

First Steps

A PDG Parent and Provider Quarterly
Newsletter



Collaborate, Learn, Support, Lead

Winter 2023 Issue

Happy New Year and thank you for your interest in *First Steps* and the work organizations, families, and early childhood professionals are doing around the state to promote the wellbeing of all Nebraska's children. This year promises to be productive for work in the early childhood field: the Preschool Development Grant will offer a fourth year of funding to allow targeted projects to continue to develop; changemakers are promoting legislation that provides tax incentives to families of young children and to early childhood professionals providing quality care; needs assessment continues to move forward informing the state's strategic plan; and, of course, organizations continue to partner with parents to create and enhance the services that families of young children need.

We hope you find information in *First Steps* on the services you need, on connecting to the organizations who provide those services, and on how to provide your child with a quality early childhood education. We encourage you to become involved in the development of early childhood care and education. If you'd like to learn more about family engagement opportunities, please visit our "[Parent Opportunities](#)" page. We wish you a wonderful New Year, one in which your children and family thrive.

If you'd like to sign up to receive *First Steps* by email, visit our [sign up page](#).



Early Childhood Champions Recognizes Excellence

Christina Sigbornson knew from a young age that she wanted to teach but wasn't sure with what age group. Even though she thought it would be elementary students, she began working at a child development center while in college. That's where her career as an early childhood professional began. In her 23 years in the field, she has earned an Associate's Degree in General Education and is working toward another in Early Childhood for which she has received a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. She is now an early childhood professional at the Hamilton Heights Child Development Center in Omaha, where she has spent 8 of her 10 years there working with infants.

And her story could have ended there like so many who work in early childhood care and education and who dedicate their days to caring for our youngest, developing important bonds, helping them toward milestones, and too often being overlooked for the crucial work they do. But a recent phone call changed Christina's story. In November of 2022, she heard from Gina Ewing, the Quality Child Care Partnership Specialist at Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, who informed Christina she'd been chosen as an Early Childhood Champion.

[Read more.](#)

Mis-sing the Mark: Misapprehensions and Misunderstandings about Infant Mental Health



Sami Bradley, who co-leads the board of the Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health (NAIMH) with Holly Hatton-Bowers, says that most people, when asked about infant mental health, “picture a baby on a couch with a therapist.” “But the field is much broader than that,” she adds. Her definition of infant mental health involves a child’s capacity to learn and grow, the development of their social and emotional skills, and, perhaps most important, the bonds they form with the nurturing adults who will model skills and educate them in their development.

According to Zero to Three, a national organization whose mission is to “ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life,” infant mental health involves “the developing capacity of the child from birth to 5 years old to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture.” The organization emphasizes the importance of the field by pointing out that roughly 10%-15% of children under 5 “experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbances,” particularly in families dealing with trauma, where substance abuse or mental illness are involved, or where one or both parents have been lost.

In Nebraska, the field of infant mental health is burgeoning even while demand in the state suggests a growing crisis. Bradley says, “there has been tremendous growth over the last 5 years, lots of building of infrastructure. But, she points out, burnout is high. There are just not enough practitioners in the field to meet demand and most are focused in Lincoln and Omaha. Bradley, who had a family therapy practice herself in Holdrege, says that some families drove more than 2 hours to see her because care was not available where they lived.

Nebraska needs, according to Bradley, more therapists who have experience with young children, more home visitors with training in the field, and more systems to help those already working in the field cope with stress. She is quick to point out that there are “really good programs trying to help with this (stress)—Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME), Circle of Security Parenting Classroom (COCP).” But, she explains, these programs don’t have enough facilitators to cover the state’s need and without more funding they can’t hire more.

[Read more.](#)

Support for Families and Early Childhood Professionals

We Care for Kids is a statewide effort to build support for quality early childhood education for all Nebraska families. Quality early childhood education supports Nebraska's kids and families—and its future. We Care for Kids connects Nebraskans to family resources:

- Finding quality early childhood education in their community;
- Understanding how quality early childhood teachers help families prepare children for success in school and life;
- Knowing what to look for in a quality program.

Early childhood educators are essential to helping Nebraska thrive, bringing out the best in children, preparing them for school and life. We Care for Kids is listening to and lifting up the stories of early childhood educators so Nebraskans can appreciate this essential workforce.

Early childhood teachers are invited to share their stories with We Care for Kids (use EC Professionals link below). What goes into helping children and families thrive, what are your challenges as a professional, what do you need to stay in the profession—and what do you want people to know about the power of your work?

When we care about bringing quality early childhood education to all Nebraska families, we ensure that Nebraska thrives.

Families

EC Professionals

Mom Shares How Nebraska Program Helped Her Find Child Care for Her Daughter



Quality Early Childhood Education
For All Nebraska Families



Tosha Wright, an Omaha mom who works outside of her home while raising a 16-year-old and a 4-year-old, is familiar with the struggle of finding child care.

She applied for jobs to support her family and pay for child care—her youngest child loves school. But despite all her efforts, her child care search still wasn't panning out. A part-time job didn't pay enough. She ran into roadblocks when seeking state assistance.

“So, it was like I was getting hired, but I couldn't start because I will have to pay out of my pocket for child care fees, and I couldn't afford that,” she says.

Wright was referred to the [Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Program](#), which assists Nebraska parents in accessing quality child care and connects them to additional resources. The program launched in 2020, is administered through the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5).

Coordinated Enrollment specialists work directly with parents, finding out what type of child care they need and educating them on what quality care and responsive caregiving looks like. Specialists also help families apply for resources like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and food pantry distribution.

The work of the Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Program is an effort to put Nebraska children and parents first when it comes to securing quality early child care. Seventy-six percent of mothers with children under the age of 6 are in the labor force in Nebraska, according to the 2021 American Community Survey.

“Child care is such a burden for so many of our families, and we talk about quality, and we talk about all these things, but at the end of the day, they just have to find a place where their kiddo can go so they can go to work, so that they can put food on the table, a roof over their head,” said Mary Lariviere, the director of Early Head Start at the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative.

(Article provided by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and written by Ashia Aubrey)

[Read the full article.](#)

Early Childhood in the News

In case you missed it, here are some local news pieces that covered early childhood care and education.



The December 12, 2022, issue of the *Nebraska Examiner* included this piece highlighting the work of Step Up to Quality and We Care for Kids. Both are Preschool Development Grant funded initiatives.

[Read the article.](#)



WWT News reports, “childcare costs have nearly doubled in Nebraska. According to Lincoln Vital Signs, the average cost of childcare in Lincoln in 2019 was \$7,519 compared to \$14,098 in 2021. That’s an 87% increase over two years. The McKinley’s are paying about \$1,000 a month with their discount.”

[Watch the video or read the article.](#)



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched the First National Early Care and Education Workforce Center as part of a \$30 million investment to improve the recruitment and retention of a diverse and qualified early childhood workforce.

[Read the article.](#)

Family Resources



Getting Ready

The University of Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools offers Getting Ready which is designed to increase school readiness for children ages 5 and younger who receive home visitation or are part of center-based early childhood programs.

[Visit](#)

- Improves early language and literacy skills and develops social and emotional interactions in young children;
- Strengthens bonds between families and educators to improve collaborative approaches to learning;
- Promotes parental skills that enhance child autonomy and learning.

Parent University

The Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties presents Parent University, an initiative dedicated to the support of parents:

[Visit](#)

- Offers over 80 courses in the areas of Parenting, Life Skills & Wellness, School Success, and Leadership;
 - Courses are offered during day and evening hours as well as on weekends and are free to members;
 - Transportation, food, and childcare are available.
-

Ready Rosie

Ready Rosie is an evidence-based, birth-elementary age family engagement resource offered through Nebraska Department of Education that utilizes "modeled moment" videos that can be shared with caregivers by providers as a means of working together to target specific skills and to individualize provider care.

[Visit](#)

- Over 1,000 "modeled moment" videos in English and Spanish that encourage real-life learning moments;
- Learning games and activities that use current research on family engagement;
- Interactive family workshops that can be tailored to address such topics as positive discipline strategies, healthy routines, language development, developmental milestones, fostering play and social emotional development.

Children's Specialized Hospital Safety Resources

This website provides resources in English and Spanish that address safety for children with disabilities and special needs. Topics are designed for families, children, educators, and community members and include:

[Visit](#)

- Community safety
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Fires safety
- Health and health care
- Home safety
- Internet and technology
- Law enforcement
- Personal safety
- Recreation safety

Early Childhood Professional Resources



Communities for Kids

Communities for Kids (C4K) partners with communities to support and coordinate planning for access to high-quality early care and education for all children birth through age five. These partnerships are designed to build up the early childhood workforce when necessary, or elevate the existing one. Upcoming opportunities include:

Visit

- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation in partnership with DHHS anticipates another round of ARPA funding for childcare building opportunities to be announced in the spring with contracts starting July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024.
- A new grant opportunity is also coming out from Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services soon! The Business and Child Care Partnership Grant will launch January 17, 2023. This opportunity will provide one-time grants to individuals, businesses and organizations looking to start a new licensed child care program in Nebraska or for currently licensed programs wanting to expand their capacity.

Lead Safety Toolkits and Testing

The National Center for Healthy Housing offers early childhood professionals toolkits for maintaining lead-free childcare environments:

- [The Lead-Safe Toolkit for Center-Based Child Care](#)
- [The Lead-Safe Toolkit for Home-Based Child Care](#)

Visit

Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health

NAIMH works to promote and support nurturing relationships for all infants; to provide a forum for interaction and study among professionals, students, and parents; to advocate for application of infant mental health principles for services to infants and young children and their families; and to distribute educational materials that promote increased understanding of infant mental health issues.

Visit

- Offers a range of Infant Mental Health endorsements for early childhood professionals;
- Provides infant mental health resources for families and those who work with children.

Interested in learning more about early childhood services available to you?

The Preschool Development Grant provides information on the state's plan for developing early childhood care and education, on initiatives partnering with communities to build a better system, and on resources that assist both families and childcare professionals.

Learn More at the Preschool Development Grant Website

Our Contact Information

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