working.

HOPES is noticing families less in crisis in the past year than expected and VBPAT has seen little change with their families overall.

It is unclear at this time how the latest federal funds (ARP) will be impacting programs locally.

There was discussion of supplemental funds being used for transportation. Historically clients have not responded well to shared or public transportation plans, seeming to prefer their own vehicles. It was questioned if there is funds that could be used for repairs, maintenance, insurance, paying of old fines to renew licenses, etc. There is some concern for “fix one thing and two other things break” with older vehicles as well as liability issues. (One possible partnership mentioned was the auto tech program at SCC. Another possible partner is Griffin Muffler and Brake in Ft Madison that has done diaper drives in the past.) CPCC funds can be used for this and Promise Jobs has offered some type of repair program in the past but may have stopped due to liability or endless repair needs per vehicle.

Harmony Bible Church was mentioned as an active community partner with a strong history in Des Moines County and now gaining momentum in their ministry in Ft Madison.

Jamie reports First 5 funding not spent will be pulled back by the state. She is working on promoting a mental health training for medical providers.

DATA:

Overall there is concern for the long term delays and disorders that may be seen for adults and children due to isolation, increased screen time, lack of community connections, etc.

Jamie reviewed her First 5 data and is alarmed that the referrals have flipped from what has been the norm. Number of referrals is about half what is normal, perhaps partly due to well child exams being delayed during COVID. The ages of the children have flipped from 3-5 year olds typically to now 90% birth to three year olds.

Missy reports her referral sources have changed as she has been unable to visit in person at FMCH but OB is doing better at making referrals. She is seeing an increased number of children not passing the ASQ, more children showing delays, and is concerned it could be partly due to lack of floor time and no interaction outside the home. With her staff unable to be in the homes it is difficult to model these things to parents as the parents are holding their phones to do virtual visits. Families are becoming frustrated with virtual only services and some have discharged from the program as a result.

Melissa sees similar trends in her VBPAT program. They have lost families due to not being in person. Referrals are down from what they used to be. WIC is coming back to her building in April and she hopes this helps. Group meetings are still going well. Family needs have not really changed in her area.

Kathy reports the food pantry is serving about half as many families as normal across all demographics and Arin shared this is true of all the counties she serves in the southeast corner.

Carolyn echoed the concern that little ones are being isolated and are experiencing delays on developmental milestones. She has seen evidence of screen time addiction linked to isolation and parents being on their phones instead of interacting with the children.

Jamie has seen a surge in depression, stress, anxiety, and more due to isolation and lack of social interaction and bonding.

Missy and Melissa both report an increase in teen parenting.

Relationships/Collaborations: Ginger asked what is working and what could use some attention in terms of relationships and collaborations in the community.

School districts: Van Buren Schools could use some increased communication and cooperation. Keokuk Schools are working towards DHS licensing and moving toward full day programming and reaching out and communicating more with Children First, CCNC and CCR&R. Ft Madison Schools are starting to talk about licensing but not as far along as Keokuk. Chad suggested the Burlington district could be used as a model and a resource in terms of collaborative services.

Large employers still need to be engaged in some way to see the connection between early childhood and their bottom line as well as family friendly policies. There is still a disconnect there. Jolene also specifically noted she would appreciate more communication with Scott's in order to plan for seasonal and temporary work issues in a way that could benefit both her center and Scott's.

One idea for growth is using some child care centers as learning labs for the ECE classes at SCC.

Final updates per sector:

Oral Health: LCHD now has 3 full time hygienists and is still seeking a dental assistant primarily to help with data entry, care coordination, and related administrative duties. They have been providing on site services and have had only one site decline to allow them access. The big change in service areas is still on track to be taking place in 2022. Burlington Schools have also added a dental clinic at the high school. Overall COVID is consuming a lot of time for public health employees.

Mental Health:

Jamie shared that the SEIL region is still discussing CORE services that must be implemented and there is a subcommittee working on the “wants” such as therapeutic classrooms which Burlington is piloting and is seeking additional funding for. The therapeutic classrooms are designed for any student who is struggling for a wide range of reasons, not just those with a diagnosis or IEP. It is believed that somewhere in the Ottumwa area this is also being implemented. Ginger will check in with Pat McReynolds. Burlington is also opening a clinic at the school.

Family Support:

Missy has 2 staff and Melissa has one that need to take the family support credential test. Ginger advised they take it prior to June 30 as if by chance they do not pass there is a 6 month wait before they can take it again and the deadline is 12/31/21 for those currently employed. Missy has also wondered if some supplemental MIECHV funds will pay the \$150 per person fee for the exam.

Child Care/Preschool:

Malia reports child care homes are doing fine and really don't need anything right now. They are fully enrolled and receiving additional stipends. Centers are struggling mainly due to staff turnover. Issues include: they can make more at McDonald's, unemployment benefits are generous, and with stimulus funds some people just don't see the need for regular income.

Chad sees a developing dependence on the stipends for child care settings and for the most part does not see the providers reinvesting the stipends back into their business or using it to improve quality. Chad is also experiencing some push back from home providers regarding the mask mandates from DHS. He also estimates approximately 1/3 of the home providers do not plan to be vaccinated from COVID.

Chad proposed using the plans from the Mt Pleasant project to renovate other empty Family Video stores across the area into child care centers. Ginger will share this idea with Dawn Wiand as she is on the governor's child care task force. Jolene asserted the issue is still staffing. Her center has a waiting list of 10 two year olds. They have the space and the children wanting to come and just cannot keep the staff.

Chad also presented Burlington school district early childhood partner project as an example of how the EC system can be improved: partnering with multiple entities such as SVPP, Head Start, traditional child care etc., offering full day care, reducing the need for midday transportation, EC staff employed by district and therefore eligible for benefits and better pay.

Keokuk and Ft Madison schools are both looking at becoming DHS licensed in the first step to moving to full day preschool and being able to accept CCA through DHS. Children First has offered funds to both districts in their efforts to become licensed. Keokuk is further along in the process than Ft Madison.

Jolene shared that DHS is 7 or 8 weeks behind in paying the stipends to providers. They have yet to receive their February stipends but do anticipate getting them in April. She says there is frustration and anger among the provider group, especially the home providers, on this topic.

Ultimately the message again is that child care is infrastructure just as much as public utilities, roads and bridges, and fire and police.

Other programs/business: Kathy shared that the Ft Madison food pantry is seeing greatly reduced use of its services and Arin shared that this is true throughout the four county area.

*******Big Take Away Messages:**

- 1) Staffing is the biggest issue facing child care – pay, benefits, turnover, etc.
- 2) Current federal and state funding does not appear to be encouraging long term sustainable change
- 3) Perhaps there is a need for a public awareness campaign around the long term effects of COVID: Loss of interaction and bonding leading to depression and increased screen time for children and adults potentially leading to developmental delays and mental health issues.

The next ECTF meeting will be on Wednesday, April 28, 2021 at 9:30 am via zoom.

This meeting was adjourned at noon with a motion from Missy and a second from Rachael.

gk