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BUILDING FAMILIES EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA AREA COMMUNITY PLAN

2022-2025

Hamilton Humboldt and Wright Counties

2016-2021

Hamilton Humboldt and Wright Counties

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Date the Board Approved the Plan:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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# Section 1: General Information

Identification of the Early Childhood Iowa Area

The Iowa Legislature first recognized the importance of early childhood development in 1998 when legislation was enacted creating an initiative called Community Empowerment. The premise behind Community Empowerment, later renamed Early Childhood Iowa in 2011, was that through local and state collaboration the best results could be achieved to improve the well-being of young children and their families. This legislation also called for the creation of local boards to facilitate this process: distribute and oversee federal, state, and local funds to improve the lives of children prenatal to age 5 in their communities.

In the summer of 1999, community members combined a three-county area including Hamilton, Humboldt and Wright Counties to create a single agency: Building Families. This newly formed agency developed an early childhood plan that addresses the needs of children prenatal to 5.  The plan establishes a continuum of services and supports that enhances health of children, provides children the necessary components to be ready to succeed in school, and develops safe and supportive communities, secure and nurturing families and secure and nurturing child care environments.

Building Families Early Childhood Area encompasses Hamilton, Humboldt and Wright Counties. The area served by this Board is identified in its by-laws: “All School districts with Administrative Offices located within the boundaries of Hamilton, Humboldt or Wright Counties are considered part of the Building Families Project. All districts have borders located in contiguous counties. The Administrative Office sites indicate the definitive geographic location.”

“If a family resides outside of the geographic location but attends a school district in one of the counties, they would be eligible to receive programming.”

If a family resides outside the geographic area and would like services through Building Families Programs, or if a family resides in Hamilton, Humboldt or Wright Counties and desires services in a bordering ECI area, as indicated in the Policy and Procedure Manual, the Director will coordinate services with the other agency director, board, preschool or program in the ECI area, to ensure the family receives the appropriate services and supports.

Use of Community Plan

The Community Plan is presented to the Building Families Board and provided to the agencies and the greater community to assist in the development of a strong foundation so that true community collaboration may take place. This living, breathing, ever-changing document reflects the needs and assets available in the community and will be used by its leaders to set the Board’s priorities and guide it in its decision making. The Board uses this plan to develop its Request for Proposal (RFP) and renewal requests which requires each applicant to indicate the priorities of the Community Plan their program addresses as well as the strategies the program will implement.

Community partners and early childhood agencies have assisted in the community needs assessment process. Through this process they have gained a sense of ownership to the plan and have access to use it as a resource, data source, as well as a guide for program development and evaluation of current programs.

This plan is public record and accessible on the Building Families’ website or by contacting the Building Families’ office. The plan is shared with community partners, elected officials and funded programs. Contact can be made with the Building Families office to obtain more information about the agency and the Community Plan:

Building Families
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Vision

Since 2006, the local area board adopted the State ECI Vision:

Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.

In 2012 the Board and Marketing Committee engaged in a re-branding exercise and developed a marketing statement that would enhance the boldness of the vision. The primary questions asked of the group were to define why we exist and for whom do we invest in these services. As a result of the process the team and Board created the following message:

Developing healthy, independent, and successful children and families.

Mission

Children, youth, and families will live in safe and nurturing environments that promote health, independence, and success. Building Families will create a continuum of supports and services that embrace children and their families.

Geographic/Demographic Profile for the Early Childhood Iowa Area

Building Families Early Childhood Area includes Hamilton, Humboldt and Wright Counties in north central Iowa. Row crop farms are graced with the green belt running along the Des Moines and Boone Rivers, providing various recreational activities. Two bike trails embrace the river banks and connect communities by way of an old railroad bed. It is not unusual to see herds of deer, bald eagles, and wild turkey roaming the fields and exploring the river terrain for food.

Hamilton, Humboldt and Wright County residents tend to be more conservative in nature, proud, and rich in tradition. The counties offer many traditional aspects of small town life in Iowa with the convenience of a few larger towns. Building Families Early Childhood Area includes approximately **30 communities**. The larger communities continue to have a post office. Churches are abundant and there is typically at least one bar, and a park with a shelter; in the larger communities, there is typically a swimming pool, library, and movie theater. Iowa Central Community College outreach campuses are available in some of the communities. Eagle Grove in Wright County is home to the North Central Career Academy which provides opportunities for a group of students from different school districts to enroll in a specific set of courses associated with a designated career area.

Volunteer fire departments are supported with local fundraisers, private donations, and area endowment funding. The tri-county area has multiple celebrations during the summer, such as Festival in the Park, Summerfest, Downtown Sounds, Music in the Park, Junquefest, Art in the Park, Watermelon Day, Wednesday at the Park, Blue Grass Festival, Sweet Corn Days, Winterfest, and Annual Fourth of July Celebrations that include food, parades and fun family activities. Each county has an annual County Fair with 4-H members showing livestock, as well as homemade and home grown projects. Many of the communities within this service area hold their own farmer’s markets on a weekly basis as weather allows.

Many members of the community find it convenient to travel to neighboring metropolitan areas, such as Fort Dodge (Webster Co), Ames (Story Co), and even Des Moines (Polk Co) to obtain their needs not found in our local area, such as discount stores and chain restaurants.

Building Families encompasses a very **rural area of 1,519.4 square miles**. The largest community, Webster City, has a population of 7,825 according to the 2020 census and the smallest, Hardy, has a population of 57.The total population according to the 2020 census was 37,579 or an average of 25 persons per square mile. According to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the population of the three counties is 88% white, not Hispanic or Latino. Each county and community is unique in their population base. Hamilton County has considerable Lao and Latino populations. Wright County employs a large number of Latino workers through the pork, chicken, and egg industries. Humboldt County has experienced an influx of diverse families contributed in part to the increase in work available in Fort Dodge (Webster County). The tri-county did not experience the major demographic changes that were expected when the Prestige Pork Processing plant became operational in 2018 and added nearly 700 new jobs to the area.

The communities in this service area have historically had a strong industrial base that included factories owned by Electrolux, Beam, and Eaton, as well as ethanol plants, processing plants, and industrial farming operations. The closure of Beam Electrolux and Eaton plants over the past decade caused a temporary spike in unemployment. However, considerable investments in green energy and value-added agriculture has now offset those job losses. The unemployment rates in the three counties are now approaching pre-pandemic levels. The non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in July 2021 for our service area were, 4.3 (HA), 3.3 (HU), and 3.9 (WT) (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics).

There are **nine school districts and two parochial schools** in the Building Families Early Childhood Area. Two are elementary only schools with grade sharing agreements for older children. The parochial schools are elementary grades only. Most school systems have had to consolidate and some share superintendents, teachers, and buildings. According to the 2015-2019 enrollment data from the Kid’s Count Report, 34.7% (HA), 44.1% (HU) and 32.3% (WT) of 3 and 4-year olds are enrolled in preschool.

According to a 2020 Woods & Poole estimate, the Building Families Early Childhood Area has 2,753 children under the age of five. In 2019 according to the Kids Count Data Center, 27.8% (HA), 22.1% (HU) and 42.3% (WT) of all children participated in WIC.

Out of 453 live births in 2019 (IDPH Vital Statistics), 154 of those births were out of wedlock. There were no more than 17 babies born to parents under the age of 20, which is a dramatic reduction from 61 in 2009. 28 infants were reported with low birth weights.

According to the data reports released by the Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, in 2019 there were 128 founded cases of child abuse in the service area. The highest ranked county was Humboldt at 30 out of 99. The data on sexual abuse in the service area paints a much darker picture. Between 2015 and 2019, there were 83 founded cases of childhood sexual abuse in the service area, with Humboldt County ranked 7th and Wright County ranked 3rd out of 99 counties. This is an ongoing problem in Wright County, but the spike in the numbers in Humboldt County is alarming.

Total childcare slots available in this service area as registered with Child Care Resource and Referral in 2020 is 1,779, which is down from 1,996 in 2016. There are eight centers, 57 registered childcare providers and 22 non registered child care providers (CCR&R). Out of the eight centers, four have a QRS rating level of a three or higher. In July 2020, of the registered providers 4 have a QRS rating of a three or higher, down from 5 in 2016.

In 2020, there were 52 children in three Head Start programs and 198 children in State Wide Voluntary Preschool. There are a total of 19 preschools in our Early Childhood Area. Of those, 16 are run under a school district, 8 districts receiving the Four Year Old Statewide Voluntary Preschool Grant; two private non-profit preschools; five located and affiliated with the faith community and six center-based preschool programs. Most provide three and four year old classrooms.

The closest dental office that takes Title 19 patients is located in Fort Dodge. The reimbursement rate for taking these patients is very low, which contributes to the the lack of participation amongst dental providers in the Building Families service area. The average age of dentists in this rural area is approaching 60. There are few incentives for dentists to work in rural communities versus going to a metropolitan area and that creates a shortage of dental care in this area.

There are many supportive services offered in our area. The community mental health agency, Berryhill, is based out of Fort Dodge (Webster County); however, it does have satellite offices in Webster City, Humboldt, and Clarion. Youth and Shelter Services also has a treatment center located in Webster City. Each county also has access to quality health care through main hospitals in each county seat and clinics available in the smaller outlying communities.

There are multiple food pantries in every county. The area has also seen an increase in the use of the Backpack Program by children within the schools. Church and Civic organizations have taken on the responsibilities of filling and distributing the packs to local schools. Additional supportive services in our area include a comprehensive substance abuse prevention and treatment facility based in Fort Dodge with offices in each county, employment assistance through local libraries, and a cultural outreach facility (All Cultures Equal – ACE) immigration processes, and community engagement around cultural competency.

Department of Human Services offices and staff have faced major cuts in these rural counties. The DHS offices in Humboldt and Wright Counties have closed; staff is available by appointment only. The Hamilton County DHS office houses six social workers. All additional services are outsourced to contracted agencies that are in Sioux City, Mason City, Waterloo, and Fort Dodge. Families have a difficult time transporting to work with the DHS staff and some families still do not have computers or internet access through a smart phone to file for assistance online.



Children eligible for services must be aged 0-5. Parents of children who are prenatal through age five are eligible for services, such as preschool and child care assistance, parent education and family support. Restrictions include:

* Preschool scholarships—families must reside at or below 200% FPL and not receive or be eligible for any other funding for preschool tuition. Only if funding is available, families between 201-300% FPL may be approved for tuition assistance on a sliding fee scale.
* Family Support/HOPES—families are eligible for long-term family support services through a risk assessment. The HOPES programs serve children aged 0-3. Funding is not available to serve children aged 3-5.

# Section 2: Community Needs Assessment

Development of the Community Needs Assessment

Data was solicited and collected from outside services and resources within the community to minimize duplication of surveys and efforts. Needs assessments were requested and gathered from local hospitals, public health agencies, community action agencies, transportation agencies, child care service agencies, and area school districts. This data is regularly presented to the Board in small portions as part of the professional development process.

Additionally, data and information are collected throughout each year at meetings held in the community and with non-profit organizations. The Family Support quarterly meeting now begins each meeting with identifying what’s going well and not going well in the programs, along with identified gaps for services. The Program Committee of Building Families also begins its meeting similarly and holds discussions about what assets our service area holds to meet the gaps or what the ECI Board needs to discuss regarding the challenges and gaps identified. The Tri-County Human Service Provider meetings are coordinated by the ECI Director. This is an opportunity for agencies beyond those that serve children and families ages 0-5 to identify needs, gaps and assets . A report is included in Director’s Reports to the Board on an as-needed basis. COVID-19 has affected our ability to conduct these meetings in the fashion that we normally would. Many of the meetings now occur virtually or with reduced frequency based on the number of COVID cases in the area; however, we continue to do our best to stay connected.

Summary of Assessments

The Program Committee reviewed the following assessments to develop the Community Needs Assessment and the Provider Needs Assessment in the Fall of 2020. Key findings are also noted below:

* **Data From Prevent Child Abuse Iowa**
	+ Sexual abuse is a major problem in the service area.
	+ The latest five year rolling average ranks Wright County as the 3rd worst in the state and Humboldt as the 7th.
* **Data from Iowa Kids Count 2020**
	+ Childhood Poverty has decreased since 2010 but still remains stubbornly high in Wright County.
	+ The percentage of children receiving free and reduced lunches has increased in all three counties hitting a remarkable 59.8% in Wright County.
* **Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2019-2020**
	+ The overall population of the three counties has shrunk in contrast to what many expected would be an increase with the construction of the new Prestage Pork Processing Plant near Eagle Grove.
* **Community Input** – gathered from Family Support program meetings, Building Families Program Committee, Prevent Child Abuse Council, Community Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Council and the HHW Community Partnership for the Protection of Children. The most significant priorities identified at each meeting have been 1. Transportation; 2. Quality Child Care; 3. Mental Health Services
* **CHNA-HIP for Hamilton County Public Health 2019**
	+ Those surveyed in Hamilton County identified the lack of mental health services in the county and the ongoing stigma associated with it as the number one health issue in need of addressing.
* **CHNA – HIP for Humboldt County Public Health Department 2016**
	+ The data included is quite old because the latest version was postponed due to COVID-19.
* **Iowa Specialty Hospital Wright County Health Needs Assessment 2019**
	+ There is a serious issue with getting children immunized in a timely manner.
	+ There is a lack of mental health services and dental care in the county.
* **Upper Des Moines Opportunity Community Assessment 2019**
	+ The subcommittee selected the charts on children and foster care as well as WIC and Food Assistance usage.
	+ In all three of these categories, as in so many others, families in Wright County clearly struggle more so than in the other two counties.
	+ Over 30% of the families in the service area were on WIC in 2019. This indicates a high population of working poor when you compare it to a food assistance recipient rate of around 10%. It is also a reminder of how poverty is concentrated around children.
* **Y.O.U.R. Incorporated Head Start Community Assessment**
	+ The subcommittee selected the charts on educational attainment as well as poverty and food security to be shared with the Board.
	+ The area has higher than average rates of high school graduates but much lower than average rates of college graduates.
	+ The rates of poverty and food insecurity were closely correlated.
* **Iowa State University Extension Data For Decision Makers**
	+ The Housing stock in all three counties is aging. Nearly 35% of it was constructed prior to 1939.
	+ Overall poverty rates for the service are lower than the statewide average. When compared with the high numbers of children receiving free or reduced lunches, it appears as though children are more likely to live in poverty than the population at large.
* **Child Care Resource and Referral Data Sheets**
	+ Even if all listed childcare slots were full, (they are not full due to staffing shortages) there would still be a childcare shortage.

Analysis of the Needs Assessment Data Collected

On an annual basis, the Building Families ECI Board, community members, and area agencies come together for a retreat where new data are presented, priorities are explained and reviewed, and community-wide indicators are assessed. Representation at the retreat includes all area public health departments, family support worker supervisors, business owners, elected officials, Child Care Resource and Referral staff, educators as well as school administrators, child abuse prevention coalition leaders, adolescent sexual health leaders, and other parents/guardians of children aged 0-5.

At the Board meeting in February of 2021, the Director reviewed the nature of the Community Plan and re-designation process with the attendees.

In April of 2021, the Director reviewed potential survey ideas with the Board and the Program Committees. A decision was made to use other readily available assessments rather than generating our own as previous efforts to gather surveys from community members had failed to garner enough responses to make the results representative of the entire service area.

In June of 2021, the Board and community members gathered at the Wright County Professional Building where the ECI Director began the retreat with a SWOT analysis. At the August 2021 Program Committee Meeting, strategies and tactics were built around various items that emerged through that analysis. The product of that work is contained in a PowerPoint File that will be attached to this submission.

At the same meeting, the Board members noted they were content by and large with the direction of the organization and the current community plan priorities. However, they mentioned that they would like to see a greater focus on making community members in the service area more aware of the variety of services that we currently fund and they would like the priority related to that be focused on and perhaps revised.

At the October 2021 Program Committee meeting, the committee members reviewed the draft of the community plan as well as the various data sources and assessments used to compile it. They broke into subcommittees by county and selected various data points to present to the Board at their October meeting, and recommended a set of indicators to track over the next four years. They also discussed a revision to the current community plan priority “Improve the public perception of our programs and services.”

At the October Board Meeting the Board reviewed the key points selected by the program committees sub groups as well as various sources of raw data from the Iowa Department of Human Services, Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, ISU extension, Child Care Resource and Referral and the Iowa Department of Public Health selected by the director.

The Board then reviewed the current priorities for the Community Plan, as well as the revisions that were recommended to them by the Program Committee. After some discussion and a minor modification, the Board settled on these four priorities:

Priorities of the Building Families Early Childhood Iowa Area Board

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Priority | Rationale for Identification/Deletion of Priority |
| Enhance the health, growth, and development of children and adults in the family unit. | The Building Families Board believes that this is a priority that still exists for our service area and it is vital to improving household environments for the long-term. As shown through data collected by area partners, there is evidence to demonstrate that Parent Education and Family Support are the number one priority. Developing healthy, independent and successful children and families begins by educating and supporting parents and guardians in their roles with child rearing.  |
| Improve the availability and quality of childcare and preschool programming. | Childcare is a necessity in every community so parents/guardians may participate in the workforce or improve their education. It is also clear in the data collected by our partners that there is a serious lack of quality childcare in the service area. As a result, it is important to the Building Families Board that investments be made to support the availability as well as the quality of child care and preschool programming that helps to meet the Board’s vision. |
| Provide training and support to the early childhood workforce in order to enhance children’s health, safety, developmental skills, and abilities. | Building Families is committed to ensuring that the individuals that have access to the children in child care or preschool settings have adequate and appropriate training and support. The high turnover rates reported by area childcare centers ensure that training will remain a priority over the coming years. |
|  Increase the public’s awareness of our programs existence and the positive impact they make in the service area. | Over and over again, the Board has identified this as a priority that must be addressed. Much of the public is unaware of the services provided by Building Families to support young children and their caregivers as well as the positive impact these services have on their communities. This lack of awareness means some families that could benefit from our services go unserved and makes it a challenge to build public will for investing in our services.  |

Community-Wide Indicators of the ECI Area Board

Community-wide indicators are measurements that provide information about past and current trends. These indicators measure the relationship between social, educational, environmental, and economic factors affecting the well-being of those in our area. During the October meeting, information was presented on community-wide Indicators for the Building Families ECI Area Board to assess and provide a rationale for those selected.

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| --- | --- |
| Indicators Analyzed |  |
| Quality Preschool Programs | Children who are allowed access to quality preschool programming are ready for kindergarten and are more successful in life, work, and health.  |
| Early Literacy Skills | Literacy benchmarks being met during kindergarten encourages healthy reading with parents and children that will assists in the academic achievement of children as they go through school.  |
| Low Birth Weight | Birth weights are a leading indicator of infant health and development. Tracking low birth weights can provide a correlation to prenatal care, nutrition, potential at-risk children as well as projections for health and welfare needs/costs. |
| Dental Services | Children that have lack of access to dental services and adequate education about the importance of dental hygiene also see an impact on their nutrition, education outcomes, and long term health.  |
| Immunization Rates | A significant means of decreasing and protecting children from deadly childhood diseases is done through immunizations. It is an indication of the overall performance of our health system and children’s health. |
| Educational Attainment of Mothers | The educational attainment of mothers is directly connected to the economic well-being and stability of their families. |
| Incidence of Child Abuse | When children do not live in safe environments, they are not allowed the opportunities to grow and thrive. High incidence of child abuse have been indicated in our service area and continues to impact the well-being of children and families.  |
| Teen Birth Rate | Among other indicators, there is a correlation between child abuse rates and teen pregnancy rates. There are significant impacts on overall child well-being, welfare, dependence, out of wedlock births, lack of skills, workforce development and others that lead to poor outcomes for teen parents and most significantly children. |
| Unemployment Rate | The area's overall economic health can be measured with this rate. Unemployment impacts education, crime, child abuse, health and other costs to communities. |
| Children in Poverty | This is a connecting indicator when comparing it with unemployment rates as well as nutrition. Poverty rates play a significant role in the overall health and well-being of children and families and a community’s ability to thrive in the long-term. |
| Quality Early Learning Environments | It cannot be enough to only have slots available for children to participate in. Quality early learning environments allow children the opportunity to be ready to succeed in school, the workforce, and have improved overall health outcomes.  |
| Availability of Child Care | Comparing the number of children needing access to child care and the number of spots actually available speaks to the overall support of the economic system. The data here provides a picture of how supported parents, the workforce, and those seeking greater education are of value to a community.  |

Adopted Indicators with Trend Data

Due to our small area, population size, and limited funding, in Fall 2021 our Early Childhood Area adopted the following 7 indicators for its focus. They fall into four of the five result areas. There was only one change here from the previous plan as the Board elected to begin following Kindergarten literacy skills.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Result Area | Indicator | Data Source | Baseline Data | Trend | Goal | Progress Update |
| Healthy Children | **Low Birth Weight** – percent of live births weighing less than 2500 grams at birth | Iowa Dept. of Public Health | 6% (27 births)2010 | 3.3% 2017 | 5.3%2018 | 6.2%2019 | Decrease by 3% by 2025 | Discussion was held about how to best decrease this number. Family Support programs agree that the best influence for this indicator would be to work with families prenatally to inform of substance use during pregnancy and work with medical providers to enforce the same message as well as increase their education and awareness of the impact their conversations have with patients. |
| **Immunization Rates** – percent of children immunized by age 2 | Iowa Department of Public Health | 74%2017 | 76%2018 | 74%2019 | 71%2020 | 81% by 2025 | Programs, particularly Public Health Departments, weighed in on this discussion noting that the impact on this item can be difficult depending on the access PH has to the children and families. More information and education can be done to disprove theories about the effects immunizations have on children. There is also a concern that resistance to the COVID Vaccine will morph into added resistance to all vaccines amongst parents. |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Result Area | Indicator | Data Source | Baseline Data | Trend | Goal | Progress Update |
| Safe and Nurturing Families | **Incidence of Child Abuse** – Number of children who are confirmed to have been abused or neglected per 1,000 | Prevent Child Abuse Iowa; Iowa Department of Human Services | 14.42016 |  14.22017 | 15.82018 | 20.3 2019 | 14.2 2020 | 12.52025 | Due to changes in reporting methods adopted by the state, this rate may be influenced. Programs, services, and partnerships continue to influence these rates. We have also seen a decline in unemployment rates overall, which can contribute to a decline in stress and strain on families. However, this has likely been countered by the impacts of the pandemic. The drop in founded cases of abuse in 2020 probably has more to do with fewer eyes being on children than a reduction in the actual instances of abuse and neglect. |
| **Teen Birth Rates** – Births to mothers under 20 (% of births) | Iowa Department of Public Health | 37 (9%)2010 | 21-5.0% 2017 | 24 5.3%2018 | 15 3.3%2019 | 2.5% by 2025 | Efforts around adolescent sexual health have been abundant with the ongoing Community Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention grant for Hamilton and Wright Counties. Teen pregnancy rates still are higher in Wright County than the state rate. Strong partnerships have contributed to decline in rates and the stigma associated with adolescent sexual health. A vocal minority still plays a role in the accessibility of services, programs and supports to teens. Focus continues to be on education, awareness building, prevention efforts, and early interventions with families through parenting classes and family support programs to create secure and nurturing families that would prevent teen pregnancy. |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Result Area | Indicator | Data Source | Baseline Data | Trend | Goal | Progress Update |
| Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments | **Quality Early Learning Environments** – (QRS 4 or 5) | Child Care Resource and Referral (Mid-Sioux Opportunity, Inc.) | 32012 | 72019 | 112020 | 72021 | Increase 4 and 5 level ratings by 5% by 2025 | While it makes sense to continue following this indicator, it is important to note that the implementation of QRiS will result in a dramatic shifting of these numbers as it becomes exceptionally difficult to obtain a four or five star rating. |
| **Availability of Quality Child Care** – Number of slots or spaces available for children 0-12 in a licensed or registered setting | Child care resource and referral; Department of Human Services | 2,3032012 | 16172019 | 15462020 | 16392021 | Increase the number of slots by 100 by 2025 | As the only indicator available that tracks childcare capacity, it makes sense to follow it. However, we should note that at this point in the childcare crisis, the number of slots is not indicative of the amount of childcare available in the market place because most centers are operating well under their licensed capacity due to staffing shortages. |
| Children Ready to Succeed in School | **Early Literacy Skills** | Early Childhood Iowa Annual Report | 70% 2017 | 60% 2018 | 68% 2019 | 65% 2020 | 72.5% by 2025 | The Board elected to begin following this metric as part of the community planning process. It has not been a primary focus in the past; however, literacy efforts are integrated into childcare quality, home visitation and parent education efforts. |

Strategies of the ECI Area Board

We know that many factors influence the outcomes for young children and their families. During the first 2,000 days of life, the brain develops millions of neuro-synapse connections that build the foundation of who they will become intellectually, physically, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially. If we invest in those first days of life, we can have a profound impact on their outcomes.

The programs that we can invest in have been proven to assist parents and caregivers in providing the positive stimulation that can set the trajectory of a child’s life. Evidence shows the influence that positive and negative experiences have on a developing brain. It is so important that parents and caregivers utilize guidelines that show evidence of positive reinforcement and brain development, such as the following:

* Practice good self-care
* Ensure the health, safety and nutrition of children
* Recognize that each child is unique
* Establish routines
* Develop warm, positive, and caring relationships with children that are genuine and sincere
* Respond to children’s clues and cues
* Talk, read and sing to/with children beginning at birth
* Use safe exploration and play

Building Families engages in a quadrennial strategic planning process that creates strategies that will affect the priorities for the service area. Current knowledge and data are used to ensure the appropriate strategies and efforts are selected in the development of a plan. Annually, the plan is reviewed along with relevant data, and strategies and tactics are modified accordingly. The Board uses the plan and annual reviews to guide their funding decisions and to evaluate their effectiveness.

### Progress on the Strategies of the Plan

The Building Families Board has funded several projects that help to move its plan forward.

* Family support programs (HOPES and Parent Connection) continue to see advancements in connecting families with community resources, establishing medical homes, increasing prenatal care, and developing personal goal setting. These programs work closely with families to prevent child abuse, increase success rates, and emphasize relationship building with their children and other parents. All programs adhere to the highest standards of service and have earned their State of Iowa Family Support Credential.
* Preschool Parent Nights are implemented at each of the preschools where scholarships are provided to children attending 3 year old preschool or other preschool programs that are not part of the State Wide Voluntary Preschool Program. The purpose of this program has been to introduce parents not only to the family support programs but also to provide parents with skills to use with their young children and expose parents to the prevention of child abuse and specifically child sexual abuse prevention.
* Training opportunities are vital to increasing the quality of early learning and family support programs.
* Building Families funds the Business Investment Plan through CCR&R to improve the quality of early learning environments.
* Building Families administers Childcare Worker Bonus Funds in Humboldt and Wright Counties to improve the quality of early learning environments.
* Building Families funds a childcare nurse consultant to cover the entire service area.
* Preschool Scholarships are provided to all children under 200% of the FPL. In years when funding is available, children up to 300% of the FPL may receive partial scholarships.

### Capacity to Address Priorities:

In spite of modest increases in funding to the service area, years of stagnant budgets prior to that forced the board to realign the family support programs in Hamilton and Wright Counties, with fewer families served as a consequence. The Director has had a great deal of success in leveraging outside funds to support childcare projects in all three counties. Over the next three years, over 1.8 million dollars in non-ECI private and public sector resources will be invested in the wages of childcare workers and childcare facilities in the service area as a result of our work. One of the major limitations of our capacity to address priorities is time. It is a challenge to balance monitoring the grants, completing all regular ECI duties, running the Association of Early Childhood Iowa Area Boards and Advocates and administering the massive influx of outside funds into the service area.

### Gaps in Services

Throughout each year, Building Families Board members, Director, program staff and volunteers are actively engaged in the community where they are able to hear both the successes of the programs and possible areas that have gaps. Two such items that are consistently underfunded and are desperately needed in our rural area include access to reliable transportation and qualified interpreters. Other areas that are also of concern include comprehensive health services, including dental care for individuals covered under Title 19 supports, child mental health, in-patient mental health services, and substance use/abuse.

### Strategies for 2021-2025

* Continue social and earned media efforts to inform the public on the issues of parenting, brain development, healthy family relationships, the importance of early childhood and targeted information about programs.
* Update the Hamilton, Humboldt, Wright and Webster County Resource Directory biennially.
* Assist pregnant women with accessing prenatal care.
* Promote and facilitate access to immunizations.
* Provide information to parents and facilitate connections to obtain needed supports and services.
* Increase the understanding of what children need for optimal health and development.
* Promote the new Quality Rating System to providers and parents.
* Continue to enforce the standards set for quality preschool programs for the tuition program.
* Provide preschool scholarships and tuition assistance for families that would have a financial hardship paying for preschool.
* Support high quality, professional development opportunities for early care and education programs.
* Continue to collaborate with community and neighborhood events to promote activities for families with young children.
* Continue to support the quality of family support programs through the Iowa Family Support Credential or national accreditation.
* Promote childcare provider registration and quality improvement.
* Leverage the interest and concern about the lack of childcare into investments in it that address the core issues in each community.
* Create a business continuity plan that encompasses the needs of Building Families, our contractors, the families and caregivers we support.
* Work to build a more culturally competent and inclusive Board of Directors and contractor workforce.
* Build Stronger Connections with policy makers and business leaders around the importance of Early Childhood.
* Improve the public’s awareness of our programs and the positive impact they make in the service area.
* Build early literacy skills through existing programs and professional development efforts.
* Leverage outside funding to raise the wages of childcare providers in order to enhance the quality and capacity of childcare in the service area.

The ECI Area Board’s Process for Awarding Funds

After the Board has determined its timeline for the release, acceptance, scoring, and approval for Renewals or Request for Proposals, the RFP or Renewal forms are sent via e-mail to all service providers in the three-county and surrounding areas and posted on the Building Families’ Facebook page and website. The Board appoints members (no less than 3, preferably one from each county) to a Grant Review Committee to read and score the applications. After a meeting of the committee, the members develop their recommendations that will be presented for approval to the Board.

The Director reviews the grants upon submission to ensure they are in compliance with the requirements. If requirements are not met, the committee is made aware of the application; however, it is not reviewed by the committee. The Director does not read or score the grants as this is a Board/Committee member’s responsibility. The Director does attend the meeting to provide committee members direction and assist with the budget, as this is where the budget begins its development. The recommendation for funding is brought to the entire Board for approval. The Committee and Board can request to have any grant proposals presented orally, or may contact the grant applicant if necessary.

* The committee uses several methods to determine funding of projects. Consideration was given to the criteria for each funding carve-out. Each grant had to identify the priority and the result it addressed. The committee then **looked at the priorities** developed at the Retreat to make final funding decisions.
* Recommendations were taken to the full Board for approval. The Director advised the Board on conflicts of interest in relation to all the grants and Board members who had conflicts abstained from voting on that particular grant.
* Letters were sent to the grant recipients with a request for budget amendments as most of the projects could not be funded fully (appropriations decreases). After the revised budgets were turned into the Director, the contracts were written.

An appeal process is included in the Board Policy Manual. An explanation of this process is provided to the recipients and agencies that are not funded. Information on how to access the form and timeline for the appeal process is provided.

**Appeal Process**

Applicants of a proposal for funding whose proposals are rejected and denied funding may appeal in the following manner:

* Upon receipt of the grant RFP rejection notification from the Director, the applicant may file an appeal letter with the Director of the Building Families ECI Board. If he/she is expected to have an extended absence, the appeal will be rerouted to the Building Families Chair.
* Appeals may be filed on the grounds that the selection process violated state or federal law or that the process involved a conflict of interest by project staff or the review team members. Other grounds could include definitions specific to the grant process, an error in point calculation, errors made in the applications, or the Board did not follow the defined grant or RFP process.
* Appeals may not be filed when the applicant is disqualified by not following the RFP process or guidelines.
* Appeals must be filed within seven working days of the rejection letter date. Appeals must be in written form, clearly, objectively and specifically defining what they did not like and why. All appeals must be in written form and either hand-delivered or mail delivered. Fax and electronic appeals will not be accepted.
* A special meeting of the Review Board consisting of Board Members available that would not have a conflict of interest will be called within seven working days after receipt of the appeal letter in order to review the appeal.
* The Review Board makes a decision on the appeal and sends written notification to the applicant.
* The appealing person/agency may then call a special meeting of the Board by written request within the next seven days. Board Members will meet with the person/agency to discuss the decision. The Board decision will be final and recorded in the Board Meeting notes.

# Section 3: Fiscal Assessment

### Process used to Gather Information

Within Iowa law, Early Childhood Iowa Area Boards are required to identify federal, state, local and private funding sources available in the service area that provide services to children prenatal through age five. In accordance with a change to the law during the last meeting of the General Assembly, we have shifted our focus away from identifying actual funding amounts and towards identifying the number of children aged 0-5 served.

 The information contained in the following matrix was obtained by requesting the information from area community organizations, non-profit agencies, service providers, and early care providers. The information was initially requested in an email format. A letter explaining the purpose of the request and the necessity for completing it was included. A follow up request was made via email; additionally, program staff and the Director communicated directly with key entities to request a response to our inquiry.

This matrix assists the Board in assessing the needs of the community from the program or agency perspective. The Board is able to review the availability of other resources for children in this manner. It provides another method, along with needs assessment and priorities set by the Board, to determine if additional resources are actually needed for programs that apply for funding.

 ECI Area Board’s Fiscal Assessment (Conducted Fall, 2021)

## Key for Identified Sources of funding: Federal Funding=F; State Funding=S; Local Funding=L; Private Funding=P; ECI =E)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Agency/Organization | Location (Service Area) | Type of Service provided | Ages of Children Served | Number of Children Served | Identified Sources of Funding | Identified Gaps in Funding | Agency’s Level of Collaboration |
| Wright County Health Department | Clarion, Iowa(Wright) | Home Visitation, Maternal HealthWIC, First Five | 0-5 | 394 | S, F, E, L | Transportation  | Collaboration |
| Hamilton County Public Health | Webster City, Iowa(Hamilton) | Home Visitation, Maternal Health,WIC, First Five | 0-5 | 375 | S, F, E, L | Transportation – Limited funding | Collaboration |
| Humboldt County Public Health | Humboldt, Iowa(Humboldt) | Home Visitation | 0-5 | 119 | S, E | Marketing budget | Collaboration |
| Your Own United Resources, Inc. | Fort Dodge, Iowa(All) | Head Start | 0-5 | 52 | F | Center-Based Head Start in Wright County | Collaboration |
|  Child Care Resource and Referral  | Remsen, Iowa(All) | Professional Development | 0-5 |  | S, E | Trainings and Safety; Money for quality incentives | Cooperation |
| Riverview Early Childhood Center | Webster City, Iowa (Hamilton) | Child Care, Preschool | 0-5 | 67 | P, S, E |  | Contribution |
| Mid-Sioux Opportunity | Remsen, Iowa (All) | Quality Child Care Services and Supports | 0-5 | Unknown | F, S | Need additional Child Care Providers | Coordination |
| Stratford Early Learning Centers | Stratford, Iowa (Hamilton) | Child Care, Preschool | 0-5 | 36 | P, S, E |  | Coordination |
| Domestic Sexual Assault Outreach Center | Fort Dodge, Iowa (All) |  |  | 5 | S |  | Communication |
| Parent Connection | Clarion, Iowa(All) | Family Support | 0-18 | 80 | S, E | Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Awareness | Collaboration |
| Parent Connection | Clarion, Iowa(All) | Preschool Parent Night | 3-5 | 250 | S, E | Poverty awareness/ simulations, Cultural Competency | Collaboration |
| Asbury Preschool | Webster City, Iowa(Hamilton) | Preschool | 3-5 | 54 | S,P,E | Transportation | Coordination |
| St. Mary Early Childhood | Humboldt, Iowa(Humboldt) | Preschool | 3-5 | 57 | S,P,E | Transportation | Coordination |
| Clarion Goldfield Dows School District | Clarion, Iowa(Wright) | Preschool | 3-5 | 57 | S,P,E |  | Coordination |
| St. Paul Lutheran Preschool | Webster City, Iowa (Hamilton) | Preschool | 3-5 | 42 | S,P,E | Transportation | Coordination |
| TLC Preschool | Belmond, Iowa(Wright) | Preschool | 3-4 | 15 | P, E |  | Coordination |
| Kiddie Kats Childcare  | Humboldt, Iowa(Humboldt) | Childcare | 0-5 | 52 | S, P, L |  | Coordination |
| YSS | Webster City, Iowa (Hamilton) | Counseling Services | 0-5 | 5 | F,P, S |  | Coordination |
| Iowa Specialty Hospital | Clarion, Iowa(All) | Medical Care | 0-5 | 1773 | F,P,S,L | Transportation | Coordination |
| Kid’s Korner | Clarion, Iowa(Wright) | Child Care | 0-5 | 38 | S, P, L | Childcare Facility | Coordination |
| Van Diest Medical Center | Webster City, Iowa(all) | Medical Care | 0-5 | 586 | F, S, L, P |  | Coordination |
| Mighty Trojan Daycare | Blairsburg, Iowa(Hamilton) | Child Care | 0-5 | 37 | S,P,L |  | Coordination |

# Section 4: Community Collaboration

Collaborative and Networking Opportunities

**Collaborative Committees**

The Director is involved in multiple committees in all three communities. ECI project staff also work in the communities on collaborative committees and report activities back to the Director. Some of these committees include focus on changing substance abuse policies in the communities, child abuse, youth coalitions, and service provider meetings.

**Decategorization Board**

The Director attends decategorization meetings as requested and gives input regarding community needs as assessed by Building Families. One decategorization grant was awarded to Building Families this year.

**Prevent Child Abuse Council**

Building Families is the fiscal agent for the various grants that support the council’s parent education and child sexual abuse prevention efforts. The Parent Coordinator facilitates the PCAI Council for Hamilton, Humboldt, and Wright Counties.

**Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children**

The Building Families Director attends CPPC meetings in our area and participates in its activities. Building Families regularly receives funding for child abuse prevention and other minor projects from it.

**Community Foundations**

Building Families leads the Youth in Philanthropy Project of the Enhance Hamilton County Foundation. The project empowers youth to award funds to project that they select to be funded. Building Families regularly applies to the area foundations for funding. The last award was for a marketing project to recruit in-home childcare providers.

**Philanthropic Organizations**

The Director, program staff, and Board members regularly present information to community service and philanthropic organizations. This opportunity allows the greater community to learn of the needs and provide support where needed. This year we received a $5000 grant from the William Morrison Trust and an additional $750 from service clubs to support the Childcare worker Bonus Fund in Hamilton County.

**Other community partnerships**

The Director serves as the coordinator for the Hamilton, Humboldt, and Wright County Providers meetings. This is an effective way to get information out and ensure the community is being appropriately served.

**Hamilton County Childcare Coalition**

This collaborative effort is a public-private partnership spearheaded by Building Families and Hamilton County Economic Development that has raised nearly $200,000 and secured commitments for another $400,000 over the next three years to raise the wages of childcare workers in the county.

**Power Up YOUth**

This community coalition is designed to work toward creating a positive community environment concerning youth development in Hamilton County. One of the unique features of the coalition is the belief held by all members that *collaboration* is essential if the vision of “All Hamilton County youth will thrive” is to be realized. A broad base of representatives must be at the table to affect the type of global change that is desired.

**Infectious Diseases and Child Injuries**

The Child Care Nurse Consultant in Webster County provides child care providers’, childcare facilities and preschools the services to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, prevent child injuries, develop health emergency protocols, help with medication, and care for children with special health needs. Public Health in each county also has the mandated duty to work with agencies on health, diseases, and child injury issues.

# Section 5: Review and Evaluation

**Review and Evaluation Methods**

The Board has developed various methods to ensure ongoing evaluations are completed. Some of the methods include but are not limited to the following:

* Programs selected to receive funding are chosen based on outcomes that address the needs and align with the strategies and indicators identified in the Community Plan.
* Programs supply monthly invoices, quarterly reports, and a comprehensive year-end report. Reports include a narrative section that demonstrates successes and challenges, financial information, and program performance measures that meet state ECI requirements.
* Funded programs present to the Board to update on their activities, outcomes, and financial standing.
* The Building Families Board reviews the funded programs’ finances and outcomes annually to ensure the programs are meeting the needs of families in the service area. The Director visits with each program annually to review program status, methods of implementation and documentation, and to address any concerns with the program or financial aspects.
* The Community Plan is reviewed once a year by the Board as well as the Program Committee to provide necessary updates and to review the indicators to ensure the funded programs are having a positive impact.
* An annual report is provided to the State of Iowa. The report is public record and can be obtained by contacting Building Families in person, by phone, or via email.
* An annual evaluation of the Board is completed and Board professional development occurs at the beginning of each meeting to improve Board connection, participation, and effectiveness.