



**Bi-Monthly Newsletter - June 2022**

## Welcome to Year 3--Success Stories

As we enter the final year of the Preschool Development Renewal Grant, there is still much work to be done. Some projects are still in their development phase while others have begun outreach to families and early childhood professionals. We continue to work to create greater access to quality care, to collaborate with other professionals, and to build an aligned system that offers all Nebraska families the early childhood care and education they seek.

Despite the work that lies ahead, it's important to recognize how much work organizations and initiatives have done over the last three years. Much has been accomplished in this short time, and the next issues of the PDG eNewsletter will highlight some of the success stories stemming from PDG funding and from the excellent work initiatives have created from that funding. Now is not only a time to look forward and consider how we sustain momentum, but also to look back and find inspiration from challenges we've overcome.

## PDG Initiatives Make an Impact

### Touching Little Minds



*New developmental toys for Parkview Kids Christian Learning Center*

Something as simple as a toy octopus may be an important reminder of movement forward in the work PDG initiatives are doing to improve early childhood care and education in Nebraska.

Rachel Sissel, Associate Vice President for Early Childhood Programs for Nebraska Children's Communities for Kids (C4K), was reminded of pressing issues facing providers when she recently attended a regular C4K Action Team meeting for North Platte, an area she supervises in her role. At the meeting, Sissel was impressed by presentations given by local providers who had benefitted from Preschool Development Grant funded quality and capacity "mini-grants" offered through C4K, a moment she



*Rachel Sissel*

celebrated even as she recognized the more pressing challenges that face early childcare professionals.

Sissel is direct about the large challenges that providers face in the area. She notes that meeting capacity is their biggest problem. Even though plans are underway to build a number of new centers in her region, she says that there are worries about having staff to meet the demands of these centers. This concern was echoed by one of the presenters at the team meeting, Rebecca Fahrni of Parkview Kids Christian Learning Center. Fahrni

describes the program in North Platte that is licensed for 60 children but has to run at about 32 because of a lack of teachers.

Sissel explains the problems of finding teachers with an education background and of losing potential hires to the sometimes long waits for background checks to clear. She adds, "even when we have teachers who have an education background, they're doing student teaching at kindergarten levels or above." They are thus inexperienced in infant and toddler settings.



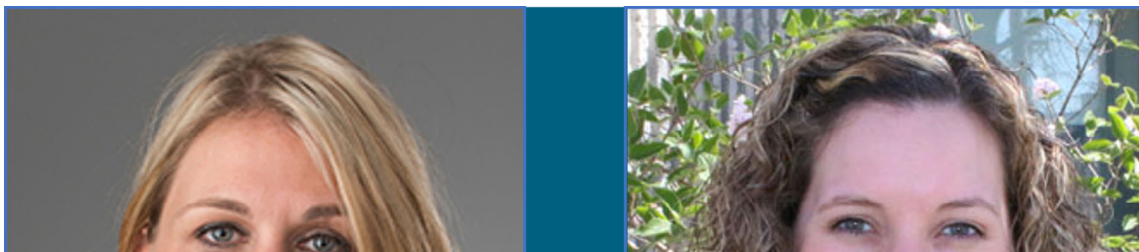
*Rebecca Fahrni*

But this is not the story of the larger gaps in the system. Our work with PDG initiatives tell us that there are larger issues we must overcome and these issues demand time, money, and a lot of patience as slow change happens. Our focus, however, on the larger issues sometimes leads to overlooking how meaningful smaller changes can be.

Remember that octopus? Fahrni describes how the mini-grant she received provided for a number of purchases, including a small plush octopus that could be turned from green to red and used by children to describe the feelings they were having in

the moment. Voila, a social emotional tool! This is what impressed Sissel, the way that small purchases not only impacted the quality of care-environments, but also the way they translated into developmental instruments for the educators.

**[Read the full article.](#)**





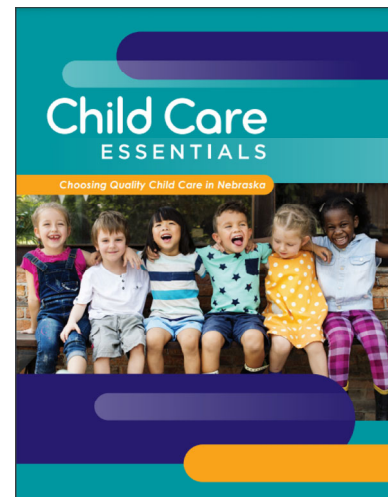
Holly Hatton-Bowers

Jaci Foged

## What Quality Looks Like

The project began, you could say, in 2017 when “The Right Place” brochure was created to help inform families on how to choose the best care for their children. The booklet was a mere 2 pages and was designed more as a vehicle to guide parents to the website for more information, explains Holly Hatton-Bowers, who, with Jaci Foged, leads the team that revised and completed a new version of the brochure over the course of 2022.

Both Foged and Hatton-Bowers are faculty members with University of Nebraska Lincoln’s program for Child, Youth, and Family Studies (UNL-CYFS) as well as Nebraska Extension and are part of a collaborative effort to revise “The Right Place” into something more substantial. Representatives from Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Department of Education, and UNL-Extension’s Early Childhood Interest Team worked together with UNL-CYFS to transform what was essentially a two-page checklist into an informative, illustrated 32-page guide titled *Child Care Essentials: Choosing Quality Child Care in Nebraska* that is a must for families with young children.



*Click image to see the booklet.*

Hatton-Bowers says of the booklet, “I think it’s not even comparable to the old one. It’s a more integrated resource—all in one.” Foged, who was previously a childcare director, describes the changes. The new booklet has a “much better organizational strategy” that divides information into sections, including an Introduction and Overview that answers important questions, an Age-Specific section, and a Resources section. *Childcare Essentials* also adds pictures and illustrations, extends the checklists and makes them specific to developmental age groups, voices important family questions, and provides a glossary of terms that families might need.

**[Read the full article.](#)**

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## Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health Celebrates Small Things







*Joy Osofsky*

*Sami Bradley*

Something small happened on April 6, but it happened in a big way. Small only in that we're talking about the smallest among us—infants and toddlers. The Nebraska Association of Infant Mental Health (NAIMH) ushered in a new era of big change in the field when it celebrated its partnership with the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health, an internationally recognized certifying agency for the field.

The day was designed to draw focus to the importance of infant mental health and to celebrate the long wished for Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E®) beginning in Nebraska. Over the past year, an Endorsement Leadership Committee was selected and has been the first to work through getting Endorsed as a way to build capacity and get Nebraska ready for this day.

After opening comments by Sami Bradley, who acts as co-leader with Holly Hatton-Bowers of NAIMH, Joy Osofsky, PhD, spoke as keynote. Dr. Osofsky is the Paul J. Ramsay Endowed Chair of Psychology and a Barbara Lehman Professor of Child Welfare at Louisiana State University, where she also acts as Director of the Harris Center for Infant Mental Health. Osofsky focuses her work on the impact of trauma on infants and toddlers and knows well the importance of an aligned and well-supported infant mental health system.

In her book, *Treating Infants and Young Children Impacted by Trauma*, she notes that “by 2 to 3 years of age, approximately 26% of children had been exposed to trauma and 14% exposed to violence.” She adds that additional risk factors make exposure more likely, citing the example that “49% of children living in poverty had been exposed to trauma and were 2 to 5 times more likely to be exposed to violence.” She goes on to say that she and other professionals in the field have used their “experience over the years to help dispel the myth that infants and toddlers are not affected by trauma and to help promote understanding that early intervention and treatment can make a difference. An important part of our efforts has been the education of psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, social workers, and other health professionals about the impact of trauma on young children and the evidence-based treatments that work.” It thus speaks highly of the work done by NAIMH that she said in her opening comments, “Nebraska has really taken the lead in many ways.”

**[Read the full article.](#)**

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## New PDG Website is Live

The PDG website now offers content for systems stakeholders, early childhood professionals, and families. Visit individual pages for all PDG-funded initiatives, learn more about community-based work, explore resources, and much more.

Visit the New PDG Website

## PDG Brief Reports

### **Elevated Network *Powered by Wonderschool***

In 2019, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC) engaged Wonderschool, a national network of modern early education programs, to pilot their comprehensive technology platform in Nebraska. This platform allows childcare programs to manage nearly every aspect of their business through one complete tool. Although the tool was designed for family childcare, Wonderschool has recently expanded to childcare centers.

Currently over 60 Nebraska family childcare programs and 9 childcare centers have on-boarded to Wonderschool. NECC has an ambitious goal to reach over 100 childcare programs by the end of this year. If you are interested in hearing more about Wonderschool, please contact [NECC](#).

For more information on Wonderschool, please contact [Brandee Lengel](#).



### **AOK Business Training Series**

Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC) partnered in 2019 with All Our Kin (AOK), a Connecticut-based nonprofit organization that had garnered national attention, to pilot their business training curriculum, consultation model, and licensing toolkit.

Since the inception of the Business Training Series (BTS), NECC has provided the program to 400 Nebraska family childcare educators. Participants in the most recent cohort raised their average pretest score of a C, to a posttest score of a B+.

NECC is now accepting applications for the fall cohorts, which will start in August. To learn more and/or to register, please visit our [web page](#).

For more information on All Our Kin, please contact [Brandee Lengel](#).



### **Strategic Plan**

In the **SPEAQ Up! Nebraska** meetings happening across the state, families and early childhood professionals are helping to identify strategies that will build the well-being of families and their young children.

Special meetings are being set up to review the vision for Quality in the Strategic Plan: "All children experience quality early care and education in every setting, that is, they experience physical and emotional safety in the context of frequent one-on-one interactions with a caring adult/s that are warm, language-rich, and educational."

If you are interested in participating in these discussions, please contact [Sara Vetter](#).



## Coordinated Enrollment

The Coordinated Enrollment Expansion Project will undergo some changes for Year 3 of PDG. After reviewing data and feedback from stakeholders, team members realized that while some families appreciated the one-on-one experience of working with an enrollment specialist to access quality early childhood services, others preferred a less intense approach. Workforce shortages also meant that many of partners did not have openings for families seeking care. To address these issues, the team is contracting with Wonderschool to create an online platform during Year 3. This will allow families to explore any providers included on the platform, including centers and family childcare homes. One-on-one assistance will be available but not required to access coordinated enrollment services.

For more information about Coordinated Enrollment, please contact [Mary Lariviere](#).

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## First Five Nebraska Provides Legislative Highlights of Year Two

[Click to View Highlights](#)

## PDG Partners at Work





## Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide

It's the first day of Kindergarten—kids get dropped off at school, where they meet other children for the first time, encounter new teachers, and experience a brand-new schedule and structure—all in a setting that is likely unfamiliar to them. This transition can be a whirlwind for children, families, and educators.

The Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide was created to support the process between preschool and Kindergarten. It's a new guide for families, school district staff and Kindergarten teachers, as well as early child care professionals.

“This was an opportunity for Nebraska to think through how to have better communication and collaboration between the three different types of adults—parents, early childhood professionals, and those working in schools and school districts—who impact children's transitions the most,” said Lisa Roy, former director of program development at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and project lead for the toolkit and resource guide. “All of those adults make a difference in how well a transition happens for a young child.”

WestEd, an educational research and service organization, developed and designed the toolkits with the input of more than 50 individuals from across Nebraska. The group was purposeful in ensuring that the toolkits generated an understanding of what could be expected of a child when reaching Kindergarten and highlighted techniques to support their learning and development; they also intentionally focused on ensuring inclusion when customizing them to represent the state of Nebraska.

The goals of the toolkits are to:

- Strengthen collaboration among early childhood providers and public schools
- Support learning and development to meet the needs of all children equitably
- Build knowledge among professionals in early childhood care and education and schools
- Promote partnership between families, educators, and communities
- Help align a successful transition for children to Kindergarten

Inside the toolkits are messages and themes on readying children for the transition to Kindergarten, and tips on how a family can prepare at home. The booklets address how child care providers and administrators can best support children and families, the expectations of the transition process to Kindergarten, and recommendations on what school districts and Kindergarten teachers can do to strengthen the environment where children learn.

To learn more and access the Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit, click [here](#).

(Article by Ashia Aubrey--reprinted with permission of Buffett Early Childhood Institute)

**[Read the full article.](#)**

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## Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about newsletter content, PDG-related activities, or partner organizations, fill out the form at the bottom of our "PDG Progress" page, and we'll find you answers.

Get Answers to Your Questions



### PDG Partners

Nebraska's PDG work is led by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) under the authority of Governor Pete Ricketts, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the University of Nebraska system, and many other partners.

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For questions or comments regarding the Preschool Development Grant, please contact:

**Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal**, Assistant Vice President Preschool Development

For more information or to subscribe to the enewsletter, visit **Preschool Development Grant**.

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