



A Report on the Early Childhood Learning System of Elkhart County

Submitted by D3 Associates

November 2017



**Early Childhood System of Elkhart County
Stakeholder Gathering
March 23, 2017**



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
WHO WE ARE: HISTORY OF PEN AND ECLS	5
RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCESS	5
INTENTIONS, PURPOSE STATEMENT AND LIMITATIONS	6
EXPERIENCES AND VISIONS OF SUCCESS IN ELKHART COUNTY	6
WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE? WHAT ARE WE WORKING TOWARDS?	6
STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES OF ELKHART COUNTY	7
EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN ELKHART COUNTY	9
CHILDCARE: THE NEW NECESSITY	9
CHILDCARE PROGRAMS AND CAPACITY IN ELKHART COUNTY	10
UNLICENSED CARE: A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?	10
COST OF CHILDCARE IN ELKHART COUNTY	11
AVERAGE COST OF HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE	11
CHILDCARE: PARENT CHOICE AND MULTI-MODE SYSTEMS	12
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH AND LEARNING	13
FINANCIAL INSECURITY: POVERTY AND ALICE FAMILIES	13
TIME-POOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS	14
TRANSPORTATION	14
PARENTAL AND FAMILY HEALTH	15
PARENTAL AND FAMILY TRUST, OPENNESS, AND WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE	16
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATIONS, PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS	17
FUNDING	17
TURNOVER	17
LANGUAGE BARRIERS	17
COMMUNICATION AND MESSAGING	18
COLLABORATION: ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, AND NEXT STEPS	18
AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION	19
A NEW VIEW OF THE SYSTEM: THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	20
KEY QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS FOR EACH SPHERE OF THE SYSTEM	22

<u>APPENDIX 1: INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>APPENDIX 3: MEMBERS OF THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT NETWORK (PEN) AND/OR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING SYSTEM NETWORK (ECLS)</u>	<u>29</u>

Introduction

Who We Are: History of PEN and ECLS

This research and the discussion which it seeks to contribute to is rooted in the collaborative work of The Early Childhood Learning Systems (ECLS) Network. The ECLS Network emerged in its earliest form in 2015 as the Parent Engagement Network (PEN). PEN, using frameworks and skills drawn from Collective Impact trainings,¹ sought to bring together those who are passionate about the engagement of parents/caregivers in the learning development of their children and youth.

Coming together under the shared vision that “All Elkhart County children have a warm and responsive parent/caregiver engaged in their child’s learning journey,” collaborators were inspired to exchange information, learn and share new insights and strategies, and create and coordinate with each other as a group to improve parent engagement in this community. Horizon Educational Alliance served as this Network’s backbone support group.

In time, however, it became apparent that there were underlying issues that might better inform the work of the Parent Engagement Network. Through a series of conversations a compelling question emerged: “What are the factors that limit or enable growth and learning for Elkhart County children 0-8 years old, outside the K-12 (formal) systems?” While parent/caregiver engagement is vital for a child’s development and success, we came to see the importance of broadening the scope of our vision and collaboration.

From this question, came the desire and decision to map the early childhood system of Elkhart County. This mapping has taken various forms, but has a single goal: to find out what is limiting or enabling early childhood development in Elkhart County, to know who is doing what and with whom, and to understand the current system, how it operates, and what it is producing. These broader system-oriented inquiries are what morphed the Parent Engagement Network into the Early Childhood Learning Systems (ECLS) Network.² Having expanded from its original focus on parent engagement, the current purpose of the ECLS Network is: “To promote and strengthen the early childhood learning system in Elkhart County that enables every child to thrive.”

On March 23rd of 2017, the ECLS Network put together a meeting, inviting those in Elkhart County who are connected to early childhood in one way or another.³ After this meeting, the Network decided to take the next step in exploring and mapping the early childhood landscape of Elkhart County.

Research Method and Process

Following the March 23rd meeting, a list was created naming key stakeholders in the early childhood landscape. This list served as a sampling and touchstone of the larger early childhood system. These individuals were contacted by steering committee members and invited to participate in this study. From June to August, a total of 48 individuals were interviewed, representing 33 different organizations.⁴ Each interview was conducted by one or more individuals from the ECLS Committee, and

¹ See appendix for further information on “collective impact” and “networks”

² See appendix for names of ECLS committee members

³ See appendix for outcomes and notes from the March 23rd gathering

⁴ See appendix for individuals and agencies interviewed

lasted up to 75 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured, using a predetermined interview guide.⁵ Each interview was audio-recorded, and individual reports were drafted for processing and later analysis.

Intentions, Purpose Statement and Limitations

This research was conducted with the intent to explore and describe the early childhood landscape of Elkhart County. Having sat and talked with nearly 50 individuals across Elkhart County, all of whom are connected in one way or another to early childhood, we have created this report to share and reflect upon what we have heard.

We recognize that additional interviews would undoubtedly create a richer picture of our community and the early childhood landscape, yet we believe we have engaged enough perspectives to record a constructive sampling of the voices in the Elkhart County community. While print sources and statistical data were researched and included to a minimal degree in this report, our data and analysis draws primarily from the findings of our interviews.

The two primary goals of these interviews were to (1) map the early childhood system and landscape of Elkhart County and to (2) test for the need and/or interest stakeholders have for some kind of collaborative process to enhance collective impact.

This research was exploratory and descriptive in nature, and the report—we hope—mirrors this. We are not here to assess successes and failures of systems, compare organizations and initiatives, or push for action in any particular direction. The purpose of this project is to take the time to listen to those who work with young children in Elkhart County and parents that live with them—to listen to those who affect and are affected by children in these early and formative years. In our questioning and listening, we sought to draw out and create a fuller map and understanding of what the lives of our young children and those who interact with them are.

We looked for strengths and successes in the early childhood landscape of Elkhart County, recognizing that good things are happening in this arena. We looked for challenges and barriers: barriers preventing our young children from developing well, barriers impacting our organizations and their success, and barriers we share and shoulder as a community. We looked for data and methods of sharing information and ideas. And we explored the possibility of collaboration, asking ourselves, how can we do better *together*? As a community, how can we build upon a foundation already strong, and better the lives of the young children of Elkhart County?⁶

Experiences and Visions of Success in Elkhart County

What does success look like? What are we working towards?

While exploring the early childhood landscape of Elkhart County, we asked the very important and perhaps overlooked question: “What does success look like?” With so many working to help our children develop and live well, taking a step back and looking at the successes we have (and hope to have) may prove helpful, offering a guiding vision. Success, though, can be difficult to measure and track. One individual we spoke with said, “We grasp at pieces to understand success, but when working with kids you don’t always see the end results. Families are constantly changing, and success looks like so many things.” Given the variety of organizations and work represented in our interviews, success was

⁵ See appendix for a sample interview guide

⁶ See guiding goals and questions in appendix

described in differing ways, yet the desire for our children and families to do well and be well was evident in all. Below are the words of those we spoke with; this is what success looks like or *could* look like:

- “Seeing children improve, be healthy, develop and grow (...) Seeing families be able to do well, for parents to trust us and be able to go to work and support their families.” - Erin Syslo, Executive Director of Walnut Hill Early Childhood Center
- “Success is functioning families, children that are adjusted and understand the value of education and not breaking the law. The biggest factor in influencing success is relationships; you’ve got to have people who sincerely care, and I think we have that.” - Deborah Domine, Judge at Elkhart County Juvenile Court
- “Success would be when every family in our county has access to and knowledge of resources: for childcare, summer care, tutoring resources, and parenting resources.” - Carla Biro, Elkhart County Early Childhood Coordinator
- “Long-term success in my work would be if we’re able to normalize parents asking for help—reducing the stigma surrounding parents asking for help. To be able to admit that we’re struggling and to be able to ask for help is a huge success.” - Emily Herriott, Coordinator of Triple P
- “When I close out a chart and know that the family is going to make it; the baby is bonding, the mother is involved, and the two are doing well.” - Marti Conrad, Healthy Babies Program Supervisor at Elkhart County Health
- “Seeing the kids learn and having parents come back once their kids are in kindergarten, thanking us for preparing them.” - Erica Siegel, Director of Kingdom Kids
- “Creating a space for families to feel comfortable, to want to hang out and read, learn, and grow.” - Tina Ervin, Goshen Public Library
- “Success is having our participants graduate and complete their goals. A goal may be to get a job, repair their credit, find childcare, or get out of assisted housing.” - Taresa Walker, Special Programs Coordinator at Elkhart Housing Authority
- “In coaching success looks like facilities developing better practices and really understanding the importance of developmentally appropriate practices and learning. Seeing programs move up Paths to Quality levels is success.” - Mona Livingston, Coaching and Outreach at Early Childhood Alliance
- “What excites and motivates me is seeing the success of children not only being school-ready, but having long-term success. None of us start out with the same advantages, but there are things we can do to give them a boost. Success is when families receive the resources they need, learn to implement the things we teach them, and when families stick with us along the way (...) When all the pieces [health information, parenting tips, and resources] come together and the child is ready for school, that’s success. Success is giving them a good foundation.” - Melanie Sizemore, Director of Healthy Beginnings Division of Elkhart County Health Department

Strengths and Successes of Elkhart County

Throughout the course of this research, it became clear to us that we must start this report and conversation on a note of celebration. For while the barriers and challenges we face are many, there is

much to celebrate. We as a county, as agencies, and as individuals are doing so much right regarding the health, care, and vibrancy of our young children.

Many of the individuals with whom we spoke are passionate not only about their work, but about the context of Elkhart County. We heard time and time again that “Elkhart County cares for its own.” While respondents described this *culture of care* in varying ways and with differing words, the sentiment was always one of authentic care. Respondents across sectors, ranging from social service agencies, public school corporations, and private childcare centers, all named Elkhart County as a county that cares for and invests in its own. As Candy Yoder, Executive Director of CAPS, said:

“I sense a real value of strong families. There’s high value placed on helping families be strong and that that leads to strong communities. I think—uniquely so—a lot of people care about keeping this community strong; businesses invest back into this community in particular because they care about this community being strong, and that includes families.”

Some attributed this sense of care to the county’s close-knit nature, some to strong community leadership, and others to the kindness and goodness of the average citizen of our community. This care and community buy-in, while positively impacting the landscape of early childhood, is one of the many things to celebrate across *all* sectors and landscapes of Elkhart County.

Another gift of Elkhart County that was named is that of *collaboration*. Kathy Guajardo, Executive Director of Head Start, said, “I have never experienced a culture of collaboration like we have here. People are so ready to ask ‘what do you need?’ and are eager to help you get it. It’s a small town feel in a big town environment. And if people don’t know how to help you with something, they’ll direct you to someone who can.”

Magistrate Deborah Domine of the Juvenile Court reflected on this spirit of collaboration saying, “What’s working well is what works well in every part of the system, and that is collaboration, innovation, real sincere caring about doing it right and wanting to do it better.” Domine went on to say that she believes that we, in Elkhart County, do this very well, particularly compared to other counties in the Indiana. And yet, she said, “We can always do it better and we should do it better. And I think sometimes we drop the ball and we get so mired in our own little worlds that it’s hard to see outside and see how other entities can help us and how we can help them. But for the most part I think if there’s a call for help, people come running.” This opportunity to do better, which Domine named, will be addressed further into the report, along with past and present collaborative initiatives in Elkhart County.

Elkhart County’s culture of care and collaborative spirit, along with other strengths, are visible in the early childhood landscape. One strength in this landscape, which we have come to name as a result of this study, is the strength of dedicated and caring professionals—professionals in various sectors who are deeply committed to seeing children learn, grow, and thrive. While we, as a county and state, have been slow to recognize the importance of early childhood and have invested minimally in the field, the children of Elkhart County have been cared for and looked out for by a relatively small group of people dedicating their lives to this work. These people are in our schools, our social service agencies, our libraries, childcare programs, and homes. These are the people who are the strength and backbone of so much of this early childhood system. These individuals and the organizations they represent are, perhaps, our greatest strength.

Yet as we expand our scope, and continue looking at the larger picture, we see several other strengths appear. The first of these is an increased awareness on a community and state level of the importance of early childhood. Many respondents, particularly those working more directly with young children,

noted a trend in increasing county interest in early childhood. Respondents named the greater recognition of the importance of early childhood, particularly those years birth to three, as an encouraging sign. This increased awareness, which has been accompanied by increased funding (to some degree), is in part a result of the State's movement towards supporting early childhood. The increased awareness has created the On My Way Pre-K initiative, bringing greater attention and funding to kindergarten readiness across our county and state. There has been an apparent shift in both political and public awareness that what happens in early childhood matters.

While having the State invest in early childhood is a great contributor to the development of our early childhood system and surely adds ease to the process, the commitment and passion we've seen in our interviews indicate that regardless of what the State does or does not do, we will continue working towards the betterment of our own system. With strong curriculums, providers, and dedicated key individuals and organizations, Elkhart County is on the path to creating a healthier county for our children to grow and thrive in.

Early Childhood Care and Education in Elkhart County

Childcare: The New Necessity

While success and healthy child development is multifaceted and expansive, a large part of the early childhood landscape and discussion is oriented around childcare and education. Kindergarten-readiness, as seen above, is one indicator of a developing and thriving child. So we begin this exploration of the early childhood landscape discussing early childhood care and education.

In our conversations with parents, childcare providers, and others who are engaged in the early childhood arena, affordable quality care was named frequently as a primary concern. Elkhart County, like many counties across our state and nation, is experiencing a shortage of affordable quality childcare seats. As the number of homes in which all parents/caregivers work, childcare has become a new necessity. According to statistics released by the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), in 2015, there were 18,225 children ages 0-5 years old in Elkhart County, 60% of which lived in households where all parents work.⁷ Of these 18,225 children, only 2,860 were enrolled in known childcare programs. Of those 2,860 children, only 723 were enrolled in high-quality programs. While Elkhart County's enrollment rate in high-quality care is strikingly low, the challenge of finding affordable quality care is a challenge experienced by many other counties across the state and nation.

In October of 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics released the findings of a study focused on this very issue. In this study, nearly 6,000 families with children under age 5 who were not yet enrolled in kindergarten were polled about factors that affect their childcare choices including cost, reliability, and access to care. The survey's key findings are as follows:

- 31% of respondents cited cost as the primary reason they had difficulty finding child care
- 27% of those families surveyed said the availability of child care slots was the most common barrier to securing care
- 22% of families said it was difficult to find quality childcare⁸

⁷ ELAC Report – cite in proper form

⁸ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017101>

According to an article produced by Early Learning Indiana, in Indiana alone there are a half million children under the age of 5, only 35 percent of which are in high-quality programs. Nine Indiana counties remain without a single high-quality childcare program.⁹

Childcare Programs and Capacity in Elkhart County

With so many parents working, the growing need for childcare, and low reported enrollment rates, who is caring for Elkhart County's children? According to Shannon Gage of Early Childhood Alliance (ECA), there are 100 known early childhood programs in Elkhart County serving birth through school-age children. These types of care include: licensed homes, licensed centers, ministries, Head Start, exempt preschool programs, exempt center programs, exempt family homes, and exempt school age programs.¹⁰

The types of provider, number of programs, and capacity for each type is as follows:

Type of Care	Number of Programs	Capacity
Licensed Family Home	28	332
Licensed Center	18	1,128
Ministry	19	1,468
Head Start Programs	14	500
Exempt Preschool Program	10	755
Exempt Center Program	2	251
Exempt Family Home	2	5
Exempt School Age Program	7	460
Total	100	4,899

Janet Whalen Couch, Director of Campus Center for Young Children, made note of Elkhart County's low capacity for childcare, saying, "There's an increase in county population, but little growth in childcare capacity." According to one respondent, there are only two new (licensed and quality) childcare centers that have opened in the last 20 years. With this in mind, we wonder, how can we make the early childhood environment more attractive for others to come in?

Melanie Sizemore, Director of Healthy Beginnings Division of Elkhart County Health Department, echoed this concern, saying that many program directors and individuals in this field "have gone into this field mostly out of the goodness of their heart. It's not a friendly or inviting environment for people to take on, particularly because of the low wages." In 2015, the annual median wage for preschool teachers in Elkhart County was \$19,365. While the challenges of cost and capacity are experienced on state and national levels, what can we, in Elkhart County, do?

Unlicensed Care: A Cause for Concern?

One concern or area of further inquiry is *unlicensed* homes. According to Shannon Gage of ECA, there are many, many unlicensed homes in our county unknown to us. Marti Conrad who works with mothers through the Health Department's Healthy Beginnings program, has concerns about these unregulated homes. Marti spoke of a visit she recently had to one of these homes. As Marti approached the house, she saw five kids in the yard (ages roughly 4-9). Upon entering the home, Marti found six babies in playpens, lined up, and two babies strapped and sitting in car seats.

⁹ <https://earlylearningin.org/new-study-confirms-access-cost-remain-barriers-quality-child-care/>

¹⁰ "Exempt" in this context meaning unlicensed, unregulated, and outside of the formal licensed care sector.

Though this may be an extreme example of an unlicensed home scenario, it does display the potential risks of putting a child in an informal childcare program. In a setting like this, a child does not receive the important opportunities to play, interact, and learn with others. There are also clear health and safety concerns.

A more moderate yet still concerning story of home care came from Erin Syslo, Executive Director of Walnut Hill Early Childhood Center. Erin told us about a four-year-old child who recently started at Walnut Hill. Upon walking into his new classroom, he asked the teacher where the television was. The teacher responded saying they don't have televisions here. To this, the boy said, "Well, that's what I do." This little boy did not know how to play with other children. At his previous provider all he did was watch TV. But at Walnut Hill, he adjusted—he learned how to play and how to play with others.

Erin Syslo spoke of unlicensed care, as "the area that we know least about; and yet it's a *huge* part of the childcare system." Erin and others we spoke with mentioned the common questions they hear parents ask other parents: "Who's your sitter? Who do you use?" Often times these are homes down the street, homes of extended family members, or homes of a coworker. Occasionally these homes are found through Facebook inquiries—parents voicing their need for childcare and asking Facebook friends and others if they know of any providers. "That's how desperate they are," says Marti Conrad referring to these Facebook posts, "asking total strangers to care for their child." In our interviews we sought to find out what is behind this desperation. Why are parents putting their children in settings that may not promote and support their children's development and flourishing?

Cost of Childcare in Elkhart County

Many individuals we spoke with, along with reports and statistics we have encountered, name cost as the primary barrier to accessing quality childcare and early education. According to ELAC's 2017 statistics, the average cost for high-quality care per year in Elkhart County is the following:

Average Cost of High-Quality Childcare

Age Group	Cost (per year)
Infant	\$8,116
Toddler	\$7,608
Preschool	\$6,982
Average (all age groups)	\$7,455

As will be discussed later, a number of Elkhart County families fall under the category of Working Families (aka "gap families" or the "working poor"). These families, according to United Way's recent research, name childcare as one of their three most pressing challenges. The other two are housing and job/skills training.

These families, which are many of our Elkhart County families, must make difficult decisions regarding their children and childcare. As Allison McLean, Director of Children's Services at the Elkhart Public Library expressed, "Many families fall between the cracks; they make too much money to get assistance but don't make enough to afford quality childcare." When quality care costs as much as \$260/week (and even more for infant care), alternatives to quality care are often essential. Some parents, faced with this immense cost of care, choose to quit their jobs, stay home with their children and even start doing childcare themselves, offsetting the cost of their unemployment. This is how many unlicensed homes begin.

The state's voucher program is one attempt to offset the cost of quality care. While these meet a portion of the need, there is a large portion that remains unmet. Teresa Walker of the Elkhart Housing Authority spoke of this challenge: "I hear mothers say that they have a job, have transportation, and have applied for vouchers, but there aren't enough out there. So they have no childcare, and going to work is no longer feasible." When childcare becomes a barrier to a parent or caregiver pursuing work, our system is not functioning as we would hope. Deciding between supporting one's family monetarily and supporting one's young child's development is a decision no parent should have to make. Darren Bickel, formerly of United Way of Elkhart County, discussed the need of focusing our vouchers and work on working families, saying:

"For working families, the cost of childcare is the biggest barrier. We can talk about vouchers and On My Way Pre-K, but the qualifications for that are too low. Most of our support is going to students and those with little to no work. We need to help the working families as well, which is a large percentage of our population. This is a statewide and national issue; quality care is not cheap."

Providers whom we talked with are well aware of the stressor of cost, but can do little to change the situation. As was stated, quality care is not cheap. Licensed childcare programs have many regulations—regulations that add not only stress, but monetary costs as well. Operating on tight budgets, providers do their best to keep costs low. Some operate on a sliding-fee scale and others provide scholarships, which are taken out of their budget. There are attempts to offset the cost of quality care, but this barrier persists for most childcare facilities.

Walnut Hill Early Childhood Center is one program that has made a strategic shift in the last three years to increase funding and cut costs for families. Walnut Hill's executive director, Erin Syslo, shifted her work from day-to-day operations at Walnut Hill to development, focusing on fund-raising, relationship building, and telling the story of Walnut Hill to the broader community. Jamie Pankoke became the Family Coordinator, taking on the day-to-day responsibilities at Walnut Hill. Jamie will officially be titled the Center Director in Walnut Hill's new building, taking charge of family engagement, all licensing, NAEYC Accreditation, Paths to Quality, etc. While creating an additional position (and salary) like this is risky for a program operating on a tight budget, Walnut Hill has successfully increased funding and scholarships for students, providing a more affordable early education for the students and population they serve.

Childcare: Parent Choice and Multi-Mode Systems

There are many types of childcare from which parents may choose (bearing in mind the constraints of cost, transportation, etc.) While some parents want their child in a home setting, others want a classroom. Some choose a faith-oriented ministry program, and others a setting in the public school system. When it comes to selecting childcare, parent choice is key. Mike Garatoni, Executive Director of Growing Kids emphasized the importance of parent choice, saying, "If you undermine the power of parents, we lose the multi-mode system." Having many options and varied costs is important. Several individuals we spoke with, recognizing the high cost of quality care, emphasized the importance of having a mixed delivery system.

Many of the individuals with whom we spoke champion the classroom, believing that strong curriculums, play-based learning, and a structured classroom setting prepares children for the transition to kindergarten—a transition that is difficult for many children. Mary Kay Longacre of Goshen Community Schools has experienced that children who transition from preschool to kindergarten within the Goshen Public School system need less support and assistance in that transition than students who

have not attended formal pre-k programs. She named one of the gifts of classroom learning as helping a child to “know how to ask for help and know how to learn.” Directors of early learning and childcare programs spoke of a similar goal of preparing their students for kindergarten and instilling in them a love of learning.

Some parents and families are wary of putting young children in classrooms. Some prefer a home setting or for their child to be with an extended family member or friend. In this sense, culture, family, and values play a role. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to early childhood care and education. A multi-mode system for parents and caregivers to choose from is important, as is assuring that all these settings are high quality, providing a healthy environment for children.

Barriers and Challenges to Early Childhood Health and Learning

While our research questions and areas of inquiry were expansive, uncovering many themes, the subject of barriers and challenges was an area that occupied much of our conversation and reflection. In order to know how to move forward, we believe, we must know what the barriers are that must be navigated and, hopefully, dissolved. We have broken the theme of *barriers* down into two categories: (1) challenges and barriers experienced by children and families and (2) challenges and barriers experienced by organizations, stakeholders, and those working with children and families. These categories are fluid, as many of these barriers expand beyond our attempts to categorize and understand them. Some of these far reaching barriers, like that of *poverty*, we will be unable to solve. We name and discuss these barriers not in attempt to solve them, but with the hope of creating a fuller understanding of the difficulties our children, families, and community face. What is preventing our children from developing and living well? What is preventing us from helping them develop well? Do there need to be any alterations or changes to the system of early childhood in Elkhart County?

Financial Insecurity: Poverty and ALICE Families

The first and perhaps most challenging of barriers experienced by the families and children of Elkhart County is that of financial insecurity, or poverty. The individuals we talked with, particularly those working with families and parents, discussed the everyday stressors that result from poverty—stressors that “make it hard to do more than just survive.” Many families in Elkhart County, including families with young children, are struggling to pay their bills, feed their families, pay for their doctors’ visits and medications, and afford the clothing, shoes, diapers, and care that their families need simply to survive. Leah Plank, Parent Aide Director at CAPS, spoke to this, saying, “If children don’t have shelter, food, and clothing, and the tangible resources that they need, it’s really hard for kids to succeed.” This stress impacts not only the ability to access material needs, but in turn impacts the way families and parents view and treat themselves, their partners, and most importantly, their children. Emily Herriott, Coordinator of Triple P, spoke to this in her interview:

“When families don’t have the resources that they need to thrive, there’s a lot more stress in daily life that affects their interactions with each other. (...) We have a lot of families in Elkhart County that are not making it financially, or are barely making it, and I think that that affects how they feel about their kids, how they feel about their spouses, how they feel about their work. And they can’t always put their best foot forward when they’re relating to their children.”

Respondents who named financial insecurities as a barrier were subsequently asked what they thought was at the core of this barrier—why are our families experiencing such financial burdens? They pointed to low wages, an economy of low-skill industry, lack of education, or generational and cultural patterns as being at the root of this barrier. Others did not have a response. In asking this question, however, we

discovered a distinction that has been drawn between those living well within the poverty guidelines and those in Elkhart County who are referred to as the “working poor,” “working families,” “ALICE families” or “gap families”—families who are employed, perhaps even in a two-income home, yet struggling to make ends meet.

United Way of Elkhart County recently financed a study of Elkhart County focused on ALICE families—ALICE being used as an acronym for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, and **E**mployed. Living just above the Federal Poverty Level, ALICE families are those who are consistently employed yet do not make enough money to meet basic monthly expenses (housing, food, health care, childcare and transportation), despite working hard. United Way’s study found the following in Elkhart County:

- 1 in 4 Elkhart County households, or 24%, is ALICE
- 17,000 Elkhart County households are ALICE
- 45,000 people are living in ALICE households
- 9,400 ALICE households are headed by a single parent

2017 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia

Persons in Family/Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$12,060
2	\$16,240
3	\$20,420
4	\$24,600
5	\$28,780
6	\$32,960
7	\$37,140
8	\$41,320
* For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,180	

Time-Poor Parents/Caregivers

Another challenge experienced by working parents is that of time-constraint. One individual used the term “time-poor parents” to describe this challenge—a term we found helpful. For parents who are working a job or multiple jobs, it can be challenging to find the time and energy to spend with their young children after work. These time-poor parents who are working hard to provide a stable income and home for their families may not be able to provide their children the educationally important activity of play and interaction. Some individuals we talked with are working to address this barrier by teaching parents how to incorporate developmentally appropriate learning activities into everyday activities, like grocery shopping or cleaning the home.

Transportation

Transportation is another restrictive barrier to children and families. In Elkhart County—a large and spread out county—the inability to drive or access a vehicle can be a major barrier to holding a job, getting your child to childcare, or accessing the resources you need. Many families in Elkhart County cannot afford a car or are unable to legally drive. Cars, along with the expenses for gas, plates, and maintenance, are expensive—an expense that many families cannot afford. There also exists among our Latino community, particularly those who are undocumented, a fear of driving. Some individuals cannot

get a license, either for lack of proper documentation or because of prior infractions and a revoked license.

Many individuals we spoke with did note the presence of the Interurban Trolley. It was generally agreed upon, however, that the trolley has many limitations; it does not go where many parents need to go, and if it does, it is far too time consuming. Transportation has been named as a contributor to low participation in parenting classes, health services, and parent-engagement activities. When parents cannot get to where they need to be, *when* they need to be there, their children suffer.

Transportation, or lack thereof, is one of the greater barriers to childcare. “After cost,” says Mona Livingston of Early Childhood Alliance, “location is the first concern of parents [when choosing childcare]. Many need the program to be within walking distance.” Because of this, parents choose a childcare program that is either close to their home or close to their work. While 30-40% of providers (mostly ministries) provide transportation, the transportation needs of families remain unmet. It should be noted that only 5% of programs provide transportation for infants.

Brightpoint, an agency that provides childcare vouchers in Elkhart County (among other things), provided us with statistics regarding childcare and transportation. According to Brightpoint’s 2016 Annual Client Survey:

- 15.3% of Early Head Start/Head Start families did not have a car in working order
- 70% of these families felt it was a barrier for them.
- Lacking their own transportation, 47.6% of these families relied on borrowing from friends and family
- 38.1% walked
- 14.3% used city busses
- 56.8% of families named transportation as an issue.

Parental and Family Health

Parental and family health is a large factor in—and possible barrier to—the health and development of a child. While physical health of a parent or caregiver may prevent one from parenting to one’s best ability, the more pressing concern we heard throughout our research was that of mental health and addiction. Magistrate Domine, when asked about the challenges for young children in Elkhart County, responded, “It’s about the health of the parents. And I say that out of growing concern for addiction, out of growing concern for mental illness. I don’t know if we have enough resources to really help parents be the parents they need to be.”

Many named the increase in parental mental illness as a primary concern. Marti Conrad, supervisor of the Healthy Babies Program of the Elkhart County Health Department, estimated in our interview that 75% of the mothers she meets with have a history of depression and/or anxiety. And that estimate, she says, may be an underestimate. Increased use of marijuana and opioids has also been noted as a concerning trend.

Mental health was named as a concern, as well as the shortage of mental health professionals, or more accurately, the lack of mental health professionals and providers who accept Medicaid. We heard this theme emerge among social service providers who refer clients to mental health services, early childhood educators who seek assessments for their students, and mental health professionals themselves who are feeling the stress of being one of few providers serving those on Medicaid in Elkhart County. There is also a shortage of child therapists in our county. Emily Herriott of Triple P mentioned the lack of Spanish speaking mental health counselors who provide services on a sliding fee scale.

Many families, particularly young mothers, entering programs like Healthy Babies and Healthy Families have very little support from their family or father of the baby. Families and mothers who feel isolated or unsupported are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. And when thinking about young children's mental health, as several respondents have said, "children's mental health is parents' mental health." Healthy relationships between parents, amongst extended family members, and between parent and child are vital in providing a young child the stability s/he needs for healthy development.

Parental and Family Trust, Openness, and Willingness to Engage

A barrier named by individuals who work with parents is a parent's openness or willingness to change and/or utilize a new resource. Many of those we interviewed who work directly with parents noted the importance of having a parent fully onboard and engaged. One of the first challenges and potential barriers to this is trust. Paula Parker of Healthy Families at CAPS says:

"For us, a big part of it is trust. People don't trust. No matter how many times you tell them 'it's free, it's voluntary, we're not DCS, we're here for you', they don't trust you. Sometimes it takes a while, and God bless the ones that let us come in time after time. (...) Trust is a really hard thing. The people that we work with, they've been hurt over and over and over, and so we represent some sort of authority to them."

Before accepting and pursuing assistance and resources for a child, a parent must first trust those who are asking to help. Several home visitors we interviewed talked about the importance of little successes, including (and beginning with) the success of being let into a home. However, even once trust and a relationship are established between client and provider, there remains a cultural barrier or generational mentality that presents yet another barrier; a barrier that prevents parents from helping their children succeed. Leah Plank, who is the director of the Parent Aide Program at CAPS, says:

"I never met a parent—and I've met a lot of parents—who really doesn't want something better for their children. Although, as children get older, there is sometimes an attitude of 'you're not going to be better than me.' (...) They say, 'don't be uppity' or 'remember where you come from.' It's really hard to work within that. It really comes back to educating those parents, and the new parents, and the grandparents, because that's the support system. If someone is at the wheel saying, 'don't think you can do that,' we're not working together on the same vision at all."

Parents and primary caregivers are key to the growth, learning, and success of young children. While they have great power to positively influence their children, there's also a great risk that negative experiences, trauma, and beliefs held by parents can impair their ability to do so.

In our conversations, another barrier was named: the fear of being labeled a "bad parent." This fear, along with the discomfort of asking for help has made engaging and educating parents particularly difficult. Mary Kay Longacre of Goshen Community Schools said, "We have to help parents figure out that it's okay to ask for help and lean on each other. Sometimes parents think we expect them to have all the answers, but we just expect us all to work together."

There also exists a perception that only those who are really desperate or experiencing "serious" problems should seek help in parenting. One individual we talked with told us of a conversation she overheard in which a group of parents were discussing parenting struggles. This individual suggested to them a parenting class, a flyer for which she had on the desk in front of her. They dismissed her suggestion, saying, "Oh, our parenting struggles aren't intense. We don't want to take up room in that

class for people who really need help. We struggle but it's not at that level of severity." Normalizing parenting struggles and encouraging parents to seek resources and assistance, though difficult, is vital.

These barriers experienced by children and families of Elkhart County are only a few of the many we heard named in our 48 interviews. Yet these barriers—these themes—are prominent and persistent. The individuals we met with are all working, in one way or another, to help our county's families navigate and move beyond these barriers. But in the process, these individuals and their organizations must navigate their own barriers and limitations, both internal and external.

Barriers and Challenges for Organizations, Providers and Stakeholders

Funding

Finding adequate financial resources in the field of early childhood education and health is a challenge experienced by many individuals and organizations we talked with. Though some organizations have steadily received state or federal money, many have experienced cuts in recent years. These cuts limit programmatic opportunities, as well as the ability to keep and pay staff well.

Marti Conrad, Healthy Babies Program supervisor at Elkhart County Health Department, told us of the large financial cuts her department has undergone in recent years. These cuts come from the Federal and State level and have significantly reduced funding for WIC and other programs supporting the health of mothers and their young children—programs that help families afford nutritional food, prenatal care, and children's healthcare.

When Healthy Babies at the Elkhart County Health Department was fully staffed, their team consisted of three full-time and three part-time social workers, one full-time RN who worked with Substance Use and Tobacco Cessation, and one part-time RN who did Mother-Baby Home visits. Healthy Babies has now been cut down to only one full-time and three part-time social workers. There is also one part-time individual working with Tobacco Cessation; substance use services are no longer provided at this location.

Turnover

Those working in social services and early childhood education are hit particularly hard by high turnover rates of staff. Heather Miller, Director of the Bristol Street Growing Kids discussed the challenge of keeping her teachers; many of her employees are young and at a transient time in their lives, leading to high turnover. Others leave for higher paying factory work. Heather did note that several of her teachers, after leaving for factory work, returned because of the rewarding nature of teaching and supportive environment of Growing Kids.

With the influx of new hires, keeping up with training can be overwhelming. Finding qualified teachers is another challenge. For providers who are Paths to Quality, there are educational requirements for teachers—requirements that can be hard to meet. The Career Center and Ivy Tech have come together with their early childhood education degree, helping high school students receive their CDA before graduation. This is an asset to our community, providing new and trained teachers ready to work.

Language Barriers

Another staffing challenge experienced by organizations in Elkhart County is finding bilingual staff. With a large and growing Hispanic population, having staff that not only speak Spanish but also understand the cultural context of this population is important. But this is hard to find. Engaging and getting

information to minority populations is another challenge. These include but are not limited to Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Amish communities.

Communication and Messaging

Communication and messaging was also named as a challenge. Leah Plank of CAPS noted, “It takes a long time for families that are isolated and don’t have a huge support network to know all of the things that are happening in their communities. Finding a creative way to market, if you will, or get that information in the right hands is key.” No matter how strong a program or organization is, if their information and resources are not reaching those they need to reach, they will not be utilized.

Jeff Fater, Men’s Coach at RETA, discussed the challenge of misinformation, assumptions, and getting accurate descriptions of resources and services into the community: “Most people still assume we’re just a pregnancy support service; not enough people know who we are and what we do. People are particularly unaware of services for fathers.” RETA, along with several other agencies we spoke with are investing more heavily in marketing and development, working towards more effective communication and outreach.

The subject of communication now brings us to the closely connected *collaboration*. After mapping out the early childhood landscape, strengths and barriers included, we explored the theme of collaboration in this particular field.

Collaboration: Attitudes, Experiences, and Next Steps

Elkhart County, as previously discussed, has a collaborative spirit. This spirit was evident in the March 23rd gathering and in our subsequent interviews. In speaking with Kathy Guajardo, Executive Director of Head Start, Kathy said, “Collaboration and partnerships are essential. Coming together and mobilizing is essential, otherwise you don’t stand a chance. It’s rough out there to do it on your own.”

Some perceive it to be not only rough in their particular field, but nearly impossible. Paula Parker, Supervisor of Healthy Families, spoke to the interdependence among actors, saying: “We benefit from coordination because we rely on each other to take over parts that we cannot do. We’re not therapists, so we rely on those who do have that training. (...) We need those supports and to have each other’s backs in the community.”

Dr. Kristin Tawadros, Clinical Psychologist and Team Leader of the Child and Adolescent team of Oaklawn, echoed this sentiment, saying “Coordination is a very big part of our work; we can’t meet the needs of the families without other programs and services.” Some of those we spoke with named collaboration as the next step to building upon our successes and the system in place. Shannon Gage, Program Director of Early Childhood Alliance (ECA), stated:

“We have such a greater impact when we work together, when we have sustainable connections, and reach more people. The community needs to see collaboration as important, which I believe is the case. But also needs to learn how to do it and how to do it together. The early childhood system is good, and we’re building more as a system. (...) In order to build on our successes we need to come together, and not be afraid to come together; we need trust.”

While all those we talked with named collaboration as something of value, we also heard about the frustrations, hesitations, and challenges surrounding collaboration. Some spoke of past exciting and innovative collaborative projects that, in time, lost momentum and left them disappointed. Others spoke of the time-consuming nature of collaboration, saying that so often collaboration is comprised of

meeting after meeting, conversation after conversation, and followed up by little action. Emily Herriott of Triple P spoke to the challenge of follow through, saying:

“We want to partner in a variety of ways; the intent is all there, the desire is all there. The challenge has been that people and organizations already have very full plates, are doing lots of things. For them to fully engage and do as much as we would desire for them to do is challenging for them. The intent is really good, but the ability to follow through is sometimes a challenge.”

Communication, which is essential to collaboration, has also been named as a challenge. Allison McLean of the Elkhart Public Library spoke of the challenge of communicating across sectors, saying: We may have similar missions but different language to express it, (...) which complicates communication and collaboration. Sometimes working together sounds like a good idea, but the logistics and details can be difficult to work out. We’ve got to have a plan before jumping in.”

Kim Boyton, previously at Elkhart County Schools, said: “It’s a big county and lots of things are happening. We have to make sure communication is clear, roles are clear, and keep everyone in the loop: providers, businesses, parents, etc. There’s a lot of confusion in Elkhart County among providers and parents and agencies. We need better communication.”

Having a plan and clear communication is important, especially when there is confusion surrounding who is who and who does what. Many parents as well as agencies are unaware of what is out there. There is much need for clarity of resources and services, as well as a more effective mode of distributing and accessing information and resources. Justin Allen, Director of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), said all the initiatives, services, and programs overwhelm him at times. “It’s difficult to provide all the information to volunteers and be able to differentiate one initiative or service from another,” said Justin. He, and many others want to know: “What’s out there and to whom does it apply?”

This desire for clarity of initiatives, services, and resources is one of several desires named by those we interviewed. Another desire that was named is the desire for a unified voice and vision in the arena of early childhood—a vision that allows for diversity in actors and missions, yet unites all under a common goal. We wonder, what may that goal, vision, and voice be?

Some named advocacy as a rallying point for our various organizations and individuals. Voter education and improved and expanded advocacy efforts were mentioned by several individuals as potential next steps. Many desired a resource guide containing providers, organizations, and others working in the field of early childhood, along with contact information and description of services and resources provided. This resource could be helpful for both professionals and parents. Some brought up the idea of holding a resource fair for parents and families—a one-stop-shop where providers, educators, and other organizations and services connected to early childhood could gather and be accessible to parents and families. Smaller collaborative opportunities were named as well: shared training and programmatic opportunities for providers, block grant initiatives, and cross discipline conferences were some of the few named.

Areas for Further Exploration

Throughout our conversations, other strong themes emerged that we feel are worthy of mentioning and potential further exploration. If we are to alter or rebuild a system that better life and development for our county’s young children, these are some things we may want to consider. These are some of the areas around which we may gather and work together, accomplishing more together than we could as individuals.

- *Engaging and involving the business community* – While many in our community are on board and understand the importance of early childhood, many individuals we spoke with saw the business community as difficult yet important to engage. Businesses are in a unique position to help offset childcare costs, provide information regarding early childhood care and education to their employees, and create more family-friendly work environments.
- *Finding a unified vision and voice* – Some individuals we spoke with had interest in finding a unified vision and voice in order to educate the public and advocate for early childhood concerns. It has been mentioned by some that advocacy skills are not very developed in this field and that the development and exercise of such skills could lead to much progress and support of this work.
- *Improving knowledge and communication of resources and services* – Another area to explore is that of communication about resources. Many parents, as well as agencies, are unaware of what is out there. There is much need for clarity of resources and services, as well as a more effective mode of distributing and accessing information and resources.
- *Focusing on birth to three years* – Some people we interviewed mentioned the importance of the birth to three years period of development and voiced their concern about the lack of resources for this age group. These early years in the child and family's life are often especially difficult, yet so incredibly important for health and development, as 70% of a child's brain is developed by age 3 and 90% developed by age 5.
- *Data and Information* – Many people we spoke with feel that they have plenty of data and believe it to be helpful. Some individuals desire more data, believing it would increase the effectiveness of their work or organization. We also found that data is not easily or commonly shared across early childhood organizations, leaving organizations and individuals unaware of what information others track or hold. Some attributed the difficulty or lack of data sharing to the multitude of different methods and efforts to track data. While some organizations' data is more quantitative (numbers), others' is more qualitative (anecdotal). Some individuals expressed satisfaction with current amounts of data and information and others expressed a desire for greater sharing of data. Exploring the possibility of a countywide dashboard or initiative to share data and information may be something to consider.

A New View of the System: The Ecological System of Human Development

One helpful tool we have found to frame our understanding of the early childhood system is the Ecological System Theory of Development, the theory of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner was one of the first developmental psychologists to make visible the multiplicity of systems that affect a child's health and development. His holistic approach to understanding the progression of young lives is one that we hope to emulate in our work here.

An interpretation of Bronfenbrenner that we use to frame our findings is inspired by the work of Tani Marilena Adams, a good and inspired friend. Tani utilized the Ecological System of Development in a study on chronic violence and human development in Latin America. Using a theory such as Bronfenbrenner's allows us to expand our peripheral vision and see early childhood as the expansive field it is. The following is an excerpt from Tani Marilena Adams, presenting her understanding of the Ecological System Theory of Development:

Human development is rooted in but transcends human security. It takes place in a multi-tiered system that extends from the micro-level relationship between parents and children to macro-level institutions and cultures and unfolds over time. Bronfenbrenner's formulation shows that personal, social, and political aspects of an individual's development are inseparable and

integral to each other; and that individual development occurs interactively with local, national, and global structures, actors, beliefs, and cultures. For people to thrive as individuals, social beings, and citizens, they need conditions that allow them to flourish physically and psychologically, and to develop increasingly inclusive and expansive relationships and actions as both social and civic participants.¹¹

Bronfenbrenner's multi-tiered system includes the following elements, illustrated in Figure 1 below:

- The *microsystem* contains the developing person, what s/he brings into the world, and the interpersonal relations s/he experiences. The primary maternal–infant bond or parental– infant bond is the initial and most critical relationship for lifelong development;
- The *mesosystem* consists of the interrelationships between the primary relations of the developing person, which support his or her development;
- The *exosystem* is the larger web of interactions that directly affect the developing person but may or may not involve them. For a child, this might include interactions between parents, peers, and teachers and the family doctor. The extent to which such actors communicate with each other and have mutual interests is an indicator of the child's ability to thrive;
- The *macrosystem* is the larger pattern of relations and structures that interact with the lower systems. An example is the multiple faces of health care, from the informal practices within a family to national and international institutions. It includes actors, institutions, and the ideas and beliefs about the subject that inform, reproduce, and drive them; and
- The *chronosystem* depicts the fact that the four systems described above evolve and change over time.¹²

¹¹ Tani, xiv

¹² Tani, (Bronfenbrenner 1994, 1979)

IDEAL ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

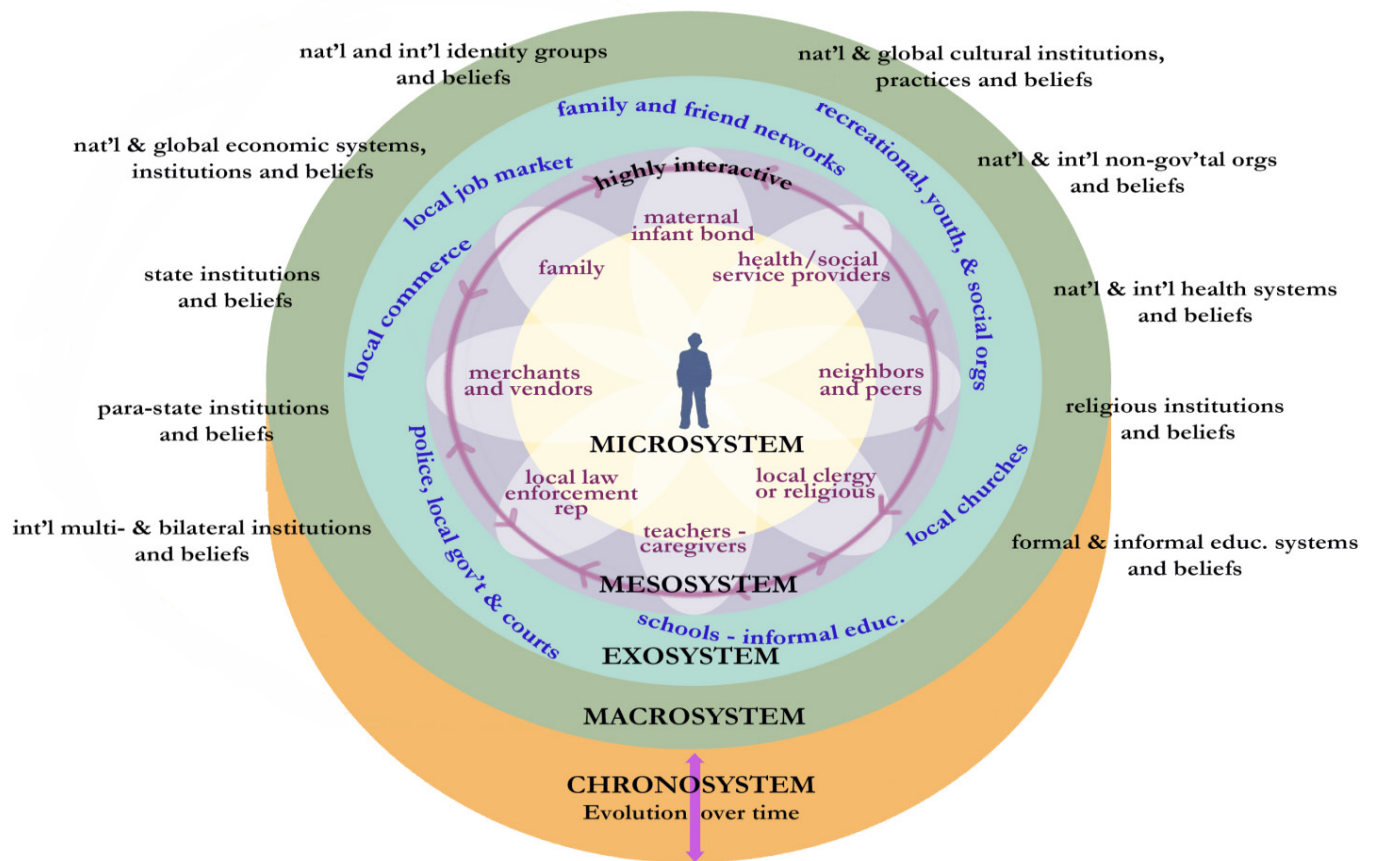


Figure 1. Ecological System of Human Development¹³

Key Questions and Thoughts for Each Sphere of the System

Microsystem: For parents, teachers, caregivers, librarians, and others working directly with children, the microsystem is an important level to address and explore. These are the individuals who have the most interaction and opportunity with the young children of Elkhart County. Though this system is the most immediate and quite vital facet of child development, most of the individuals we interviewed do not fit into this category. There are many, however, who work to support those interacting more directly with children; most of this work is directed towards parents and early childhood educators.

For those of us who are in immediate relationship with young children and find ourselves in the microsphere of a child's life, the question is: how can we better interact and affect young children? What curriculums, what parenting methods, what direct interventions can be employed to better the development and health of our children. Ultimately, those who have the most direct and prolonged contact with young children are the ones who will most impact their development. In this sense, educating and preparing our county's parents to parent well is essential.

¹³ Tani's article

Mesosystem: At this level, relationship is key: relationships between spouses, parents and teachers, etc. The ways in which individuals in these positions and relationships interact greatly impacts a child's wellbeing. How can we encourage better communication and interactions that foster greater cohesion and facilitate smooth transitions from one sphere to another in a child's life?

- Working to better family dynamics and relationships between parents
- Relationship between parent and extended family
- Parent involvement in school/with teachers
- Parent involvement in social services
- Agencies working together
- Legal system – DCS, CASA, police, judge
- Directors Roundtable and Tools of the Mind – providers working together
- Referrals across agencies – importance of communication

Exosystem: Not all of us work in positions that bring us in direct contact with children. Not all of us have the gift or need to do so. But many of us work with those who are in direct contact with children. We work with parents of young children, teachers of young children, educators, mentors, or social service providers that work with young children. In this position, how can we act and what can we do to better the interactions and impact that *these* individuals will have on young children. How can we support and prepare them?

- Parent and employer
- Parent and housing authority/landlord
- ECA quality coaches and providers
- “Boots on the ground workers” and their superiors/administrators

Macrosystem: This is for those of us, and really all of us, who are impacted by culture. These are the barriers like language and culture that prevent children or parents from accessing services or even seeing services as necessary. This is the fear of being labeled a bad parent or a bad kid.

- Cultural differences – African American, Latino, Amish
- National and State culture and attitudes towards early childhood education
- Differences in culture and values across sectors – business community vs. education community

Chronosystem: Response of parents: “Well, we didn’t have this when I was growing up; my kid doesn’t need that, s/he will be fine” – Reality is, we now have more research and knowledge regarding the importance of those early years. We now know better and must *do* better. This is a different time, a different setting (with trends of technology, changes to family structure, economic changes, etc.) and we must be willing to adapt in order to meet the needs of children *today*. This is our opportunity to raise the next generation, to do things differently and do them better.

Appendix 1: Individuals and Organizations Interviewed

Organization	Representative(s) Interviewed
Boys and Girls Club of Elkhart County	Kevin Deary - Executive Director Travon Curry - Kids Care
Campus Center for Young Children	Janet Whalen Couch - Director
CAPS-Child and Parent Services	Candy Yoder - Executive Director Justin Allen - Director of CASA Netra Brown - Parent Aide Family Support Specialist Kaylie Bruinsma - Director of Building Blocks Betty Maravilla - Supervisor of Healthy Families Paula Parker - Supervisor of Healthy Families Leah Plank - Director of Parent Aide
Chamberlain Elementary	Delia Murillo - Parent Liaison
Community Foundation of Elkhart County	Amanda Jamison - Program Officer Youth Development and Scholarships
Early Childhood Alliance	Shannon Gage - Program Director Mona Livingston - Coaching and Outreach
Early Childhood of Elkhart County	Carla Biro-Elkhart County Early Childhood Coordinator
Elkhart Area Career Center - Early Childhood Education, Teen Program	Barbara Gingerich - Early Childhood
Elkhart Child Development Center	Paula Mumaw - Executive Director
Elkhart County Special Education Cooperative	Debra Midgley - Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator
Elkhart County Health Department	Marti Conrad-Healthy Babies Program Supervisor at Elkhart County Health Melanie Sizemore-Director of Healthy Beginnings Division of Elkhart County Health Department
Elkhart Community Schools	Meredith Warnock - Early Childhood Coordinator
Elkhart General Hospital	Patty Gremaux
Elkhart Housing Authority	Taresa Walker - Special Programs Coordinator
Elkhart Public Library	Allison McLean - Director of Children's Services
Faith Mission	Mike Perez - Resource/Development Director LaTosha Davis - Case Manager
Goshen Community Schools	Mary Kay Longacre - Director of Grants and Assessment
Goshen Health System	Jennifer Van Fleet - Childbirth Education Coordinator
Goshen Public Library	Tina Ervin - Director of Children's Services
Government	Wes Culver - Representative of Indiana House of Representatives
Grace Community Church	Taanan Peters - Child Pastor K-12
Growing Kids	Mike Garatoni - Executive Director Heather Miller - Director of Bristol Street Growing Kids
Head Start	Kathy Guajardo - Executive Director
Horizon Education Alliance	Kathy Royer - Associate Director
Juvenile Court	Deborah Domine - Judge
Kingdom Kids Pre-School	Erica Siegel - Director
Maple City Health Care Center	Dr. James Gingerich – Founder, Director, Doctor

Oaklawn	Dr. Kristin Tawadros - Clinical Psychologist and Team Leader for Child and Adolescent team
RETA	Roxanna Konopinski - Executive Director Jeff Fater-Men's Coach
Triple P of Elkhart County	Emily Herriott - Coordinator
United Way of Elkhart County	Bill Rieth - President/CEO Keith Sarber - Vice President of Community Impact
United Way of Kosciusko County	Darren Bickel - President, previously at United Way of Elkhart County Kim Boynton - Previously at Elkhart Community Schools
Walnut Hill Early Childhood Center	Erin Syslo - Executive Director

Appendix 2: Questions for Stakeholder Interviews

Guiding Goals and Questions for Interviews

The purpose of these interviews is to answer the following core questions in order to achieve two primary goals

1. Map the early childhood system/landscape in Elkhart County – Develop a good picture of the current state of play
 - *What do key actors identify as current strengths and challenges in the early childhood landscape in Elkhart County?*
 - *What is the specific role and work of each actor and their own perceived challenges and successes?*
 - *Who do key actors identify as other key actors in the early childhood landscape (system)?*
 - *What information/data is identified as playing a key role in this work / when, where, with whom and how is it shared?*
2. Test for the need / interest stakeholders have for some kind of collaborative process to enhance collective impact
 - *Where do key actors perceive need and opportunity for greater collaboration and what do they identify as potential shared objectives this collaboration would pursue?*

Interview Protocol

- A. Personal background and story *(roughly 5-10 minutes)*
 - Can you tell us a bit about the work you do and what led you into this work?
 - What most excites or motivates you in this work?
 - *(Optional if necessary or useful) Can you share a story or anecdote that illustrates what you most value about this work?*
- B. Identifying strengths and success *(roughly 7-8 minutes)*
 - As you think about the local context and landscape for early childhood development, tell me about what you see that seems to be working well? Where are you seeing successes in your own work and in the broader landscape? Can you share a story or example that helps illustrate this success?
 - What do you see as some of the significant strengths of our local environment (institutions, services, opportunities, culture) that are having a positive impact in terms of facilitating or enabling healthy development of our children?
 - Have you noticed any shifts in the context or trends over the past number of years that contributes positively to this work?
 - What ideas do you have on how to further build on these strengths?
- C. Identifying challenges *(roughly 7-8 minutes)*
 - What have you found to be some of more significant barriers that children face in our community in terms of their learning/development?
 - What examples can you share to help illustrate these barriers or challenges?
 - What thoughts do you have about what keeps these barriers or challenges in place?
 - Have you noticed any shifts in the context or trends over the past number of years that contributes to these barriers or challenges?

- What ideas do you have about what is most needed to overcome these barriers and ensure conditions for children to thrive?
- What piece do you play in this?
 - What is the specific role you play and the contribution you make towards improving conditions for healthy development of our children?

D. Exploring and understanding success and effectiveness *(roughly 7-8 minutes)*

- Can you share a story or some examples that illustrate what success in your work looks like?
 - What do you think has most contributed to your success? (internal/external factors)
 - What approaches do you use to assess effectiveness in terms of changes or results achieved?
- What do you feel are the most significant constraints to achieving greater effectiveness?
- What are the other factors beyond your work/control that influences the degree of success you are able to achieve and sustain?

E. Understanding the broader system of actors *(roughly 10 minutes)*

- If you were to imagine a picture illustrating the many different actors that play an important role in health and well being of our children, whom would you include in this picture in terms of individuals, organizations, and institutions?
- To what extent does your work (and the work of your organization) depend on or involve coordination with some of these other actors?
- What has been your experience with coordination efforts?
 - With whom do you currently coordinate and what does that look like?
 - Where has it worked well? What made it work well? How did you benefit from the coordination?
 - Where has it been more difficult and why?
 - Do you see areas where increased coordination would likely contribute to greater positive impact in the well being of our children? If so, could you talk about how this might be useful and what might be needed to facilitate greater coordination?

F. Reflections around information and data *(roughly 7-8 minutes)*

- Are there types of data or information your organization collects and/or tracks that informs the work you do? If so, how is it used?
- Are there other types of data or information, if it were made available, would benefit your work?
- Where is the lack of information or data most strongly felt?
- Are there useful mechanisms that help organizations working on issues of early childhood to share and access relevant information in Elkhart County? If so, what are they?
- If there were a countywide early childhood dashboard, what would you want on it?

G. Exploring interest in ongoing process of engaging early childhood system: *(roughly 10-15 minutes)*

- We are interested in hearing more about how participants responded to the March 23 event. What do you think was most valuable about this meeting? Was there anything you wished was done differently at that meeting?

- If there were a process focused on convening and engaging the broad group of actors involved in different parts of the early childhood system, what interest would you have in participating?
- How might you and your work benefit concretely from such a process?
- If there were such a process, what would you want it to focus on...
What would be a shared goal or objective that you think this group could address more effectively together as a collective that individually would be more difficult to achieve?
- Is there anything you would hope such a process would avoid or not focus on?
- Have there been efforts in the past to coordinate organizations in a collective manner?
 - If so, what happened to that effort? What results were achieved?

H. Wrap up questions

- Are there any other questions you wished we had asked you?
- What are you curious about learning from others?
- Who else would be good for us to talk with?

Appendix 3: Members of the Parent Engagement Network (PEN) and/or the Early Childhood Learning System Network (ECLS)

Candy Yoder	CEO of Child and Parent Services (CAPS)
Carla Biro	Ministry Coach of Early Childhood Alliance
Dawn McGrath	Deputy Superintendent of Elkhart Community Schools
Diana Montiel	Beacon Health System-Dame Tu Mano
Don Jantzi	Parent and Child Engagement Coordinator of HEA
Emily Herriott	Coordinator of Triple P Elkhart County
Judie Jones	Parenting Director of CAPS
Marti Conrad	Healthy Babies Elkhart County Health Department
Phil Thomas	International coach, facilitator, consultant, founder and principal D3 Associates
Rocio Diaz	Coordinator of Intercultural Community Engagement at Center for Intercultural and International Education (CIIE) at Goshen College