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COLORADO EVALUATION
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Colorado Lab Newsletter

February 2022

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In Focus: Early Childhood and Young Families

Experiences and relationships during pregnancy and through the early years of life have a significant impact on the health and well-being of children and their families across the lifespan. With an understanding that young children and families who experience inequities and adversities can face a lifetime of challenges, Colorado is innovating and expanding efforts to provide a strong start and pathways to meaningful opportunities. This month's newsletter features some of the early childhood and family strengthening projects the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab is engaged in with partners across sectors—public, private, nonprofit, and academic—to build evidence and activate effective approaches to improve the lives of Coloradans.

Listening to Families to Learn What Helps Them Thrive



Words reflecting social support and connections that can help families thrive as expressed by participants in five Colorado communities during Colorado Lab-facilitated listening sessions.

A new Colorado Lab report features diverse and insightful learnings from community listening sessions that were held with parents/caregivers to better understand how social connections and support can help families thrive. Research shows that strong social connections support parents and caregivers in experiencing fewer stressors, buffer the negative experiences of stress when it does occur, and promote resilience. The [CDC’s Essentials for Childhood framework](#) has identified changing social norms to support parents as an evidence-based strategy for preventing child abuse and neglect.

Research for [Social Support Norms Among Colorado Families](#) was conducted in partnership with the Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families (“the Partnership”) and county and community partners at five demonstration sites—Adams, Boulder, Denver, Jefferson, and Prowers Counties. The Colorado Lab partnered with local peer facilitators to foster safe, trustworthy, and respectful environments, and conducted sessions in English, Spanish, and bilingual. Using this innovative approach, we reached over 40 parents and caregivers—centering their experiences from the start.

As shown below, information gathered through the listening sessions will inform the development and use of a Family Insight and Action Survey tool on social connections and support, and survey findings will then inform local public awareness efforts in the demonstration communities as well as statewide practices. The overarching goal is to create conditions where children and the adults in their lives—parents, family members, caregivers, providers, and educators—can thrive.

Three key findings were identified from the community listening sessions:

- ***The WHO of social connections.*** Informal support comes mostly from close relationships, such as family and friends.
- ***WHAT types of social support are needed and given.*** Social support needs exist along a continuum—including factors such as child care/transportation/financial to advice/suggestions/information to listening/empathy/love—requiring different sources of support.
- ***HOW support-seeking and support-offering behaviors are promoted or inhibited.*** Asking for and giving support happens most comfortably in mutual relationships with fewer worries about being judged, as well as in reciprocal relationships with people more willing to provide support when they know they will be supported in return.

Throughout the findings, leading cultural and community considerations were identified for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities, parents/caregivers experiencing substance use disorders, families in rural areas, families with undocumented members, and families in lower socioeconomic status households. Other cultural and social considerations, such as language and behavioral health, are also highlighted in the study. These considerations are vital to promoting culturally responsive and community-grounded practices during norms strategy work.

“I wish that I was able to say, ‘You know what? I’m working late. I didn’t have time to cook. Can someone help me out?’ But we really don’t do that as a society much anymore, you know, and especially as women, it seems like a pride thing. I don’t know if I feel comfortable saying that [I need support], even if I really needed it.”

- Listening session participant

Based on the findings, the study team recommended that social connections should be fostered with consideration to unique cultural and community context, noting that a “one-size-fits” all strategy will not work. Cultivating both informal and formal support is also recommended to more holistically meet the continuum of needs families have. Additionally, focusing on norms related to mutual relationships is recommended as a means to reduce stigma and strengthen cohesion.

Looking forward, the research team encourages ongoing community dialogues to further expand insights and encourage action. “Future rounds should target additional affinity groups, be conducted in additional languages, and be offered through a combination of in-person and virtual dialogues at varying days and times,” said Dr. Courtney Everson, Senior Researcher/Project Director for the Colorado Lab, who led the research team. “Including more voices, and more diverse voices, can further inform and strengthen approaches to advancing norms that support health and well-being.”

To learn more about the study and listening sessions, please reach out to [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

PDG B-5 Home Visiting for Home Child Care Providers Pilot Findings



This short video features findings from the Preschool Development Grant case study evaluation and is being used by early childhood professionals and others as they seek additional resources to further sustain and scale their work.

To advance Colorado’s vision that all children are ready for school when entering kindergarten, the Office of Early Childhood in the Colorado Department of Human Services launched the Home Visiting for Home Child Care Providers pilot program in 2019.

“Home-based child care providers often feel isolated and may not be connected to the tools they need to better support the children in their care and their families,” said Lindsey Dorneman, Director of the Preschool Development Grant, Birth through Five. The pilot was designed to address this challenge by connecting home-based child care providers with home visitors who deliver evidence-based curriculums. Historically, home visitors and home child care providers have not interacted even though both play key roles in child development and family strengthening. **“The home visiting pilot doesn’t feel like a revolutionary new program or new approach to serving children and families, but it is,” says Dorneman. “It’s really small, simple steps that we can take as a state to improve outcomes for young children.”**

This pilot was created on the basis that home visiting works. The evidence behind the home visiting models used in the pilot—Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)—is robust, lending confidence that these services can positively influence early childhood learning and development in home child care settings, as they have through direct participation by parents.

Five home visiting agencies representing diverse community demographics participated in the pilot: Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council, Bright Futures, Hilltop Family Resource Center, North Range Behavioral Health, and Roots Family Center. Staff at participating agencies were trained to deliver the PAT and HIPPY curriculums in English and Spanish. The agencies then reached out to providers in the area they serve, inviting them to partner in this pilot.

The Colorado Lab conducted a retrospective case study evaluation of the 2-year pilot to identify the drivers of successes, major impacts, and primary opportunities for growth. Participants consistently elevated relationships as most important to achieving success. Sites with a respected reputation and existing connections were well positioned to engage home child care providers. From this foundation, relationships were further nurtured as the home visitors worked directly with providers, building their capacity to effectively deliver their new knowledge on early childhood development to the children and families they serve.

The value of nurturing relationships was compelling—100% of the providers who participated in the study said they would recommend this home visitation pilot to other child care providers. Across all sites, providers spoke passionately about the positive impacts of the pilot, from increasing their ability to provide age-appropriate learning activities and increase school readiness, to enriching the learning environment by providing books and other material resources, and establishing highly-valued professional, supportive networks that reduced isolation.

“Our preliminary findings demonstrate these partnerships can be a strategic lever to enrich home-based care and learning environments and, in turn, advance school readiness and achieve educational equity for all Colorado children,” says Dr. Courtney Everson, Senior Researcher/Project Director with the Colorado Lab. The Lab’s evaluation report, [*Home Visiting for Home Child Care Providers - The Power of Early Childhood Partnerships*](#), details findings from initial evidence-building activities and offers policy and practice recommendations for sustaining and growing home visiting-home child care provider partnerships.

[You can learn more here](#), or reach out to [Dr. Courtney Everson](#) with questions.

This project is supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative, Grant Number 90TP0054. Its contents do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In Brief

Child Care Stabilization and Sustainability Grants

The Office of Early Childhood in the Colorado Department of Human Services is investing \$271 million in federal stimulus funds to support child care programs and retain the state's early childhood education workforce. All licensed or Colorado Child Care Assistance Program-qualified exempt providers are eligible to apply. Applications will continue to be accepted on a rolling basis through September 30, 2022, and eligible programs are encouraged to apply as soon as possible to maximize the use of funds.

Watch [CBS4 News](#) story about new child care funding

The Colorado Lab helped design the application and ensured that the application process would be user-friendly for providers to complete. We are continuing to support this effort by designing the evaluation strategy and data collection efforts.

[See more information](#) about this funding opportunity. To learn more about the guidance and support being provided by the Colorado Lab, contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).

Meg Franko Named as Early Childhood Mental Health Research Partner

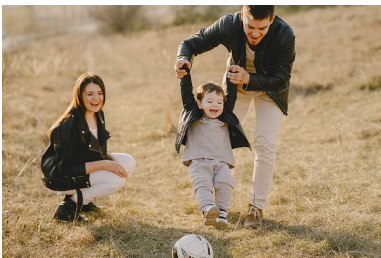
We're pleased to announce that [ECE Insights](#) has been selected to serve as an external research partner to the Colorado Lab.



ECE Insights was founded and is led by Meg Franko, PhD. As an established researcher in early childhood policy, program implementation, and systems building, we look forward to working with Meg as we continue to build evidence for the Office of Early Childhood's [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) program. Meg will support our work as we research and recommend tools for measuring core components of the consultation process, pilot the use of those tools, review and analyze resulting data, and make recommendations on ongoing fidelity monitoring tools/procedures and on training needed to support that monitoring.

Meg applied via the Lab's call for external research partners in our October newsletter and was selected from among several qualified candidates. If you are interested in being considered for future projects and have not done so already, please [learn more](#) and fill out the [brief questionnaire](#).

National Presentation on Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation *Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Conference: Equity from the Start*



The Colorado Lab's work on Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) will be showcased at the inaugural, national conference of the Center for

Excellence for Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, located at Georgetown University. We will present together with our partners, the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood, sharing approaches, learnings, and progress on Colorado’s ECMHC efforts. We’ll unpack key elements in working to establish a high-quality, statewide consultation model that responsively meets the needs of diverse children, families and providers, together with a look at what is needed to implement the model with fidelity. The goals for this presentation are to provide insight to other similarly positioned states and programs, as well as to hear feedback and learn from other states to further strengthen efforts in Colorado.

The free, virtual conference will be held on March 21-23, 2022. Our session –Colorado Model of ECMH Consultation: Building Steps to Evidence–will be presented on March 21st, 1:00-2:00 pm. Visit the [IECMHC website](#) to learn more and register for the conference. You can learn more about the Colorado Lab’s ECMH Consultation work [here](#), or by contacting [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#).

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