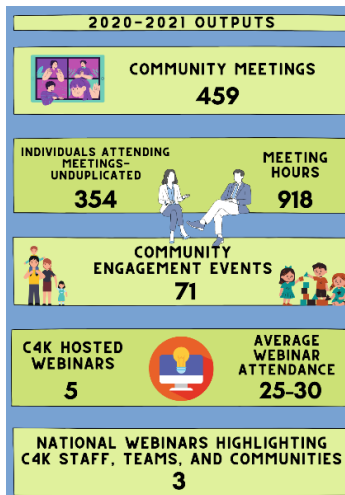


July 2020-June 2021 Annual Report

The Communities for Kids year in review is a collection of outcomes, outputs, evaluation points, successes, and challenges—but most importantly, it is the Nebraska story of our communities prioritizing the importance of increasing capacity and enhancing quality for early care and education across our state. Our team of 8 staff, 41 communities, 30 Early Childhood Community Coordinators, along with hundreds of local volunteers, have worked tirelessly to build local infrastructure and align with providers, families, local businesses, economic development, and policy makers.



National events (click links to view): [PBS News Hour](#), [Council for a Strong America](#), [American Enterprise Institute](#)

The private work of Communities for Kids has provided a strong anchor for building on local infrastructure and planning. Communities that have been part of the C4K work are ready to take full advantage of the opportunities for expanded efforts. The C4K team, who have remained consistently staffed this past year, have met expansion, challenges, and opportunities with a focus on maintaining our primary goals of capacity/access and high-quality programming. With this experienced team working with communities and bringing with them such varied experiences and expertise, the C4K model has been strengthened and a focus made on streamlining processes, evaluation, and consistency. The C4K team, along with the entire Nebraska Children and Families Foundation team, continued to adjust due to the pandemic. While the lack of in-person work has created some barriers, this team has not missed a beat through adapting new community orientations to a virtual platform. Even stronger connections with community teams have been made while we've worked through the pandemic together.

We are currently serving 41 communities with high touch technical assistance with each one seeing progress (note the attached C4K Progress Matrix demonstrating each community's progress). Additionally, we have offered limited advisement to many communities that are interested in more in-depth assistance but remain on a waiting list for full support (this currently includes 30 communities). In reflection of the last four years since this initiative began, it is clear that we have created a demand for the work we are doing, and Nebraskans are recognizing child care as a valuable asset to a community's growth and vitality. The attached chart demonstrates the ongoing progress of each community, by cohort.

STAFF TEAM



The C4K team includes 8 full-time employees.

From left to right: Noelle Wegner, Lindsay Bartlett, Shonna Werth, Jackie Farrell, Marti Beard, Rachel Sissel, and Courtney Albrecht; not pictured Chris Nord.

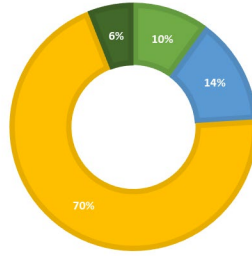
The C4K team has been at the center of the early childhood COVID-19 efforts for Nebraska. Our team has led the CARES Act funds for DHHS to distribute approximately \$14M in Child Care CARES Act funds, for Child Care Relief, Stabilization, and Incentive to Reopen Funds and are working on the CARES 1.5 funds totaling nearly \$9M additional dollars to providers. Throughout these challenges and co-priorities, we have continued to connect with each community weekly and assist local teams to move forward with their priorities.

PARTNERSHIP AND EXPANSION OF WORK

The Community for Kids partnership and alignment of work with many partners has grown stronger this past year, in particular, working with First Five Nebraska (FFN). FFN attends each new community orientation and participates as an active part of the agenda. A FFN representative has been part of the majority of C4K community events presenting the economic/business impact, return on investment and community development. Over the past year, many community C4K Core team members who participated in two past Policy Leadership Academy series attended monthly virtual alumni meetings. These gatherings have been used to share legislative updates, hearing schedules, and invitations to testify, public speak, or submit written statements for various pro early childhood and pro early childhood workforce legislative bills. Due to this ongoing effort, many representatives have publicly testified for the following bills, LB266 (school readiness tax credit), LB485 (expanded eligibility for child care subsidy), and LB351 (Step Up to Quality rating retention). There was also an overwhelming representation of public comments provided orally and in writing by child care providers across the state regarding proposed child care licensing regulation changes. The monthly alumni meetings also provide an opportunity for communities to share local successes of partnerships that came together to support early childhood care and education programs during COVID-19. First Five Nebraska has partnered with several C4K communities at local events, either virtually or in person, over the past year such as panel members in both Broken Bow and Ord following a showing of No Small Matter and the Grand Opening of Stick Creek Kids in Wood River. This partnership is one of many that demonstrates the connection and resources communities may not have had access to or utilized without the C4K initiative in place.

The Preschool Development Grant, Communities for Kids PLUS (C4K+) initiative, led by the C4K team, has awarded over \$2.4M in community grants beginning in October 2020 and will continue to do so annually for the next two years. Thanks to the forward thinking of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the William and Ruth Scott Foundation that launched this C4K initiative with Nebraska Children in July 2017 additional federal funds (see pie chart below) were able to be leveraged and are being distributed to communities and child care providers across Nebraska. Note: Leveraged Funds are local community funds that are non-grant funded.

■ Private Dollars (\$1,733,009) ■ PDG B - 5 (\$2,434,873)
■ COVID CARES (\$12,472,00) ■ Leveraged Funds (\$1,097,243)



20/21 GOALS UPDATE

GOAL	Resources/ Partners	Timeline	Progress
Support 31 communities with high touch technical assistance and funds to assist with planning	Scott Family Foundation, BECF, NCCF	Beginning July 2020- ongoing	31 communities received high touch technical support and made progress towards capacity and quality goals
Develop intentional strategies to support and include representation of diversity within each community	NCCF	Beginning July 2020- ongoing	Each community was challenged to expand leadership teams to include diverse team members. Teams increased diversity and in particular Spanish speaking provider and family opportunities increased.
Enhance C4K work and funding in select communities through the PDG funds and opportunities, including the addition of two PDG designated team members	DHHS, FFN, BECI, NDE, NCCF	Beginning July 2020- ongoing	Two team members were hired and trained. PDG programming was early implemented and designed to complement the private C4K Model.
CARES Act funding disbursed to 85% of all licensed Nebraska Child Care providers	DHHS, Federal CARES Act	Beginning July 2020- December 2020	75% of licensed child care providers were awarded funds through CARES Act.
Implement Early Learning Scholarships	Scott Family Foundation, BECF, PDG, local funds raised at the community level	Beginning October 2020- ongoing	Scholarships began in March 2021, including funding to 18 communities.
Develop a robust evaluation system in coordination with the PDG evaluation systems	UNMC, BECI, BECF, NCCF, Scott Family Fund	Beginning August 2020- ongoing	A robust logic model was developed and multiple components of the C4K work is evaluated. See this report and attached focus group, ReadyRosie and PDG/C4K+ reports.

<p>Year-long webinar series for C4K communities- focusing on storytelling and how to tell their early childhood community stories</p>	<p>FFN, BECI, Community leaders, implementing PDG 2019-2020 funded resources</p>	<p>Beginning September 2020-ongoing</p>	<p>This was a huge success. Six sessions (5 being webinars) were offered with 25-30 attendees per session. The webinar series included Creating/Developing a community early childhood story; Using key messages in community stories; Tailoring community stories for funders and grant applications; Tailoring community stories and messages to specific audiences (I.e. civic, government, etc); Tailoring and utilizing community stories for capital campaigns and fundraising; and Tailoring community stories and messages for policy leaders, elected officials and economic development staff.</p>
<p>Open application process to ten new C4K communities through PDG funds for three years of technical assistance and funding</p>	<p>DHHS, PDG</p>	<p>Beginning January 2021- April 2023</p>	<p>Ten new communities were offered PDG funding beginning in May 2021.</p>

COMMUNITY SUCCESSES

Each community has experienced great success, and many challenges, as they develop strategies and business plans to increase child care capacity and quality. Highlighted below are some of those successes.



ADAMS COUNTY COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH AND SUPPORTS THE KENESAW UNITED CHILD CARE COALITION (KUCCC). THE KUCCC TEAM WAS RECENTLY GIFTED THE VACATED METHODIST CHURCH AND \$110,000 TO FULFILL THEIR VISION OF QUALITY EARLY CHILD CARE ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL CHILDREN IN KENESAW. THE ADAMS C4K TEAM SUPPORTED THEM WITH ARCHITECTURE AND ZONING APPROVAL FEES. THEY CO-HOSTED COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSIONS IN MAY WHERE THE VISION WAS SHARED, A TOUR OF THE FACILITY WAS HELD, AND DRAFTS OF THE RENOVATIONS WERE REVEALED. THEY HAVE BEGUN THE PROCESS TO OPEN THEIR CENTER TO A SMALL NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNTIL THE ENTIRE FACILITY CAN BE RENOVATED INTO A QUALITY EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.



Photo credit: Grand Island Independent

WOOD RIVER COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS FINALLY SAW THEIR DREAM COME TRUE. ON MAY 2, 2021, STICK CREEK KIDS INVITED COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO THEIR GRAND OPENING AND RIBBON CUTTING. THEY OFFICIALLY OPENED THEIR DOORS ON MAY 4, 2021. THE FACILITY IS LICENSED FOR A CAPACITY OF 80 CHILDREN. THEY ARE CURRENTLY CARING FOR AN AVERAGE OF 50 CHILDREN PER DAY, WITH 68 CHILDREN ENROLLED, AND HAVE 23 DEDICATED STAFF. THIS HAS BEEN A TREMENDOUS ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR THE WOOD RIVER C4K TEAM. THEY CONTINUE TO SHARE THEIR JOURNEY WITH MULTIPLE COMMUNITIES IN HOPES TO OFFER SUPPORT AND SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE GAINED THROUGH THIS PROCESS. IN THIS WAY, THEY ARE NOT ONLY IMPACTING THE GROWTH OF QUALITY CHILD CARE IN WOOD RIVER, BUT ACROSS THE STATE OF NEBRASKA AND BEYOND.

NEMAHA COUNTY IS WORKING TO GROW RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT WITH EARLY CARE PROVIDERS THROUGH BRAIDING THEIR SIXPENCE CCP FUNDING THROUGH AUBURN PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITH C4K FUNDING, ENABLING QUALITY ENHANCEMENT SUPPORT TO NON CCP PROGRAMS. THEY ARE ALSO PARTNERING WITH RURAL PROSPERITY NEBRASKA AND THEIR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP FOR A COUNTY WIDE SURVEY, INCLUSIVE OF THE ECQCS.

Nemaha



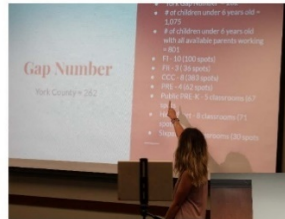
DODGE COUNTY C4K IS PARTNERING WITH ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIPS, COMMUNITY WELL BEING, AND UNITED WAY TO REACH OUT TO PROVIDERS AND PARENTS IN THE COMMUNITY TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY CHILD CARE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION AND LEARNING.

Dodge County



GERING CHILD & AFTER-SCHOOL CARE	
City of Gering	Y
St. Ann's Catholic Church	Y
St. Joseph's Catholic Church	Y
St. Peter's Catholic Church	Y
St. Vincent's Catholic Church	Y
St. Mary's Catholic Church	Y
St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church	Y
St. Francis Catholic Church	Y
St. Ignace Catholic Church	Y
St. Raphael Catholic Church	Y
St. Thome Catholic Church	Y
St. Ann's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Joseph's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Peter's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Vincent's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Mary's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Francis Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Ignace Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Raphael Catholic Church (Gering)	Y
St. Thome Catholic Church (Gering)	Y

Gering



York

MEMBERS OF THE GERING COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS TEAM WALKED IN THE OREGON TRAIL DAYS KIDS PARADE TO PROMOTE THEIR EFFORTS, SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITY, AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDERS. TEAM MEMBERS PASSED OUT MAGNETS THAT INCLUDES ALL THE GERING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS CONTACT INFORMATION, AGES SERVED, AND SERVICES PROVIDED.

THE YORK COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS TEAM CO-HOSTED A COMMUNITY EVENT, TARGETING BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYERS, TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IMPACT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD ON LOCAL ECONOMIES, OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT, AND PARTNERSHIP. THE EVENT HELD IN LATE JUNE, HAD OVER 35 ATTENDEES AND SEVERAL LOCAL BUSINESSES REPRESENTED. THIS EVENT WAS HOSTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YORK COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION AND YORK AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.



WHAT IF BURWELL DOESN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE CHILD CARE SHORTAGE?
It's a ripple effect...
Inadequate child care prevents families from improving incomes...
...which impacts the bottom line of businesses & economic growth of our community and state
Let's keep Burwell thriving!

Burwell



Amanda Smith Abigail Gustad Angelina Fregoso

Dakota County / Madison County

SANDHILLS FIRST STEPS, INC. WAS CREATED AS THE FORMAL BURWELL/GARFIELD COUNTY COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS TEAM. AS SANDHILLS FIRST STEPS, A 501C3, DESIGNS PLANS FOR AN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENTER IN BURWELL, THEY ARE ALSO FOCUSING ON SUPPORTING CURRENT & ASPIRATIONAL PROVIDERS IN THEIR COMMUNITY. THE TEAM IS ALSO CONTINUING TO SHARE MESSAGES WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. ALL THE ABOVE PICTURES WERE POSTS SHARED ON THE SANDHILLS FIRST STEPS FACEBOOK PAGE, REACHING 260+ FOLLOWERS.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY COORDINATORS (ECCC) IN DAKOTA AND MADISON COUNTIES PARTNERED WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO HOLD TRAININGS FOR BILINGUAL PROVIDERS. THIS EVENT WAS WELL RECEIVED, WAS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT BLOG AND WAS ALSO THEN REPLICATED BY ANOTHER ECCC IN DOUGLAS COUNTY.

EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIPS

The Early Learning Scholarships program is up and going and making an impact for Nebraska Families! The scholarship is intended to support working families in meeting the high cost of quality care for children 6 weeks – 6 years in full day/year-round settings (not attending kindergarten) or attending the program due to a need for care that extends beyond the hours provided by a publicly funded program (e.g., wrapping hours around Head Start or Public Preschool).

Support includes increasing access to high-quality care for young children in low and moderate earning families in Nebraska. Funding is being made available through communities to early childhood providers engaged in delivery of quality early learning environments and experiences for young children. Tuition assistance is available to families whose income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines based on family size. This will increase to 235% with the passing of LB485 allowing subsidy access for more families. The C4K team worked to complete a comprehensive plan for distribution of these dollars into the fall and early winter of 2020, including a process for choosing which communities to fund, an equitable distribution strategy for the dollars, and the development of the several documents we need to process payments and collect important data. Funding was announced before the end of 2020 and the plan was made to develop contracts and execute them beginning on March 1, 2021, which we successfully implemented.

ELS Scholarship Funds Distributed

- Beginning in March 2021, 18 communities began participating in the Early Learning Scholarships; these communities were selected based on the percentage of children ages 0-5 living below the federal poverty level. These 18 communities are working with local center and family-based providers to offer tuition assistance. As of June 30, 2021, \$77,924.00 has been distributed, 27 providers are signed up to participate, and 89 children have received assistance.

YEAR-END BUDGET

The Communities for Kids budget ended the 20/21 fiscal year with a sizable carry over amount of \$440,293.00, this amount is based on several factors:

- Travel and Lodging: Travel expenses were greatly impacted by COVID-19. Travel was resumed briefly late Summer/Fall of 2020 and then again in April of 2021. This reduced mileage, lodging, national conference/meeting travel and meals significantly.
- Community Contracts: The \$313,884 budgeted for Early Learning Scholarships was delayed by the late notification of the Preschool Development Grant and the challenges of the pandemic. Contracts to offer scholarships began in March 2021 and will continue through this year. With the impact of COVID-19, communities also saw a decrease in travel meetings and feasibility studies, resulting in less funds than were planned for to support their implementation planning.
- Contracted Services: The Elevate conference was not held in person this year, eliminating the need for sponsorship and support for providers to attend. The use of consultation was less than planned and the impact of the pandemic greatly reduced the consultant's ability to travel to communities.

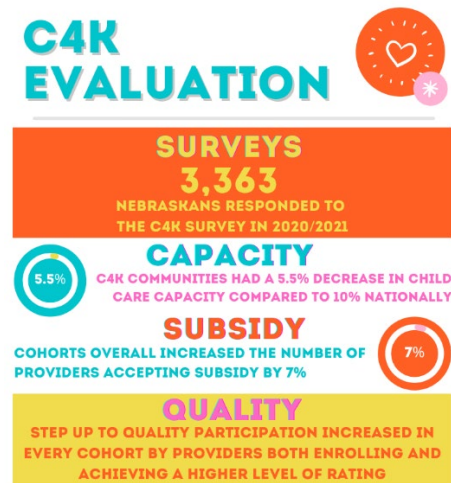
We have taken into consideration these factors as we built the 21-22 budget and do anticipate closer adherence to the planned budget.

Note: An amount of \$31,837 was allocated to the cohort one communities based on the timing of the PDG funds being available and reimbursed through federal funds. With the decision to move several communities to a reimbursement process through the Preschool Development Grant, and conclude the private funding after contracts were sent, some communities had not yet requested funds in the full amount of the original contract by June 30, 2021. Private funds will be reimbursed by PDG for the amount remaining.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation			
Communities for Kids			
Grant Period: July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021			
Reporting Period: July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021			
		ACTUAL YEAR-TO-DATE	BUDGET
		7/1/20 - 6/30/21	7/1/20 - 6/30/21
GRANT INCOME RECEIVED:			
2019-2020 Carryover Funds		\$383,099	\$383,099
2020-2021 Grant Funds: William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation		562,500	562,555
2020-2021 Grant Funds: Buffett Early Childhood Fund		562,555	562,555
SUMMARY:			
Direct Personnel and Benefits		\$477,488	\$482,878
Direct program Expenses (Travel, Meals, Conferences, etc.)		19,432	75,800
Shared Office Expense (15% Direct Personnel and Benefits)		71,623	72,431
		568,543	631,109
Administrative Overhead (18%)		102,435	113,600
		670,979	744,709
Program Grants/Contract Services		396,883	763,500
Total		\$1,067,861	\$1,508,209
DETAIL:			
Direct Personnel and Benefits:			
Wages		384,074	374,324
Benefits		93,414	108,554
Total Direct Personnel and Benefits		\$477,488	\$482,878
Direct Program Expenses (Travel, Meals, Conferences, etc.)			
Travel & Lodging		10,064	42,000
Food for New PDG Community Meetings			15,000
Program Supplies		1,242	7,000
Computer Supplies		0	2,000
Website Development and Maintenance		1,082	1,500
Dues and Subscriptions		2,732	2,700
Other Expenses		4,312	5,600
Total Direct Program Expenses (Travel, Meals, Conferences)		\$19,432	\$75,800
Shared Office Expense (15% Direct Personnel & Benefits)		\$71,623	\$72,431
Administrative Overhead (18%)		\$102,435	\$113,600
Program Grants/Contract Services			
Community Contracts			
Albion/Boone County/Nebraska Community Foundation		15,000	15,000
Garden County/Volunteers of America (Panhandle Partnership)		12,000	12,000
Lexington (First United Methodist)		15,000	15,000
McCook		15,000	15,000
Nebraska City		10,000	10,000
North Platte/Nebraska 4-H		15,000	15,000
Ogallala/Keith County/Trails West CASA		(5,026)	15,490
Stuart (Brain Builders...)		15,000	15,000
Valentine/Sandhills Area Foundation		(4,547)	10,000
Wood River		17,550	17,550
Table Rock/Pawnee County/Tiger Pride		0	0
Jackson/Dakota County (Bank of Dixon)		(4,460)	5,000
Tecumseh/Johnson County		10,653	10,000
Broken Bow/Custer County (Central Plains)		24,547	10,000
Burwell (Loup Basin)		10,000	10,000
Ainsworth (France & McNally)		2,000	10,000
Atkinson		10,000	10,000
Gering		13,000	13,000
Sidney (Cheyenne Cty - Kids Plus)		13,000	13,000
Wilcox-Hildreth		0	0
Hastings/Adams County		10,000	10,000
Valley County/Ord		10,000	10,000
Lincoln		15,000	15,000
Cohort 1 funds moved to PDG		31,837	0
Tribal Community support 3 tribes through Society of Care		0	50,000
(RDG) includes food costs for PDG communities		28,344	23,960
TBD EL Scholarships		77,924	315,000
Volunteers of America: Return Funds		(2,553)	0
Total Community Contracts		\$354,269	\$645,000
Contract Services			
Elevate Early Childhood Business Summit Support & Exchange membership		0	6,000
ReadyRosie Support		451	2,500
Consultation hours/topic specific expertise		22,773	50,000
Marketing contract: Medwick		0	25,000

	Coordinator leadership facilitation and training consultation	15,125	25,000
	Process Evaluation by UNMC MMI (Board of Regents)	4,265	10,000
	Total Contract Services	\$42,614	\$118,500
	Total Program Grants/Contract Services	\$396,883	\$763,500
	Total Expenses	\$1,067,861	\$1,508,209
	FUNDS REMAINING:	\$440,293	\$0

C4K EVALUATION



C4K EVALUATION POINTS

As we head into the fourth year of the initiative, evaluation has taken a front seat in the work and several new measures have been added to the evaluation logic model. While measuring C4K impacts across communities is not a simple task, the community-based decision-making model that makes C4K a powerful and relevant program for each community creates a unique challenge for aggregating and reporting outcomes on the partnership and community level infrastructure work. All communities are committed to two primary goals:

1. Enhancing the quality of early childhood care.
2. Increasing the availability of quality care.

As we have watched the data throughout this year and adjusted our work to respond, one thing is certain, the pandemic has greatly affected the child care landscape in Nebraska. We have seen a concerning reduction in the number of programs and capacity numbers. However, when we compare the C4K communities to the nation’s average of 10% loss in child care capacity, according to Child Care Aware of America’s February 2021 follow up blog to the September 2020 report, *Picking Up the Pieces*, it appears our communities are faring much better, with only a 5.5% loss. One positive highlight: in communities that are actively implementing C4K strategies, quality has increased and the number of programs accepting subsidy is going up.

In an effort to continually increase our understanding of the impact of our work, the C4K team had the opportunity to participate in Harvard’s Theory of Change workshop this year. Although it was unfortunately converted to an online format due to the ongoing pandemic, the team was still able to participate and get some great takeaways during the deep discussion and technical assistance provided. The overall concept was to look at how quick responses and adaptations can be made to programs as data as received. The team chose to focus on the Early Learning Scholarship piece, with participation from our colleagues with Lincoln Littles. Using this guidance, along with the professional support from Munroe Meyer Institute, the team has developed common strategies to determine communities’ progress towards reaching these goals. In total, seven (7) communities completed the Early Childhood Quality and Capacity

Survey in 20/21, with a total of 3,363 total respondents. Currently, there are eight (8) additional communities with surveys open or in planning stages. Results of these surveys assist communities in understanding how people rate the quality and availability of early childhood services. This information can inform goal setting in each community and helps the C4K team conduct progress monitoring.

To measure increases in the quality of early childhood care, the C4K evaluation tracks child care provider participation and progress in the Nebraska Department of Education’s Step Up to Quality (SU2Q) rating system. This rating system is a 5-step pathway to increase quality in early childhood care settings. It includes training, coaching, self-study, external evaluation, and a record-keeping system. Participation is voluntary; providers that choose to enroll are committing to growth and quality improvement.

With the inclusion of the Preschool Development Grant, funds are allocated for a very robust evaluation of all communities and child care providers participating in the C4K work. The alignment of public and private funds and efforts will move the focus to a strong evaluation system that measures quality and capacity efforts, as well as systems work at the community level. Future year-end reports will be inclusive of this evaluation data and analysis through UNMC/MMI and BECI.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES

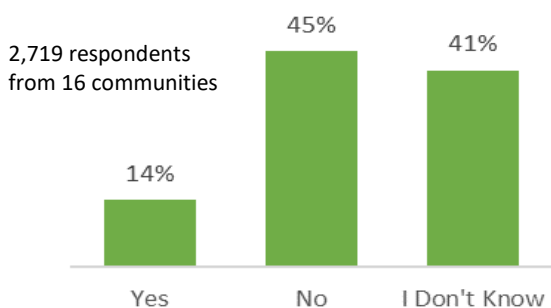
Common Questions

To determine common themes communities face when viewing the early childhood landscape, the Communities for Kids team has six consistent questions) on the early childhood quality and capacity survey conducted in communities. Survey responses have been combined to create a point of reference to assist in understanding this landscape.

Questions:

- Q1. Is there information in the community that shares what a high quality child care program looks like?
- Q2. Do you feel that there are enough child care options in your community?
- Q3. Is child care, that is affordable and accessible, important for all children in your community?
- Q4. If you are not using a child care provider, please indicate the reason.
- Q5. If you answered yes on the previous question, why was finding child care difficult? (previous question: "Was finding child care in your community difficult?")
- Q6. In the last 12 months, has a lack of childcare caused your employees to be tardy, miss work, or cause a distraction at work?

Only 14% of respondents think their community has a shared understanding of what high quality child care looks like.



With 86% of all community members indicating that they do not know if there is information sharing what a high quality child care program looks like or there is not information about high quality programs available in their community, increased efforts related to technical assistance on communication, messaging, and community engagement have been enacted. For example, C4K has secured a contract with a marketing and messaging expert to develop a strategic communications starter kit for communities.

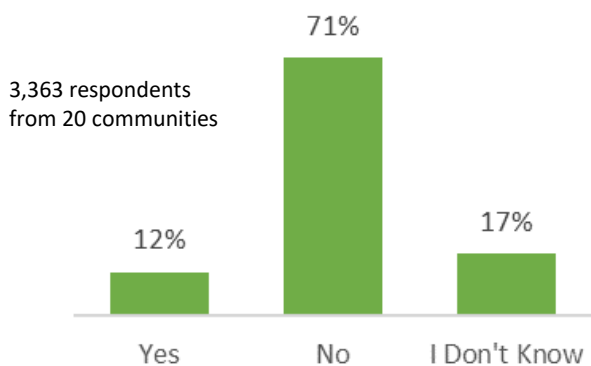
Q1. Is there information in the community that shares what a high quality child care program looks like?

During the 2020-2021 year, six communities participated in four (4) sessions each allowing them to create their local mission, vision, values, identify possible conversation characters, and refine their local stories. This work assisted communities in developing a roadmap for their organizational communications. This strategic plan for communications is continuing to evolve, now piloting a social media marketing element. Communities have been grateful for the guidance, supporting efforts to raise public awareness about the importance of early childhood and local resources, such as high quality available in their community. As we move into this next year, the process has been refined to include opportunity to work with up to 15 additional communities. The My Nebraska Story (produced by First Five Nebraska and C4K) highlights C4K communities, the importance of high-quality early childhood programs, and provides an exceptional resource that communities are continuing to use as an engagement tool.

As more communities participate in the Early Childhood Quality and Capacity Survey, we are seeing a trend of this baseline data in new communities. It is staying on track, showing the majority of the community early childhood quality and capacity survey respondents believe that there are not enough child care options in their community. Surveys are typically completed at the beginning of the C4K work, then paired with other applicable data sources, to help design and drive activities that can meet community needs. Other community survey data indicates that families also place high emphasis on quality, location, cost, program setting, and affordability. Families want options and communities want to present options in their early care and learning opportunities.

Most respondents say there are not enough child care options in their community.

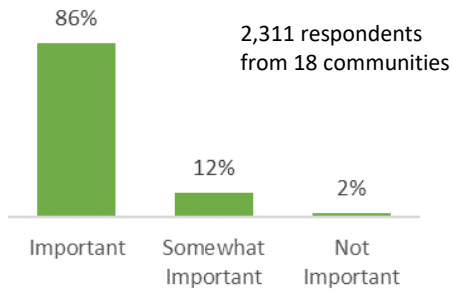
Q2. Do you feel that there are enough child care options in your community?



The C4K team is addressing the capacity need in several ways; current child care professionals are provided support, incentives, and resources to expand their program’s capacity. This is done by offering grant writing support, connection to local philanthropic groups, and business partnerships connections.

About 25% of the C4K communities have determined that a larger solution is needed to meet the need for care; many have supported start up programs ranging from a Family Child Care Home for eight children to a larger center caring for up to 100 children. Resources, such as the Early Childhood Blueprint for Success and NECC’s Licensing Tool Kit, are made available to the community and individual providers to best support their strategies. Multiple templates have been developed and shared for budgeting, design, staffing patterns, fundraising, etc., making the work of understanding how best to expand or start a program a little less cumbersome.

Nearly everyone agrees that affordable and accessible child care is important.

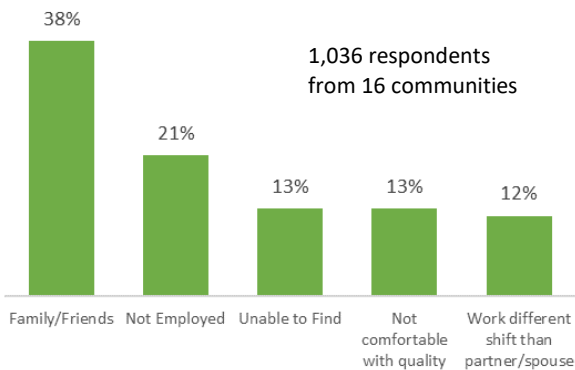


Overall respondents agree that providing affordable and accessible child care is important to their community’s vitality. Parents, providers, community and business leaders understand that a lack of affordable and accessible child care affects the development of children, support for families, and greatly impacts the overall growth of economic development in their community.

Q3. Is child care, that is affordable and accessible, important for all children in your community?

There are important primary conversations happening at the community level related to having affordable and accessible early childhood programs for all children, as well as important secondary ones. These secondary ones are encouraging communities to recognize and discuss the importance of equitable access for families and discussions recognizing child care programs as the small businesses that they are.

Almost half the families that do not use local child care rely on friends and family for support.



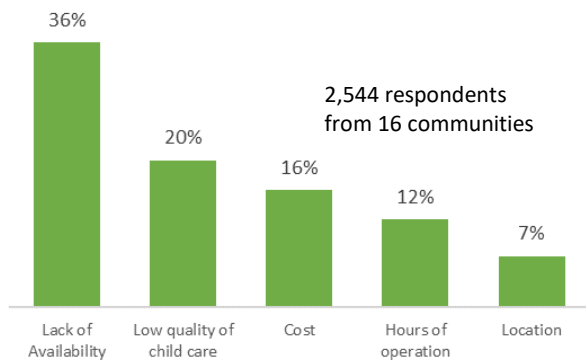
In rural communities and for some cultures, it is very common that extended family care for young children, as evidenced in the 38% of respondent above. Understanding where children are being cared for and by whom, is an important step for communities to better understand how they can best provide resources in support of family choice. Options for preschool, parent provider engagement, social emotional support and school connections are resources that are encouraged. Additionally, communities are continuing to develop efforts to lift up early childhood care and education programs so local programs can enhance quality and are easy to find.

Reasons families do not use local child care

Q4. If you are not using a child care provider, please indicate the reason.

One of the successful activities that communities participate in is building a local provider network of licensed, unlicensed and friend, family, and neighbor care providers to offer resources and supports, and more importantly, to better understand the needs of providers and parents of young children. Most providers, especially rural family-based providers, report very long waiting lists. Infant care continues to be the highest requested age group of all providers and the least available.

The top reasons families find it difficult to find child care are the lack of availability, low quality, and cost.



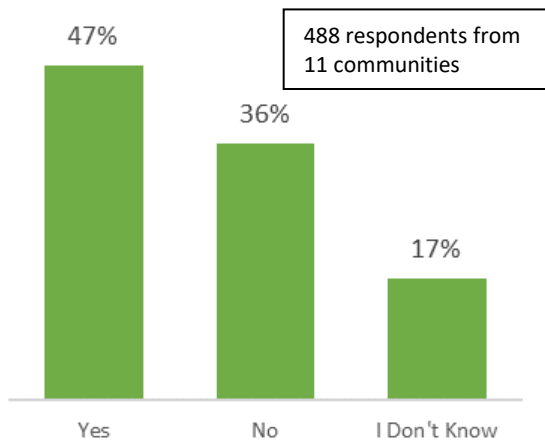
The data from the community surveys reinforce the need for communities to address early childhood capacity/availability and quality, as they are the top reasons related to the difficulty in finding child care. Following closely behind is the issue of affordability.

Reasons families have a hard time finding child care

Q5. If you answered yes on the previous question, why was finding child care difficult?

C4K communities are turning this data into actionable insights as they build work plans that respond to these difficulties in a variety of ways. Ways they are responding include expanding capacity, supporting providers through increased professional development and through continuous quality improvement processes, exploring scholarship opportunities, learning about non-traditional service hour options, and engaging new partners to assist in and advocate for these efforts.

Nearly half of the business owners/employers, participating in the survey, recognize that the lack of child care impacts their employees.



Community surveys this past year have seen an increased focus on connection to local business. Specific questions and efforts to obtain responses have been a priority for many businesses. Nearly 50% of 488 respondents report that a lack of child care has negatively impacted their business.

Q6. In the last 12 months, has a lack of childcare caused your employees to be tardy, miss work, or cause a distraction at work?

A key strategy that the C4K team has used to support communities in addressing this concern is through our work with First Five Nebraska. As mentioned earlier in the report, leaning on the skills and expertise of the FFN team has increased the connection to economic and business leaders, provided an opportunity to engage in rich conversations about mutually reinforcing activities between child care providers and local business and reinforces the message that child care impacts over-all community growth, vitality and work force. Nearly all of the Cohort one, two and three communities have held events in partnership with C4K and FFN to present and facilitate these key messages to the business community.

CAPACITY AND QUALITY

Changes Over Time - Licensed Programs/Capacity/Subsidy

The child care crisis that faces the nation intensified during this past year. Each year, Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) creates an annual report to evidence capacity of early child care and education programs in each state. This past year, CCAoA added two surveys to record the number of open programs as of July 2020 and December 2020. The data showed that as of July 2020, nationally 35% of centers and 27% of in-homes were closed. In December 2020, both center-based and in-home recovered, with 10% of centers and 10% of in-homes remaining closed. However, despite having open programs, attendance at these programs struggled. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) reported average attendance hovering around only 68% compared to pre-pandemic attendance.

According to Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service's Early Childhood Totals and Type of Capacity report, in September 2020, our state had 2,698 licenses/87,471 spaces available. By December 2020, that reported showed a slight increase in open programs to 2,700 licenses/87,727 spaces and the latest count has decline in licensed programs to 2,633/87,634 spaces. These numbers do not include School Age Only licenses or spaces.

Overall, C4K communities followed the same trends as national and state percentages in loss of programs. However, because of the increased supports for providers, communities were able to help providers remaining open to continue to enhance their quality and engage with resources that can support families. C4K communities used their already established infrastructure to provide supplies, resources, and ongoing support for providers.

Licensed Child Care Facilities by Community

Cohort 1

Cohort 1: Columbus, Gothenburg, Grand Island, Lexington, Norfolk, Pender, Red Cloud, Schuyler, and York County

Number of Licensed Programs

2017 – 2019	-3%	279
January 2020 to July 2020	-4%	269
July 2020 to June 2021	-7%	250

*Licensed programs include Child Care In-Homes, Centers, Preschools, and School Age Only Centers

Capacity/Number of Available Slots

2017 – 2019	+19%	7,219
January 2020 to July 2020	+3%	7,459
July 2020 to June 2021	-7%	6,948

In 2017, when Communities for Kids initiated Cohort 1, facility tracking began and included licensed child care home-based providers, child care centers, and school-age only programs. In January 2020, the school-age only programs were dropped from tracking to focus more in-depth on resources and capacity for families with children ages 0-5. This explains the numbers of programs for the 2017-2020 years.

From the initial tracking until June 2021, across the nine Cohort 1 communities, the number of licensed child care facilities, including home-based providers, centers, and school-age only programs has seen a slight decline of 7%, from 292 to 250 sites. While COVID is certainly responsible for some of this decrease with programs of all kinds closing due to lack of enrollment, it is not solely responsible. Another primary factor is home-based providers retiring with a lack of work force available to replace them. We are also aware that some school-age programs have chosen to no longer be a licensed facility, this may also be impacting the total decrease in over-all programs.

Cohort 2

Cohort 2: Boone (Albion), Cherry (Valentine), Custer (Broken Bow), & Keith (Ogallala), and the communities of Nebraska City, North Platte, Stuart, Tecumseh, & Wood River

*Please note, the Cohort 2 grouping has changed after conversations with four communities. These four communities either started six months into the grant year or chose to redesign geographic location after identifying county partners. Two were moved into Cohort 3 (Garden County & McCook/Red Willow) and two into Cohort 4 (Dakota County & Pawnee County).

Number of Licensed Programs

January 2020 to July 2020	-5%	144
July 2020 to June 2021	-21%	114

*Licensed programs include Child Care In-Homes, Centers, Preschools, and School Age Only Centers

Capacity/Number of Available Slots

January 2020 to July 2020	+0.4%	2,770
July 2020 to June 2021	-16%	2,369

In January 2020, the school-age only programs were dropped from tracking in order to focus on the specified Communitiesfor Kids target age group of 0-5. Across the 13 Cohort 2 communities, the number of licensed child care sites from January 2020 to July 2021 has declined. A total of 30 programs less were licensed than the previous year. The impact of COVID-19 was a factor, as well as many Family providers choosing this time to retire. The majority of the communities have had a consistent number of licensed sites across time, just under half lost facilities.

Cohort 3

Cohort 3 Baseline: Adams County, Atkinson, Burwell/Garfield County, Cheyenne County, City of Lincoln, Garden County, Gering, McCook/Red Willow, Ord/Valley County, Wilcox-Hildreth

Number of Licensed Programs

July 2020		490
June 2021	-4%	473

*Licensed programs include Child Care In-Homes, Centers, and Preschools

Capacity/Number of Available Slots

July 2020		17,857
June 2021	-5%	17,066

Cohort three saw a similar pattern of a slight decrease in over-all programs of 4%.

Child Care Capacity

Cohort 1

From 2017 to July 2020, nearly all Cohort 1 communities had an increase in child care slots. At the start of C4K, there were 6,051 slots within centers, home-based providers, and school-age only programs across the 9 communities. In January 2020, there were 7,219 slots and in July 2020, there were 7,459 slots. This represents an overall increase of 19% from 2017 to 2020 and 3% since the COVID-19 pandemic began. A decrease in capacity to 6,948 was reported in June 2021. When COVID-19 hit, most communities did not experience a significant loss in capacity. Only Columbus, Gothenburg, and Grand Island lost slots and these were modest, ranging from 1% to 3%. Interestingly, Lexington and Norfolk saw an increase in capacity of 27% and 16% respectively during this time.

Cohort 2

From January to July 2020, the number of child care slots across the communities had slightly increased by 0.4%. In December 2019, across Cohort 2 there were 2,758 slots. As of July 2020, there were 2,770 slots. Five communities (Boone, McCook, Nebraska City, North Platte, Ogallala, and Stuart) had a decline in capacity, ranging from 6% in Boone to 25% in North Platte. The 2021 capacity decreased to 2,369, this aligns with the decrease in the number of providers and is likely primarily related to the pandemic.

Cohort 3

Communities in Cohort 3 saw a 5% decrease in capacity for care, which reflects the average loss in Nebraska's providers. Providers across the state reported (through the CARES Act application narrative) struggling financially to stay open during the pandemic and many providers that were considering retiring, or moving to a different field of employment, chose to do so during the pandemic, rather than put themselves at risk of the virus, or take the financial hit due to low enrollment.

Child Care

Subsidy

Child Care Providers accepting State subsidized care has increased

Community	2017	July 2020	June 2021
Columbus	39%	40%	29%
Gothenburg	22%	30%	44%
Grand Island	35%	43%	62%
Lexington	15%	24%	26%
Norfolk	35%	47%	63%
Pender	0%	67%	33%
Red Cloud	0%	50%	50%
Schuyler	75%	38%	50%
York County	36%	55%	65%

Cohort 1

C4K communities in Cohort 1 have continued to see a steady increase in child care facilities that accept the state subsidy. In 2017, 100 child care facilities accepted subsidy and growing to 130 sites in 2021. In total, an average of 52% of all programs in Cohort 1 communities accept subsidy or are willing to accept these payments. On average, there has been 9% growth, each year. The table to the left, shows the change in the percentage of providers, in each individual community, accepting subsidy from 2017 to June 2021.

Community	July 2020	June 2021
Boone County	13%	25%
Cherry County	33%	42%
Custer County	41%	42%
Keith County	58%	58%
Nebraska City	35%	36%
North Platte	54%	72%
Stuart	0%	0%
Tecumseh	25%	25%
Wood River	0%	50%

Cohort 2

Across the nine (9) communities in Cohort 2, there are 47% of licensed child care providers accepting child care subsidies. In one year, most of the communities experienced a slight increase in their providers agreeing to take subsidy. North Platte had the greatest jump in providers, with a current total of 23 of 32 programs accepting these payments. Wood River was able to offer subsidy acceptance with the opening of the Stick Creek Kids program. The village of Stuart is continuing to encourage providers to learn more and is actively working towards being a subsidy provider with their vision for a new program.

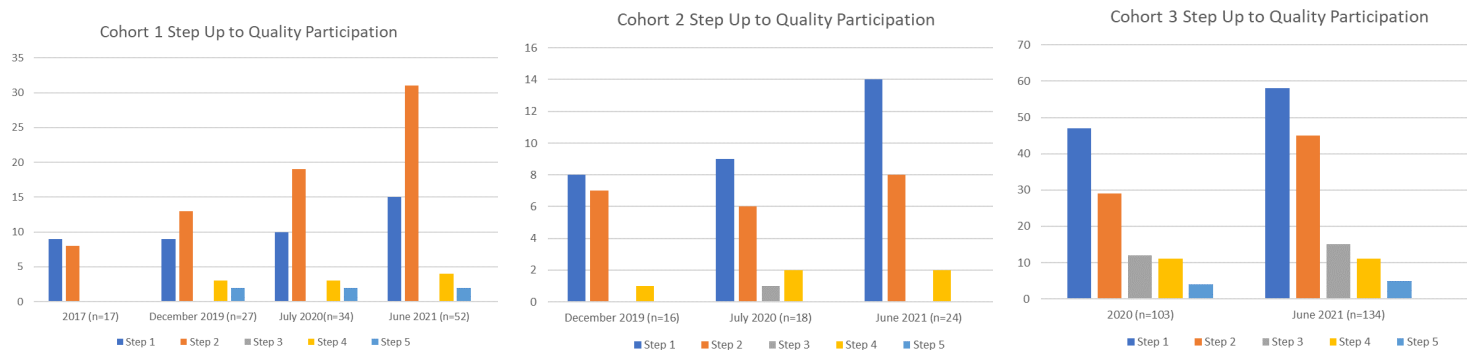
Community	2020	June 2021
dams County	60%	60%
Atkinson/Holt County	37%	50%
Burwell/Garfield County	40%	50%
Garden County	50%	50%
Gering	83%	83%
City of Lincoln	60%	64%
McCook/Red Willow County	57%	59%
Sidney/Cheyenne County	85%	85%
Ord/Valley County	50%	40%
Wilcox-Hildreth	N/A	N/A

Cohort 3

The communities of Cohort 3 have worked hard to increase or maintain providers that accept subsidy. Overall, there has been a 2% increase for all licenses in Cohort 3 communities. The City of Lincoln increased by six (6) providers accepting subsidy, Atkinson added another one, as did McCook and Burwell. Ord unfortunately lost two (2) providers due to closure. Wilcox-Hildreth does not currently have any licensed providers.

Participation In Step Up to Quality (SU2Q)

The increase in quality overall in C4K communities is **outstanding**, particularly given the challenges of the past 18 months. You will note that each cohort not only saw the number of providers participating in SU2Q increase, but also saw the quality ratings go up substantially. Efforts to incentivize providers, support community’s teams to understand the importance of, and how to recognize, quality and numerous local campaign efforts had a part in these numbers increasing.



Cohort 1

The number of child care programs participating in SU2Q since 2017 has on average increased by 31%, each year. In 2017, 5 communities had 17 child care programs participating in SU2Q. By July 2020, 3 more communities had sites enrolled in the program. In June 2021 every community in Cohort 1 had at least one provider participating in Step Up to Quality.

Cohort 2

SU2Q sites in Cohort 2 have increased site participation, each year at an average rate of 18%. At the start of C4K, 7 communities had child care providers participating in SU2Q. Currently, there are eight (8) communities with sites participating, half of them have multiple sites while the remaining half have at least one. There is only one community still working to enroll a provider.

Cohort 3

The ten (10) communities of Cohort 3 have increased Step Up to Quality participation by 23% from the fall of 2020 to June 2021. Overall, Step one participation has increased from 47 to 58, and Step two has grown from 29 to 45. In Cohort 3, four (4) of the communities have increased sites, three (3) communities have remained stable in their participation, two (2) communities are working to enroll at least one early childhood site, and one (1) community is working to develop an early childhood program.

All communities participating in C4K have focused on quality efforts as one of their primary goals. A common strategy has been to incentivize providers to take steps to increase their quality, regardless of the type of program. Examples include offering free trainings, networking and support opportunities, assistance with business plans, grant writing and curricula. A strong partnership with the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative has been instrumental in offering licensing tool kits to new providers and the opportunity to participate in business trainings to strengthen the quality of programs.

ADDITIONAL ATTACHMENTS

In addition to the information provided in this report, attached you will find several evaluation reports/tools as part of the over-all C4K managed work:

- Preschool Development C4K+ report
- Ready Rosie state-wide evaluation report
- C4K focus group report
- C4K logic model
- C4K Community Progress Matrix

Evaluation efforts continue to evolve and show a picture of need and progress towards developing local solutions to increase capacity and quality of early care and education in Nebraska.

THANK YOU

The C4K work, started by the forward-thinking teams at the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, have created a catalyst for change in our state. By engaging community members and state partners, utilizing data and resources, and making connections- a change is occurring in villages, towns, and cities. This change looks different in all of the communities as it reflects local voices, needs and solutions- what the change does have in common is the understanding that child care/early childhood care and education impacts community's ability to grow and thrive, it brings together teams of people to become champions and it has become a regular part of daily conversations. Not why, or even when, but how to assure that early care and education is available, supported, and sustainable. Our sincere thanks and appreciation for being the start of this change and providing the opportunity to continue the work to impact even more children, families, and communities in the years to come.