

## Community Plan Updates in SFY'2021

### Name of Early Childhood Area: Children First for Lee and Van Buren Counties

Iowa Code chapter 256I requires that local ECIA boards report progress toward and achievement of desired results identified in the Community Plan.

Provide a narrative of the ECIA's progress in the last year towards the priorities and strategies identified in the most recent Community Plan. Success and/or challenges to meeting the ECIA goals may also be included.

As we continue to navigate a world with COVID, our Director has focused efforts on regularly gathering information from area providers and service agencies as to the changing needs that are being seen in the community as well as the changing needs of families we all serve. System building efforts have been increased in initiatives such as Iowa Women's Foundation child care solutions work, collaborative fact gathering around supporting child care workforce, and regional mental health collaborative work groups.

Our regional community plan has four main goals to strive towards over time:

**Goal One – Promote professional quality child care business.** Towards this goal, our board expanded NAC training opportunities to area child care directors and supported expanded mini grant opportunities for needed equipment as well as funding health and safety and screening tools at area early childhood sites.

**Goal Two – Cultivate a local mental health system that is clear and accessible.** Our Director continues to participate in the regional mental health collaborative workgroup to stay apprised of area services as well as provide input into needs that appear in our communities. We provided 30 area early childhood sites with a 10 book bundle of Emotional Growth children's books to assist many sites with every day discussions with children around emotional health.

**Goal Three – Enhance safe and healthy environments for young children.** Our Director actively participates in the local CAPC/CPPC and spearheads efforts around family friendly events in the community, child passenger safety efforts, and sponsorship of empowering parent activities.

**Goal Four – Ensure ongoing early childhood advocacy and education for parents, caregivers, and communities.** We have actively partnered with two neighboring ECI areas to expand and promote our regional early childhood website and Facebook pages to dramatically increase the resources available to parents, service agencies, business leaders and members of the community around topics relevant to early childhood. This year we reinstated our annual Early Childhood Summit with family activities, community resources, and literacy supplies for members of our regional communities. Fall 2021 we are partnering with DHLW to form a virtual parent council in order to have regular, ongoing communication with young families in our region.

Describe how the board aligns their community plan with the [“We are ECI” Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#). Goals identified in the state plan include:

- **Infrastructure:** Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.
- **Communication:** Build public will for investing in young children and their families.
- **Workforce:** Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, greater professionalism, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.
- **Equitable Access:** Ensure that young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.
- **Quality:** Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

Infrastructure – We continue to host periodic provider forums as COVID rates allow. These opportunities bring child care providers together in order to gather real time information on their needs and respond in a timely manner. Our board supports a local CCNC as well as seeking out additional consulting services as needed and partnering with CCR&R. Two counties in our region (Lee and Des Moines) were awarded Resilient Communities grants and each are tasked with completing a community needs assessment. The Children First and DHLW directors are working with these committees to assist in the process as well as reviewing and analyzing the reports generated from them in order to help to guide the next update to our regional community plan in 2022.

Communication – Hosting of our EC Summit and dramatically increasing the reach of our website provides a broader reach and increased visibility across sectors.

Workforce – Regional area ECI Directors continue to research and advocate for supports for our workforce to include change in policy to allow for benefits and substitute pools.

Equitable Access – Regular communication with service agencies with whom we contract, through an active Early Childhood Task Force advisory committee, allows us to be flexible in funding efforts that are needed by young families as they need them.

Quality – Our board welcomes requests for changes in services as well as supplemental funding or new funding throughout the year in order to be immediately responsive to needs as they arise. We support a CCNC and partner with CCR&R regularly. We maintain significant funding for a Family Support program in each of our counties as well as supporting our Director’s involvement in the local CAPC/CPPC councils to address issues important to young families that may not be able to be addressed through ECI funds.

