



nebraska
children
AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION



STATEWIDE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING REPORT

2022-23

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Structure and Purpose of the Report

This report summarizes efforts across Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFE) system at a high level and profiles key findings of those efforts. In future years, this report will describe high level findings across NCFE and demonstrate the interactions and synergistic impacts of NCFE's work. Active improvements to data systems and data collection, as well as internal coordination work, are currently underway to achieve this goal. However, this work is in its early stages.

This is the first year that NCFE has produced a comprehensive report on all major areas of focus, which has implications for this document. Notably, overarching comparisons to previous years will not be made here. However, the Community Collaboratives report and reports from the various Initiatives and Programs are available upon request from NCFE and contain information on year-over-year changes where appropriate. Some information regarding change over time is highlighted below or within other NCFE reports referenced below. Moreover, the report relies on data collected from separate data systems and staff and has never previously been integrated. That is reflected in the structure and feel of the report. As improvements to the integration of NCFE systems are made, a more integrated picture of NCFE will be drawn, linkages and relationships across the organization will be illuminated, and deeper conclusions will be drawn. In short, this report represents an important first step towards answering some of the fundamental questions posed by NCFE stakeholders.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFE) works with communities to solve large, complex social issues that affect our state's children. This work is grounded in two core beliefs; prevention is the most effective and fiscally responsible approach for addressing complex social problems and that channeling a community's existing resources toward a common goal will maximize their effectiveness. All of Nebraska Children's work within communities aligns with these beliefs and each initiative is part of a larger [Prevention Portfolio](#) designed to strengthen children and families. NCFE walks alongside communities to develop and support locally based prevention systems through Community Collaboratives, initiatives and programs, and partnerships within and outside of the state of Nebraska. Community Collaboratives support individuals, youth/young adults, and families directly and help to build a community's prevention infrastructure locally. Initiatives and programs, optimally in conjunction with the Community Collaboratives, work across the state and have a narrower focus on prevention within specified domain(s).

Evaluation of prevention systems and infrastructure incorporates both implementation and outcome data. Implementation data, for example, is used to answer such questions as, "How much and what type of services were provided?" "How well are strategies being implemented?" and "To what extent are strategies adopted, and to what extent are strategies evidence-based?" Outcome data is used to answer questions such as, "To what extent did strategies improve participants' well-being?" Furthermore, for the evaluation of prevention strategies, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation focuses on a data-driven decision-making approach to help communities allocate resources efficiently and effectively. This applies to individual communities, regions within the state, and across the state, depending on the context. Data is collected and reviewed as part of decision-making and continuous improvement processes across Community Collaboratives, Initiatives, and Programs.

Scope of Report

This report covers, though not exhaustively, the work of NCCFF between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, to build and support community-based prevention systems. It consists of three major sections. The first section describes Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's statewide Community Collaborative work, describes Initiatives and Programs, and provides a framework for how the prevention systems interact statewide. Specifically, NCCFF's work is broken into systems-infrastructure focused work, service-infrastructure focused work, and cross-cutting coordination work. The second section summarizes findings from the Community Collaboratives, Initiatives, and Programs and highlights successes and challenges. The third section provides a summary of accomplishments, challenges, and future directions.

Nebraska Children's Work

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation envisions a Nebraska where all people live in safe, supportive environments that provide opportunities for all individuals to reach their full potential and participate as valued community members. To accomplish this vision, NCCFF works to build community-based prevention infrastructure and to implement programming to ensure that this infrastructure is operational and effective.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's Approach to Community-Based Prevention

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation works in partnership with local communities to improve the health and well-being of children, young adults, and families. Specifically, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation works with communities to build locally based prevention systems. The underlying assumption is that by building strong community collaborations, a local prevention system is strengthened, resulting in improved child and family protective factors. This is a collective approach and is largely coordinated through the Bring Up Nebraska public-private partnership. Partners in each community come together through the Collective Impact Model, supporting, and addressing local priorities and implementing specific targeted strategies to build Protective and Promotive Factors for all children, youth, and families.

Bring Up Nebraska

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation works in partnership with communities, and state and national partners to bring additional partners, resources, and solutions together to support a community-based prevention model in 23 community collaboratives.

Bring Up Nebraska was developed not only because of the clear need for prevention in our data but also because government is a poor substitute for a family. Large, top-down approaches like the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are expensive, hard on families, and by design, become involved only AFTER a crisis. Bring Up Nebraska is about doing business a different way. It is designed to be a community-owned effort that works to prevent families from reaching crisis and before the family becomes involved in child welfare or other higher end systems of care. Communities lead the way and discover their own challenges and strengths with the funding, support, and encouragement of many partners. Community Collaboratives can also be a valuable resource for each other as they share what they've learned and determine together the best possible solutions.

Nebraska is poised to be a model for other states when it comes to communities leading the way in prevention work and keeping families strong and together. Bring Up Nebraska has identified barriers that communities want to solve with additional supports and resources. Community Collaboratives includes service providers, educators, health care professionals, law enforcement personnel, businesses, government agencies, and most importantly, parents and youth. Together, these groups commit to common goals, measurements, and practices, working as one toward the end goal of improving well-being. Through public-private partnerships that are part of Bring Up Nebraska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation provides the administrative and backbone functions required to bring together community and state partners as they commit to common goals. These common goals are detailed in the statewide plan for Community Well-Being. Nebraska's shared goals set forth in this plan are as follows:

By 2025, we will:

1. Improve authentic collaboration between lived experience partners, system partners, local school districts, and both community collaboratives and community members.
2. Increase community collaborative infrastructure that leads to equitable well-being outcomes.
3. Improve services and supports that build Protective and Promotive Factors in children, youth, families, and communities, including:
 - Education, postsecondary education, and career services and support for children, youth, families, and communities hosted both inside and outside of the traditional school day. Supports and services for youth/young adults and young parents/families.
 - Access to and increased capacity of early childhood services in communities.
 - Access to and increased capacity of physical and behavioral health services in communities.
 - Access to economic stability and concrete supports for children, youth, families, and communities.
4. Strengthen the well-being workforce in Nebraska.

Promotive and Protective Factors

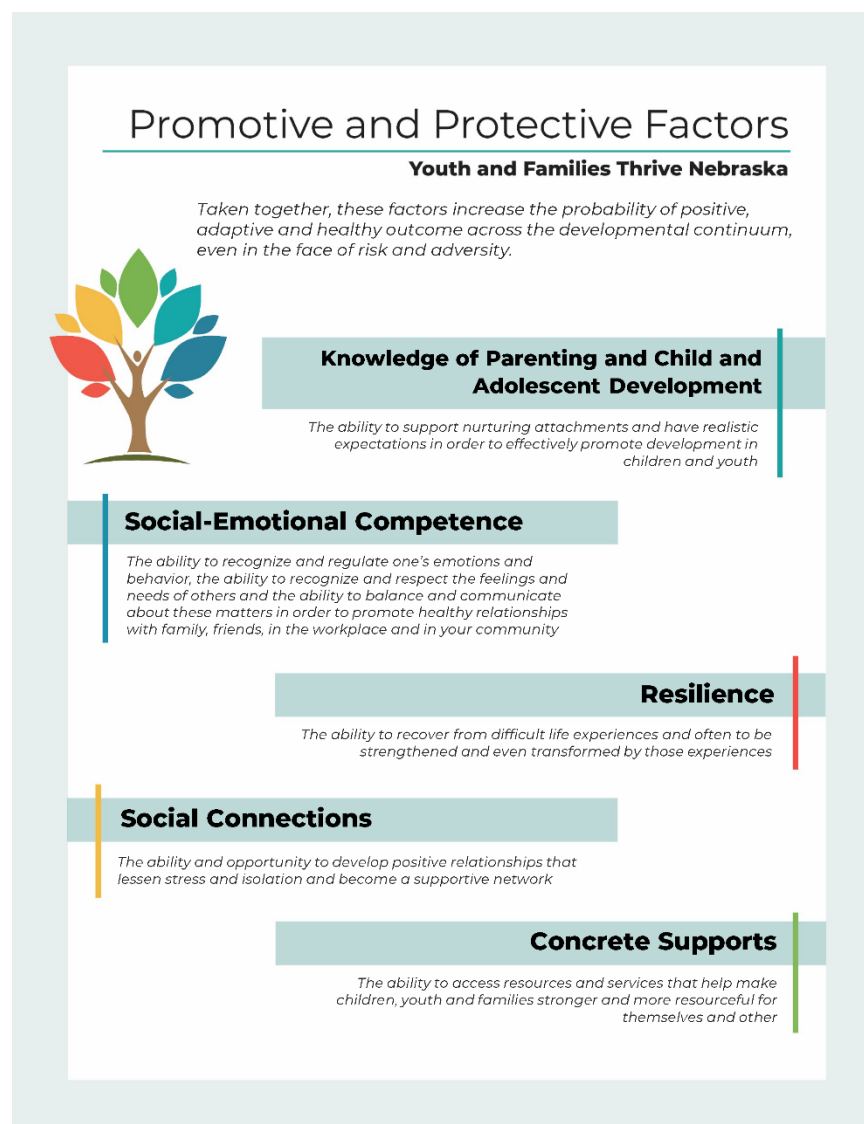


Figure 1: Promotive and Protective Factors

NCFE seeks to prevent negative outcomes by strengthening children, families, and young adults. NCFE believes that bolstering Protective and Promotive Factors is key to successful prevention work. This theoretical model guides the work of NCFE. Research reported through the Center for Study on Social Policy (CSSP) Strengthening Families© Initiative, indicates that the cumulative burden of multiple risk factors is associated with poor outcomes, including developmental compromises and child abuse and neglect. Conversely, the cumulative buffer of multiple Protective and Promotive Factors is associated with the probability of positive outcomes in individuals, families, and communities. “Risk factors are not predictive factors because of Protective Factors” (Dr. Carl Bell, University of Illinois, quoted by CSSP Strengthening Families© 101, 2018). Protective Factors are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risks. Promotive Factors are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that actively enhance well-being.

Protective and Promotive Factors are assets in individuals, families, and communities. For young adults, the Protective and Promotive Factors are associated with positive development and help young adults to overcome adversity (Browne, Notkin, Schneider-Munoz & Zimmerman, 2020). For both families and young adults, these factors increase the probability of positive, adaptive, and healthy outcomes. The following is a description of the Protective and Promotive Factors Nebraska Children and Families Foundation uses to guide its prevention work. The Protective and Promotive Factors are supported by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, with its FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, Children's Trust Fund Alliance, and other state and national partners.

Common Indicators

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's mission is to create positive change for Nebraska's children through community engagement. To advance our mission, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is a part of Bring Up Nebraska, a statewide partnership designed to enhance community well-being.

Bring Up Nebraska has crafted a statewide plan for community well-being that focuses on current priorities that, if adequately addressed, will allow Nebraska to have the most robust Community Well-Being prevention model in the nation. As noted previously in this report, by 2025, the statewide plan calls for Nebraska to improve collaboration across communities, develop community collaborative infrastructure, improve services and supports for children, youth, and families, and to strengthen the well-being workforce in Nebraska. To demonstrate that Nebraska is reaching its goals, an increased reliance on high-quality evaluation and continuous improvement data is needed.

Community Well-Being Indicators



Figure 2: Community Well-Being Indicators

To coordinate NCFF's data collection efforts, represent the overarching focus areas for our work, and ensure alignment with the statewide plan, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation engaged in a year-long process to clarify the three results areas (Figure 2) that connect the work of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation across the system. Currently, NCFF is working internally and with external partners to identify a set of statewide indicators of community well-being that will allow us to

profile change overtime related to our efforts and track progress towards the statewide goals. Notably, these indicators have not yet been finalized as we work with partners to ensure the quality and availability of data.

The Results Areas serve two purposes. First, they represent a cross-section of the things that all Nebraska families need to thrive. Second, in combination, they represent big-picture outcomes that all NCFE's work aims to advance. In some instances, the work of NCFE is clearly related to a results area. For example, the work of the Sixpence programs to develop and support high quality early childhood programs for children up to three years of age clearly relates to Kindergarten Readiness, a component of Results Area 2. In other cases, the connection to a Results Area may be more indirect. Sixpence provides a relevant example again here through their work on ensuring and documenting the quality of childcare programs through the "Step Up to Quality" Program. This again bolsters Kindergarten Readiness, however, it also helps to support childcare providers and the quality of available child care options for families. Given that access to quality childcare is a notable barrier to parents' full participation in the workforce, Sixpence-related efforts contribute to Results Area 3 by strengthening the workforce within and outside of the childcare sector, thus bolstering economic sustainability in the community. As work continues over the next several years to orient evaluation efforts to the Results Areas and fully map NCFE's work onto these results, NCFE will be better able to document the interplay and synergy between and across programs and initiatives.

Interim Indicators

Indicators	2021	2020
Nebraska Education Profile (3 rd grade)	50%	Not available
High School Graduation Rate	87.56%	87.51%
Juvenile Arrests	4,134	6,688
Children entering the child welfare system	1,965	1,979
Generational involvement in the child welfare system	46.00%	46.80%

Table 1: Interim Indicators and Historical Data

To provide a bridge between previous reports and our future indicators, Table 1 contains several indicators that are both similar to previously reported indicators and cover some of the same material that the common indicators will cover in the future. Further information about this data can be found in the Appendix.

Introduction to NCFE's Areas of Work

While all NCFE's work is related to and/or supports building a community-based prevention system, our work broadly falls into three areas. The first area captures systems infrastructure-focused activities that center on building and supporting the systems required to deliver services necessary to build strong families that are achieving their goals and reaching, for example, their vocational and educational potential. An example of this type of work is Communities for Kids, which focuses on building childcare capacity across the state.

The second area encompasses services infrastructure-focused work that targets the supporting infrastructure and systems designed to directly support individuals and families. An example of this type of work is NCFE's support for Central Navigation. Central Navigation is a system by which families and individuals can be connected to local service providers to meet specific needs (e.g., connections are made to food banks, health care providers, housing supports, etc.).

The third area focuses on cross-cutting coordination activities. This work has more of an internal, NCFE focus when compared to the other two categories. Efforts here center on coordinating

activities within and across NCFE and with statewide partners, as well as helping to ensure that best practices are implemented across the organization's efforts. An example of this type of work is NCFE's Race Equity, Access, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI) work, which internally seeks to build an inclusive culture and externally seeks to promote READI best-practices with NCFE's statewide partners.

These divisions in NCFE's work are not formal, nor are they mutually exclusive with most efforts connecting to each the three areas to varying degrees. The divisions are used here to represent how internal teams are organized and how internal data at NCFE is currently collected, analyzed, and interpreted. In some cases, this will include discussing programs in both the systems and service infrastructure-focused work. As NCFE reorients our evaluation framework towards the Results Areas, the structure of this report will change to better reflect the interconnectedness of the work across the organization.

Systems Infrastructure Focused Work

Systems infrastructure work focuses on building and supporting the systems required to deliver services necessary for communities to have strong families who can meet their goals and, for example, achieve their vocational and educational potential. In many cases this means working to support professionals that support families, including educators, healthcare professionals, and childcare providers.

Community Collaboratives

In the last year, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has provided funding and/or technical assistance to 23 developed or developing Community Collaboratives (CCs), including three Tribal nations as well as tribally affiliated families throughout Western Nebraska. These CCs promote safety and well-being through various prevention programs and practices. While each CC is in its own stage of development, all have provided direct (e.g., training, coaching, concrete supports) and/or indirect (e.g., through siblings of children receiving services) supports that benefit individuals in their community. During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, 23 CCs supported 83 counties. The full reach of CCs statewide is depicted in the map below. Note that 10 counties in Nebraska are not directly served by a CC. However, all Nebraskans have access to the existing collaboratives via a "no wrong door" approach to primary prevention, meaning that services are not restricted due to county boundaries. Youth and families are served, and community priorities are elevated, through an open way of partnering across community and county barriers.

The CCs engage in a wide range of activities best described as Systems Infrastructure-focused work. A major role of the CCs is to build local prevention networks. This work includes convening partners in a community, including representatives from physical, mental, and behavioral health care, education, law enforcement, public health, civil society and lived experience partners. Moreover, once a local network is convened, the system by which referrals are shared and changes to the system are made are often coordinated by the CCs. One of the goals of the CCs work is to understand the community-wide context and identify areas of need. Through this work by the local network the need for initiatives can be revealed and current initiatives can be sustained, modified, or implemented to meet the identified need.

The work of the CCs also includes community engagement, as well as convening specific community groups for a purpose (e.g., citizen review panels). For both the community and the

providers in the prevention system, CCs provide and/or organize trainings and professional development activities. Notably, the CCs facilitate the process by which a community can influence policy and practice decisions at the local and state level. Other work of the CCs is better described as Services Infrastructure-focused work and will be described in that section, beginning on page 14.

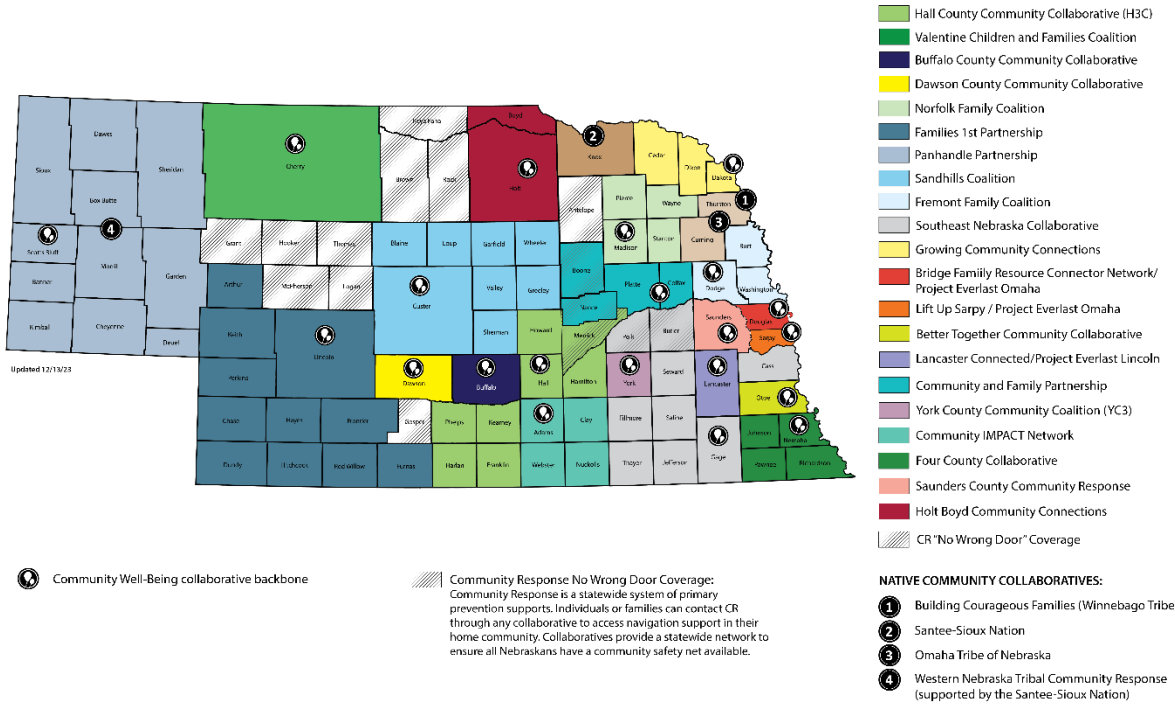


Figure 3: Community Collaborative Map

Communities for Kids

The Communities for Kids initiative was created in response to community requests for assistance with shortages of high-quality early care and education programs — shortages that both impact children’s optimal development and pose a challenge for communities hoping to attract and retain the viable workforces they need to thrive.

Communities for Kids partners with public and private entities to support and coordinate planning for access to high-quality care and education for all children birth through age five. These partnerships are customized to address each community’s unique assets and needs – so each community can grow and prosper well into the future.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation provides expertise and coordination, supporting communities using a collective impact approach to:

- **ENGAGE** stakeholders in identifying the strengths and gaps of the current early care and education resources in the community by completing a detailed Childcare Landscape Study, including the Early Childhood Quality and Capacity Survey. Engaging providers, families, schools, businesses, economic development and community organizations is an important part of this work.

- **UTILIZE** informed data-driven decision-making to determine strategies and desired outcomes most relevant to meeting the priority needs identified in the community assessment and detailing a business plan when indicated. Key messaging materials, mission, and vision using local data and perspectives are developed.
- **CONNECT** communities with resources, including peer networks, research, best practice, implementing quality measures, financing, use of government/public funding, and physical environment designs.

Preschool Development Grant

The Preschool Development Grants Birth Through Five (PDG) Initiative provides funding to strengthen a mixed delivery system of programs and services for young children. The goals are to improve the school readiness of children from families with fewer resources and to improve transitions from early childhood programs into elementary school. The PDG work in Nebraska targets improving collaboration and coordination among existing programs to increase access to programs, improve program quality, and maximize parental choice and meaningful engagement in their children's learning and development. PDG work within Nebraska Children and Families Foundation encompasses Early Childhood initiatives including Communities for Kids, Rooted in Relationships, and Sixpence. These federal funds have been used through these initiatives to increase the quality and capacity of childcare within the state. Through the PDG efforts in 2024, an Early Childhood Landscape Analysis will be designed and implemented to develop a shared understanding of the integration, benefits and challenges of these initiatives and their early childhood work across the state. There is synergy around Collective Impact and learning what early childhood efforts as a whole are making throughout the state.

Community Schools Program

Community schools are a collaborative strategy that organizes community resources to best support students' success. Community schools are about building relationships. The school serves as a hub that strengthens the alignment of services and opportunities for neighborhoods, families, students, and the community to address inequities and help improve student achievement. Community schools form strategic partnerships within the community and at the state and national levels to leverage resources that support students, families, and the community. They help schools achieve educational success by supporting students and families with food insecurities, lack of stable housing, internet, Wi-Fi, (winter) clothing, access to critical mental and physical health services, and other essential needs. Community schools focus on addressing non-academic issues, increasing student achievement, and narrowing the achievement gap.

There are four evidence-based pillars found in most community schools:

- Integrated student support;
- Expanded learning time and opportunities;
- Active family and community engagement;
- Collaborative leadership practices.

In partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education, the Community Schools approach is in place in fourteen counties, including Adams, Boyd, Clay, Colfax, Dodge, Dakota, Hall, Holt, Johnson, Knuckles, Nemaha, Pawnee, Richardson, and Webster. NCFE is working with the Nebraska Department of Education to implement Full-Service Community Schools in Fremont, Grand Island, Schuyler, and South Sioux City, as well as three rural communities as a part of the Better, Together Initiative. Notably, NCFE is working with the Nebraska Department of Education and local schools to better integrate the work of the CCs into schools to better facilitate access to services and programs that exist in the community.

Food Security

Currently, NCFE's food security efforts are centered around a Local Food Purchase Assistance grant. This program, funded by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, facilitates three activities:

- Buying food from socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and producers;
- Moving that food to local food insecure communities throughout Nebraska, and;
- Finding ways to sustain the relationships between farmers and local consumers.

Nebraska has been divided into 4 regions based on population and geography. Douglas County; Sarpy, Cass, and Lancaster Counties; Eastern Nebraska all the way to Grand Island (except the 4 counties listed separately); and Western Nebraska. Each of these regions will serve approximately 135 farms, with \$16,200 allocated to each farmer for food purchasing by the end of June 2025.

NCFE's role in the grant is to support food purchases made through local food hubs, which handle payment and distribution. NCFE administers the grant funding to directly support food purchases and is also integral to the building of relationships between food hubs and farmers. Moreover, NCFE will build on this grant and the developing relationships to further engage in activities supporting farmers and increasing food security in and across local communities.

Rooted in Relationships

Rooted in Relationships (RiR) is a statewide (see Figure 10) initiative that partners with communities to implement evidence-based practices that enhance the social-emotional development of children from birth through age 8. One part of this initiative supports communities as they implement the Pyramid Model, a framework of evidence-based practices that promote the social, emotional, and behavioral competence of young children in selected family childcare homes and childcare centers. Implementing the Pyramid Model requires significant infrastructure including coordination, coaching, training, and collaboration across entities at both the state and community levels. Figure 4 provides RiR requirements for ensuring fidelity of implementation of the Pyramid Model training, and collaboration across entities at both the state and community levels.

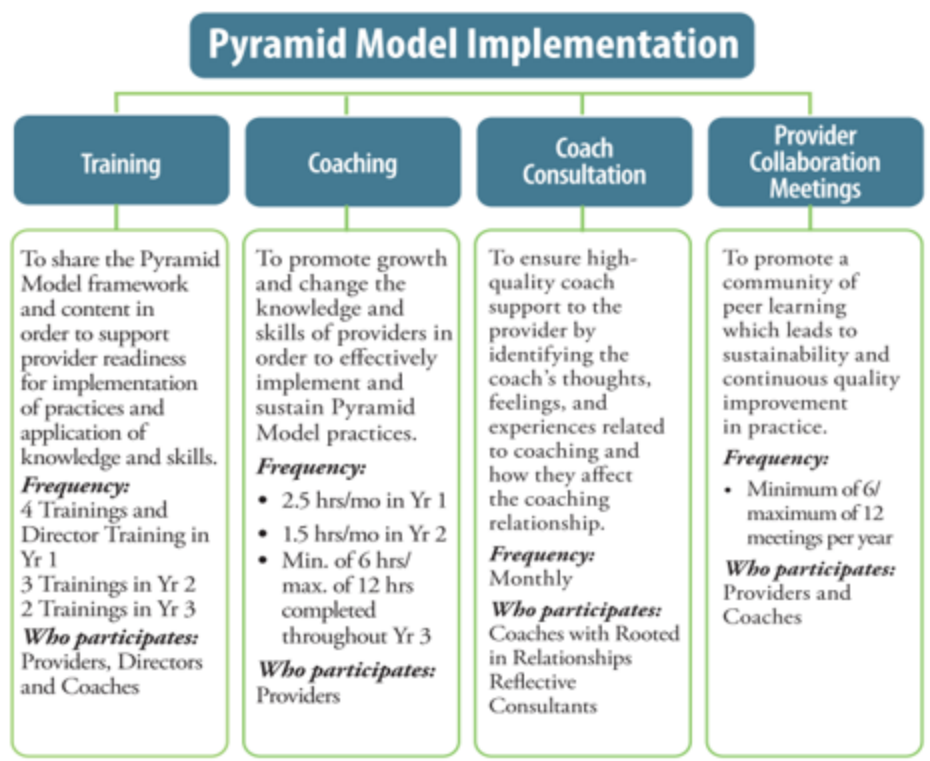


Figure 4: Pyramid Model Implementation

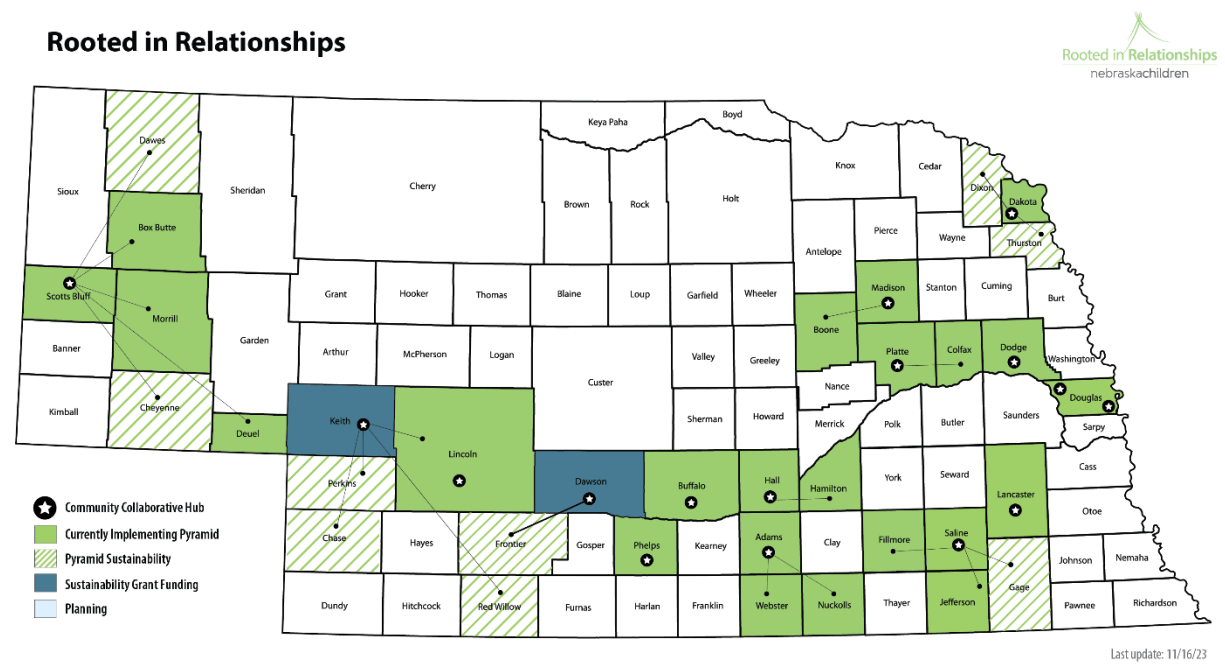


Figure 5: Rooted in Relationships map

RiR also supports community-based stakeholder groups that provide ongoing guidance and partnership on developing and maintaining the infrastructure needed to implement RiR. In addition, communities develop and implement a long-range plan that influences the early childhood systems of care in the community which supports increasing early childhood mental health services,

partnership with schools, collaboration with medical systems, family engagement, and/or early care and education strategies. RiR focuses specifically on ensuring socio-emotional development, which is a critical protective factor against mental illness in later years.

Sixpence

Sixpence provides funds and technical guidance to high-quality early childhood programs that address the unique needs of children from the prenatal period to age 3. Sixpence provides professional development to childcare providers. Via the Step Up to Quality program, Sixpence facilitates the development of high-quality childcare programs by working with providers to implement best practices. The Step Up to Quality program also documents a childcare provider's progress towards implementing best practices and allows parents to find quality childcare providers in their local community.

Beyond School Bells

Beyond School Bells (BSB) is Nebraska's statewide afterschool and summer learning network and has been a program of NCFE for twenty years. BSB is one of fifty statewide after-school networks across the nation supported by the C.S. Mott Foundation and fueled by public and private investments from key Nebraska and national stakeholders. BSB staff works to develop partnerships that lead to policies and actions, at both the state and local level, resulting in more high quality, locally sustainable afterschool programs and summer programs. These expanded learning opportunity (ELO) programs serve more youth in communities across the state, with a focus on communities operating in some of Nebraska's most challenging educational environments.

Services Infrastructure Focused Work

Services infrastructure-focused work is designed to provide direct support to individuals and families. This work includes funding direct support to youth/young adults and families, funding and coordinating direct services alongside various partners, supported/convened through the work of the Community Collaboratives. Each Nebraska Children initiative described in this section contributes to the collective priority setting and collaboration of local prevention systems. Direct service opportunities through these initiatives and programs are available through, and often coordinated by, the Community Collaborative, either through coordinated partnerships or directly available through Central Navigation.

Community Collaboratives

As a Community Collaborative convenes local partners through community building and shared priority setting within a Collective Impact approach, a locally based prevention system takes shape. Community Response is the backbone support of a community-based prevention system and encompasses all individual-level strategies implemented across the life span, as well as community capacity building and informing system level priority setting. Through Central Navigation and Coaching, Community Response coordinates existing resources within a community to help children, young adults, and families address immediate needs, as well as increase Promotive and Protective Factors in the long-term and prevent initial and/or generational entry/re-entry into higher end systems of care (Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice).

Central Navigation is the component of Community Response through which parents, community members, and young adults are matched to services. Central Navigation is also the intersection point of community partners to increase community capacity through training, as well as identifying and removing barriers to thriving. A subset of the people who engage with the Central Navigation component of Community Response may also participate in coaching. This coaching is voluntary, tailored to individual needs, and involves participants working with a coach on goals. Based on community capacity and individual needs, the specific strategies used for coaching vary. Support Services Funds are flexible funds made available through Central Navigation to address concrete needs and enhance the impact of other targeted strategies, or to fill gaps for needs, regardless of eligibility criteria in publicly funded domains.

Connected Youth Initiative

Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) includes evidence-supported services and best practices aimed to increase youth and young adult's protective and promotive factors so that they have the relationships, resources, and equitable opportunities for themselves and their child(ren) to thrive. CYI Coaching uses the Youth and Families Thrive model, which is a strength-based theoretical framework based on the idea that all youth have the potential for successful, healthy development and well-being. It focuses on the five Protective and Promotive Factors: youth resilience; social connections; knowledge of child, adolescent, and parenting development; concrete support in times of need; and cognitive and social-emotional competence. CYI Coaching also uses Reaching Teens, a strength-based, trauma informed toolkit that centers on developing all adolescents to their fullest potential by creating safe, secure, sustained, nurturing relationships. CYI helps young people, aged 14-26, without permanent family connections who have lived experience in one or more of the following: Child Welfare/Foster Care/ICWA; are homeless or near homeless (e.g., couch surfing); pregnant/parenting; or survivor/at-risk of human trafficking/exploitation.

CYI uses the following evidence-based services for connected youth throughout the state of Nebraska: a) Central Navigation and support services funding; b) coaching; c) financial education; and d) youth leadership. CYI works closely with Community Collaboratives across the state, where CYI's youth specific services are integrated into the services that exist in the community. CYI and Community Collaboratives ensure that unconnected youth have access to services that avoid duplication of efforts and maintain connections to the community and reduce generational system involvement. CYI provides goal-oriented, voluntary, youth-driven coaching centered on developing skills, accessing services, and enhancing youth's Protective and Promotive Factors. Activities covered in coaching include support for youth to meet their postsecondary education and career goals (e.g., via LEAP funding and Education and Training Vouchers [ETV]) and support for parenting youth as well as assistance in making important asset purchases (e.g., vehicles) and financial education through the Opportunity Passport™ program.

The Youth Leadership component provides empowering opportunities for young people to engage in leadership and advocacy at the local, statewide, and national levels. Activities are community-led and youth-driven via local CYI Youth Leadership Chapters. There are also statewide and national leadership and advocacy opportunities. Youth attend events like Legislative Days, where they develop presentations on current legislation and provide presentations to state senators and the governor. Youth can also serve on NCFE Youth Advisory Boards and Citizen Review Panels, where they provide recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services on improvements

in practice and policies. Members also plan and lead Legislative Days and the LEAD the Summer event and represent NCFE at national conferences. Youth participating in Project Everlast and other youth leadership chapters make connections with their peers, learn life skills to help them thrive (like budgeting and writing a resume), grow their leadership skills, and develop their voice through advocacy opportunities.

Rooted in Relationships

RiR plays a role in funding and facilitating access to early childhood mental health prevention and intervention including Circle of Security Parenting, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, and Parents Interacting with Infants. Both Circle of Security Parenting and Parents Interacting with Infants are evidence-informed interventions and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is a well-supported evidence-based intervention (<https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/parent-child-interaction-therapy/>). All three programs are designed to help parents to better engage with their children to promote socio-emotional development, decrease problematic behaviors and interactions, and to promote positive parent-child relationships.

Sixpence

In addition to its work with childcare providers, Sixpence also focuses on services for pre-born children, infants, and toddlers who are most likely to encounter challenges to their healthy physical, cognitive, and social development, putting them at risk of struggling in school and life. One of the major program initiatives of Sixpence is to give grants to school districts to provide services for infants and toddlers at-risk for school failure. Recently, Sixpence's efforts have expanded to include early literacy efforts in conjunction with the Nebraska Growing Readers program.

Medical Pathways

Medical providers are a critical group of stakeholders in uncovering and reporting child abuse and are a vital partner for the Child Welfare system. Unfortunately, data suggests that a large proportion of Child Welfare reports made by medical providers are not substantiated as child abuse. Often the Child Welfare reports reflect poverty and lack of access to services as opposed to abuse and a report does not address the problem. In other cases, interactions with the medical system may lead directly to a Child Welfare referral, notably in the case of pregnant women struggling with substance abuse. However, the medical system as currently structured is unable to offer preventative supports for the community. NCFE is actively working with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to implement LB1173 to reduce the number of unsubstantiated Child Welfare reports, particularly from medical providers. In addition, NCFE administers the Plans for Safe Care program in Nebraska.

Plans of Safe Care

In 2016, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) was enacted which amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and, among other things, specifically required that the Plan of Safe Care address the needs of both infants and their families. The 2016 CARA and CAPTA amendments focused on improving well-being and safety for infants affected by prenatal substance exposure and their families or caregivers by:

- Including both legal and illegal substances in the categories of infants to be identified;

- Specifying requirements for notification to child protective services;
- Stipulating the development of a Plan of Safe Care that includes the treatment needs of the family/caregiver in the plan (previously more focused on the infant);
- Increasing data collection and monitoring requirements.

States are now required to report to the extent possible:

- The number of infants identified as substance exposed;
- The number of such infants for whom a Plan of Safe Care was developed;
- The number of such infants for whom a referral was made for appropriate services, including services for the affected family or caregiver.

After implementation of Plans of Safe Care in Nebraska, conversations began to form regarding prevention with Plans of Safe Care. From these conversations, Prenatal Plans of Safe Care started. If a woman can be identified as pregnant and struggling with substance use/misuse, then resources should be provided at that time. Early intervention and prevention services can serve as a pathway to more positive outcomes for families. With Technical Assistance provided by Children and Family Futures through the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, Nebraska developed and started to pilot Prenatal Plan of Safe Care Binders. In June 2023, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation assumed responsibility for the Prenatal Plans of Safe Care initiative, prioritizing preventive measures.

Through NCFE, North Platte successfully introduced its Prenatal Binder. Continuous support is extended by NCFE to collaborative efforts in North Platte and Hastings, fostering the ongoing awareness and expansion of the Prenatal Plan of Safe Care Binder program. Additionally, a provider toolkit is under development to aid organizations in engaging pregnant individuals with the binder, offering insights into the historical context of Plans of Safe Care and outlining the benefits of each section within the binder for pregnant individuals and their families. This aims to prevent reports to the Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline following the infant's delivery. NCFE is dedicated to ensuring the safety and wellness of every pregnant woman by facilitating access to community-specific resources that cater to their needs during and post pregnancy. Following the pilot period, NCFE expects to partner with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to expand these services across the state.

Beyond School Bells

In addition to the systems infrastructure-focused work conducted by Beyond School Bells (BSB), BSB works directly with partners, including the Nebraska Department of Education and private partners, to fund afterschool programs in more than 20 Nebraska School Districts within underserved rural and urban communities. To advance the work, BSB is also involved in youth and family engagement work both to improve BSB's own extended learning opportunity offerings and to empower youth and families to advocate for access to high quality extended learning opportunities.

Cross-Cutting Coordination Work

To coordinate NCFE's work, specific groups are in place to focus on cross-cutting coordination efforts across the system. These efforts support the organization's work and its impact by maximizing efficiency internally and helping to coordinate NCFE's work with statewide partners.

Synergy and Alignment Support

Since early 2022, six Nebraska Children staff participated in a pilot program called "Synergy and Alignment Support" (SAS). The SAS role was first designed as a single contact for Community Collaboratives (CCs), NCFE staff, and other community partners within a single community. The SAS role evolved over the course of the pilot program and is now envisioned as supporting internal alignment and communication across initiatives/program areas. Additionally, staff in a SAS role support CCs by streamlining communication and supporting a shared understanding of the robust network within NCFE. The pilot program brought forward many ways NCFE could better serve communities and current staff, which led to the creation of a standalone position beginning in August 2023 – Assistant VP of Community Collaborative System Alignment.

Priority Areas

In 2022, NCFE implemented Priority Area Cross-cutting Teams. These teams were assembled recognizing that many of the activities of NCFE and the Statewide Plan for Community Well-Being cut across initiatives and programs. To avoid the duplication of efforts and to increase efficiency, the Priority Area teams are intended to bring together voices across NCFE in Mental Health, Well-Being Workforce & Training, Education (pre-k-postsecondary), Economic Stability, Leadership and Engagement, and Medical Pathways. These teams meet regularly and help to coordinate activities across NCFE. The work of the Priority area teams is reflected in the work of the CCs and Initiatives. Therefore, the Priority Areas will not have separate sections in the "findings" provided below.

Race, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI)

READI is the race, equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion centered work within Nebraska Children. This priority area is dedicated to the embedding and embodiment of READI concept understanding, application, and expansion. Priorities in READI don't become priorities because we want them to, they become priorities because we work for them. The efforts of the READI team currently focus on laying the foundation and creating a roadmap of the work to be done.

The READI team has established three goals for the short to medium-term:

- **Baseline Competency:** The READI team aims for 100% staff competency for understanding and applying concepts



Figure 6: READI Implementation Timeline

related to race, equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusions. Progress toward this goal is furthered by mandatory staff training that is on-going, as well as updating on-boarding and new-hire training to include this material.

- **Shift Internal Culture:** The READI team will co-create and embed practices related to READI into policies, practices, and procedures to shift toward a more inclusive and equitable internal culture. This work will begin in earnest following the equity audit planned for 2024.
- **Align Internal and External Commitments:** The READI team seeks to expand alignment so internal and external commitments center our values and work simultaneously toward our mission and vision.

Research and Evaluation

NCFE invested considerable resources in 2023 to build its Research and Evaluation (R&E) team and enhance its historical focus on collecting, managing, and using data to understand impact. More than ever, it is critical to use data to demonstrate impact and effectiveness and to drive decision-making; the R&E team facilitates these processes across the organization. This team also collaborates with external evaluation partners and local evaluators to support the CCs with their data and evaluation needs, and to support and integrate the evaluation of specific initiatives and programs.

The expanded R&E team is taking on a more ambitious set of goals focused on understanding the impacts of the system within and across the identified results area; uplifting NCFE's focus on Collective Impact; and modeling the connections within the work of the organization and to work across the state of Nebraska. The R&E team is working across the organization to align evaluation efforts and to measure the impact of the CCs more effectively, integrating the impact of NCFE programs and initiatives. Working closely with NCFE leadership and partners at the national, state, and local levels, the R&E team is supporting NCFE's efforts to win larger, more competitive federal grants that will enhance our ability to understand the needs of Nebraska communities and the strategies, resources, and efforts that best address those needs. Finally, the R&E team is working to improve dissemination efforts to demonstrate the impact of NCFE's work more effectively to a broader audience.

Key Findings

This section summarizes and highlights key findings and/or achievements across NCFE that reflect our work across the system.

Systems Infrastructure-focused Findings

Community Collaboratives

Community Collaborative Convening and Partnership building

Bringing community stakeholders and partners together to address common problems is a core feature of the work of Community Collaboratives (CCs) in and across their communities. CCs are extensively connected to their communities. For the 2022-2023 evaluation year, 19 CCs reported having either active involvement or connection to community partners in 27 areas. All 19 CCs

reported active involvement or connection to human services providers, Department of Public Health representatives, behavioral/mental health providers, and educators. Over 90% of CCs reported active involvement or connection in seven additional domains, including community members, lived-experience partners, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Over 70% of CCs also reported active involvement or connection in a further 13 domains, including local law enforcement, child advocacy centers, and “other state agencies.” Approximately half of CCs reported active involvement or connection to recreation/fitness centers, local crime commission representatives, and tribal agencies.

As a part of these partnerships local funding is invested in the community’s prevention system. Funds raised by the CCs and local communities outside of NCFE’s funding totaling over \$15.1 million. While the local funding was raised for several purposes that do not all directly support service work in the community in the long term (e.g., money to build facilities), these local funds represent important progress towards financial sustainability of the CCs as they build and support the necessary infrastructure to maintain a shared community collaborative prevention system.

Community Collaborative Practice and Policy Changes

Policy changes include changes in statute, regulation, guidance, funding levels, court decisions, or executive orders and other policy vehicles that establish requirements directed at institutions, professionals, and the public. Examples include, enacting new legislation, establishing statewide minimum training requirements, procuring pilot funding for a new program or study, creating a new option that would expand available services, or a state executive memo requiring child welfare agencies to adhere to some new agency procedure. CCs worked with other stakeholders to influence 28 policy changes across 8 communities in 2022-2023. One example of this work is CC support of the Early Childhood Task Force to create a bill in support of finger-printing efficiency for childcare providers. Another is CC participation in the Community Forum discussion group in Kearney, NE for LB1173.

Practice changes are systemic changes in the operations of practitioners that are to be institutionalized that may or may not stem from any change or requirement in policy. For example, adopting a best practice that is implemented community (or state) wide, new practices to better engage youth in transition planning, improving community level collaboration through standard operating procedures, etc. CCs worked with other stakeholders to influence 26 practice changes across 8 communities in 2022-2023. An example of a practice change in 2022-2023 was the launching of a Community Schools Initiative to build a full-service community school mindset. Another is the creation of Board Committee Charters to add to the board by-laws and committee goals, leading to the finalization of a strategic plan.

Community Collaborative Training and Outreach

Over the past 12 months, community collaboratives carried out or participated in numerous professional and community training courses to enhance supported strategies. CCs reported a total of 167 trainings with 6,502 participants representing over 1,717 organizations engaged in training. Examples of the trainings offered were: Helping Adults Cope with Grief Training, QPR/Suicide Prevention, Migrant Education Recruiter Training, Budgeting and Money Management, Collective Impact Training for New Non-Profits.

Local Evaluation Capacity Building for Community Collaboratives

Beginning with the 2020-2021 evaluation year, initial efforts to build evaluation capacity at the Community Collaborative level were undertaken by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and external evaluation partners at the Munroe Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (MMI-UNMC). These efforts encourage CCs to take ownership and approach evaluation as a partnership between CC and their evaluator(s). These efforts allowed CCs to identify and define their own evaluation question(s) specific to their community and/or CC, exploring issues that were not captured in the statewide evaluation.

During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, 10 of the 18 CCs identified a local evaluation question and worked with their local evaluation point of contact at MMI-UNMC to develop a data collection method, identify key respondents, and collect data. A variety of data and methods were employed, including qualitative data through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, and quantitative data through surveys. Most of the local evaluation questions were focused on implementation, such as identifying ways to improve services to clients and to identify any gaps in services that might be occurring. The questions were also focused on outcomes, such as the effectiveness of local prevention strategies and the CC's functioning. The interest and willingness of CCs to explore their own processes and procedures at the systems-level speaks to CCs' investment in continuous improvement, which ultimately will improve service delivery and community context and infrastructure that supports all youth and families.

Community Schools

The Community Schools work at NCFE is still in its relatively early stages. This work involves changing mindsets in a community and in a school district around what schools should be doing with families and therefore is a relatively slow process. Although this strategy for improving outcomes for all generally takes many years, there have been early signs of success. Across the pilot sites, the average daily attendance rate for FSCS sites is up 1.5%, which equates to about thirty more students in each building each day. Fremont reports a 52% increase in participants in their family engagement activities. In addition, the four Better, Together Initiative pilot sites have completed plans to accelerate student learning and development, family and community engagement, and partnership development.

Drawing from the most recent Evaluation Report covering the 2022-2023 school year, the following strengths of the sites focus on family engagement, partnership health and development, and student learning and development.

In the area of family engagement, Family Literacy programs have occurred in at least two of the sites. This has been a success for the participants who feel well-informed about their children's education and educational needs. FSCS sites, either supported by or directly providing a function of Central Navigation are also meeting the needs of the parents/caregivers and the community they serve through food pantries, medical services (vision, dental, mental health), etc. The locations (schools) for the sites have quickly become the "hub" for full-service community school services, and there are growing community efforts toward locating Central Navigation connected with schools long-term. This is an asset of the FSCS model and is already realized in these communities. The sites also have some form of parent/caregiver group that engages in decision-making and parents/caregivers are becoming more engaged in the schools their children attend.

Regarding partnership health and development, each FSCS hired a full-time School Community Coordinator (SCC) during the 2021-2022. This person's primary role is facilitating partnerships between the school, families, and community. The SCC identifies the needs of families and the community and develops plans and resources to meet those needs, supported by partnerships through the local Community Collaborative. This added resource for the FSCSs has had a positive impact on these school communities and increased school partnership and engagement with community-based prevention systems. Each site has shared the various benefits of this person's role in meeting the needs of the community. Discussions to sustain the SCC position have already started within each of the FSCSs, including discussions about local, state, and national funding streams. In addition, many families are involved and feel more connected because of the FSCS supports in place and conversations have occurred that focus on how to build community awareness of FSCSs.

In the area of student learning and development, sites began identifying community needs, and those results were reviewed and used as the starting point for providing services. School Improvement Teams began to involve the SCC in developing School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and integration of FSCS practices (Collaborative Leadership) is evident in SIPs. Schools are well-adept at developing Individual Education Plans for qualifying students and implementing the MTSS process to support all students as needed. These schoolwide supports are facilitated through the FSCS approach. In addition, educators and school staff have received professional development in supporting families with trauma, human trafficking, mental health needs, and social-emotional development. Finally, schools are more connected to local prevention systems, more aware of community resources, and the SCC works with school counselor(s) and social worker(s) to access resources to meet the needs of students and their families comprehensively and systematically.

Communities for Kids

Communities for Kids had a notable year of growth. Through ARPA funding, two new staff members joined the team, and during their first year one has transitioned into a technical assistant role, and the other is now also assisting with PDG 4.0.

Over this past year C4K expanded into its 7th cohort bringing on six new communities: Blue Hill, Box Butte, Minden, Thayer County, Thedford/Thomas County, and Pierce County. Communities for Kids is currently partnering with sixty-three communities, with four additional communities starting in January of 2024. To date, C4K Communities have leveraged over \$10 million dollars in in-kind supports, local monetary donations and private gifts, state funding sources, and city and county funding. Over this past year Step Up to Quality participation grew in every cohort. Capacity in C4K Communities increased by 17%, and childcare programs increased by 2.3%. Based on the latest reports, 62% of providers in the C4K cohorts accept childcare subsidies.

Finally, this past September, there was a record high attendance of 252 total registrants representing 84 Nebraska communities for the 2023 C4K Convening Day on the second day of the Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference in Kearney, NE. This year's focus was connection, featuring community led breakout sessions and TED-style talks spotlighting wins from five different communities. For the first time, live interpretation was provided for Spanish-speaking participants. This opportunity was made possible by the tireless work of NCCFF staff members and funding provided by the former First Lady of Nebraska Susanne Shore.

Preschool Development Grant

Some of the projects listed below were awarded funds from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) implementation grant that was awarded to Nebraska DHHS from 2020–2023 and some are part of the \$4 million planning grant for 2023. The PDG grant supports many activities. Below are highlights from activities funding between July and October 2023:

- Six Action Teams were launched that focused on identifying more strategic next steps, goals, and parties responsible for each of the Action Agenda priorities. Each Action Team created achievable goals for their main actionable items for 1 year and 3-5 years.
- The Needs Assessment team finished coding transcripts from Head Start workforce focus groups, began writing the report, and received permission from DHHS to proceed with the provider funding survey. The survey was distributed in early August to over 5000 potential participants.
- Through their training/coaching series, *Getting Ready* impacted 230 families through the work of educators.
- *Help Me Grow* made substantial updates to the website and added three medical providers and one social work supervisor as committee members to participate in the strategic planning process.
- *Business Training Series (BTS)* - One of two cohorts of the Summer BTS wrapped up with graduation events for the 11 participants in August. One cohort was held in English, and one was held in Spanish. Marketing and enrollment for fall has continued and there are over 60 enrolled currently.
- *Licensing Toolkit Program (LTP)* – Staff continued pairing new Licensing Toolkit participants with Partner Mentors and/or Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC) Staff. Two new NECC Spanish bilingual staff completed Mentor training and were able to start a caseload. There are 63 current participants, including 17 who have received their provisional license, and an additional 13 who have graduated from the program by obtaining their full operating license.
- *Shared Leadership and Finance* – The Cost Model Advisory Workgroup met to provide input on the draft tool, review final cost model tools, draft recommendations for utilization of the tools, and finalize recommendations to be included in the LB151 Interim Study Report. Staff also developed a plan for a Cost Model user-friendly guide, data visualization, webinar, and translation in Spanish and are drafting a plan and timeline to reconvene the Shared Leadership & Financing Task Force.

Child Care Partnerships

Child Care Partnerships (CCP) are a collaboration between school districts and local childcare providers to improve the quality of early childhood programs serving infants and toddlers up to age three and their families. It is funded 100% through a subaward from Nebraska Department and Health and Human Services to NCCFF using Child Care Development Funds, which are allocated to

nine school districts across the state. The CCPs are currently providing coaching to 62 child care programs. Notably, the majority (56%) of the 59 CCP sites reporting are at Step 3 or higher on the Step Up to Quality (STUQ) scale (Figure 6). A significant accomplishment for Sixpence Child Care Partnerships in Grand Island was supporting Spanish-speaking providers through coaching, one of which achieved the highest rating with Step Up to Quality, a Step Five.

OVER HALF OF THE CCP CHILDCARE PROGRAMS WERE AT STEP 3 OR HIGHER.

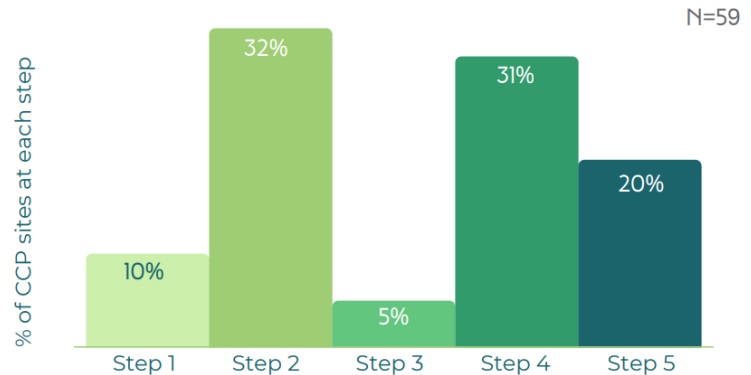


Figure 7: CCP Child Care programs Step Up to Quality rating levels

Rooted in Relationships

Rooted in Relationships is currently supporting 16 collaboration hubs, which are engaged in various stages of the initiative inclusive of planning, implementation, and sustainability. For those implementing the Pyramid Model, in 2023 the initiative supported 50 early childhood coaches and 321 center and home-based providers in 147 programs impacting over 2,971 children. Figure 8, shows the change in practices for the six centers that engaged in the Pyramid Model center-wide within the 2019-2022 implementation period. (One center stopped implementing center-wide between years two and three.) After the three-year period, the fidelity goal was attained overall and for all subscales with the exception of professional development and monitoring implementation. Moreover, in a sample of 44 providers (out of 59 total) receiving coaching showed

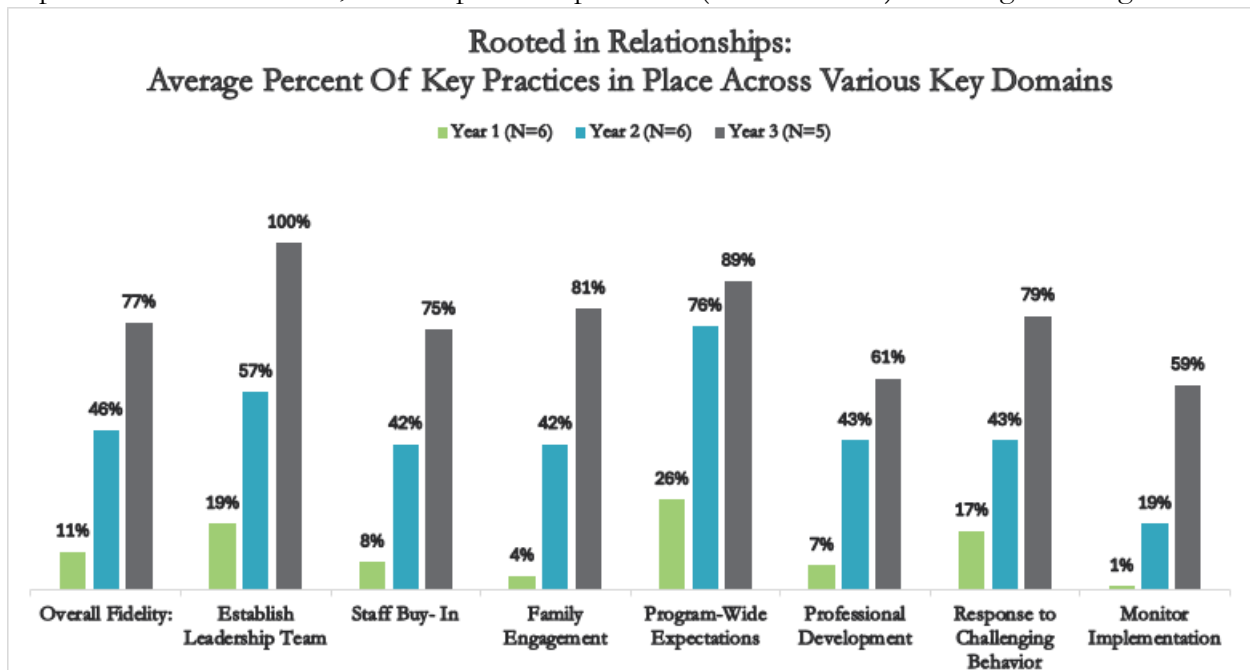


Figure 8: RiR Average Percent of Key Practices

an increase in their use of Pyramid Model skills (Figure 9). Similarly, in 46 out of 71 total providers, respondents reported an increase in their confidence in supporting children’s social-emotional development (Figure 10).

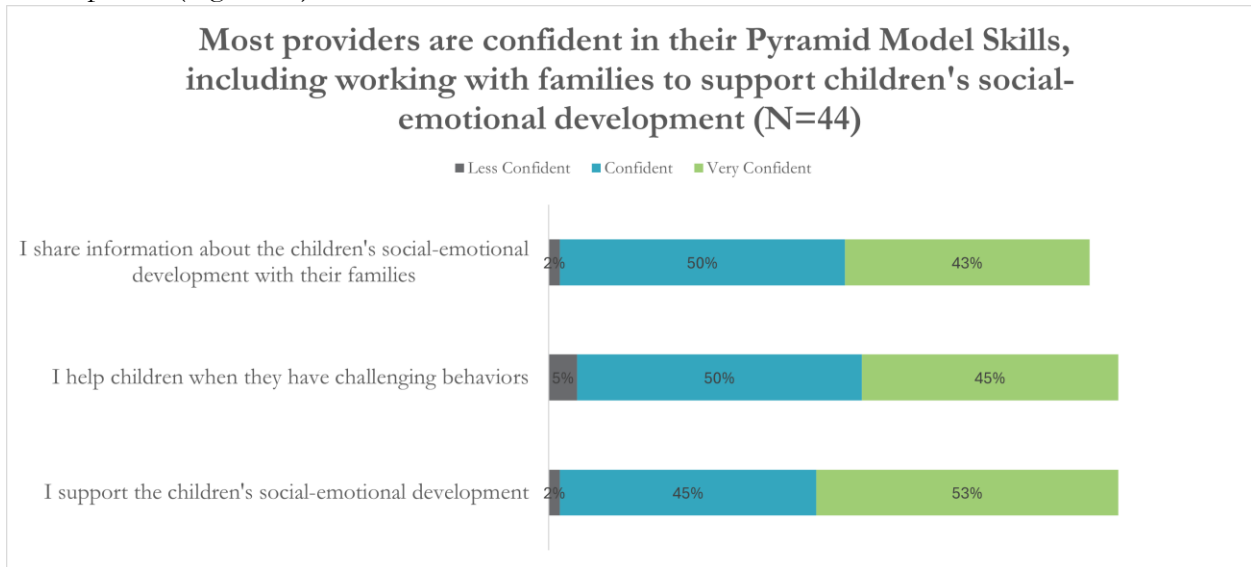


Figure 9: Pyramid Model Skills

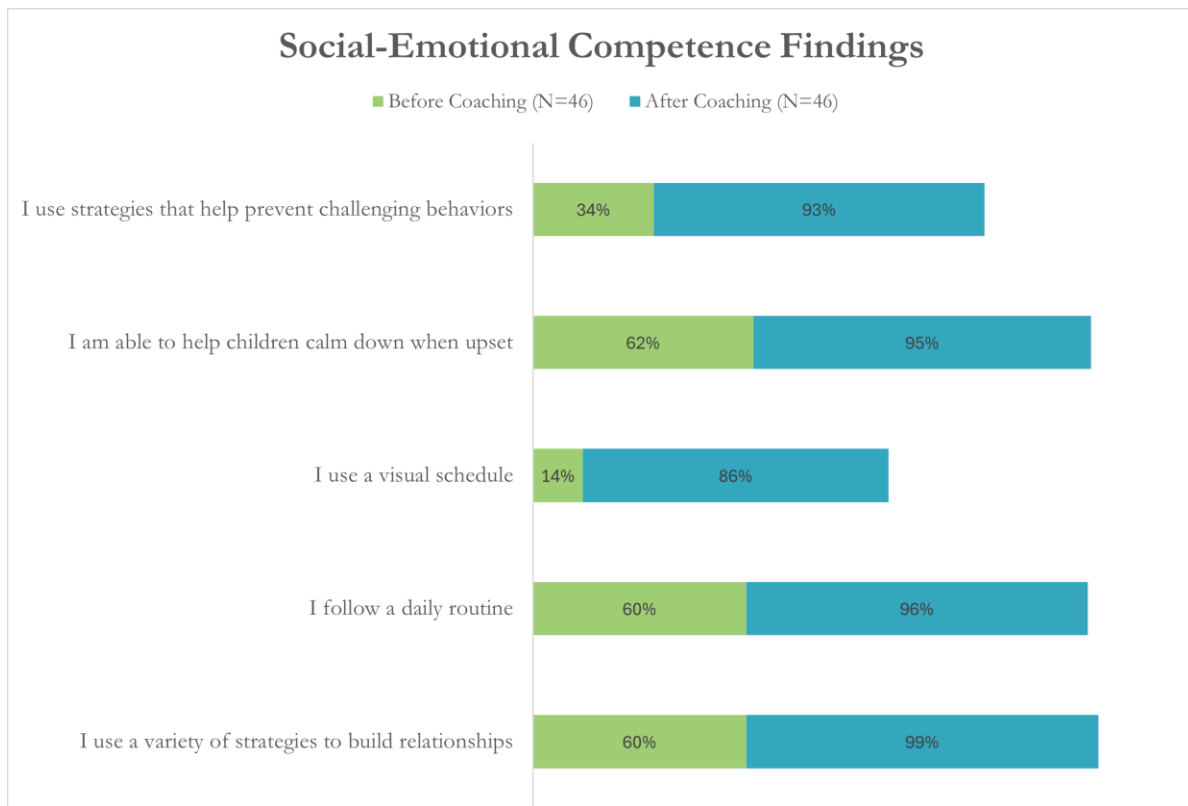


Figure 10: Social-Emotional Competence Findings

Sixpence

Sixpence supports both systems infrastructure-focused work, as well as service infrastructure-focused work (page 30). With respect to the systems infrastructure-focused work, Sixpence made important progress in 2022-2023. The Sixpence Board of Trustees released a strategic plan emphasizing several areas of importance.

- Expansion of Sixpence’s focus from 0-3 to 0-5 and increase Sixpence's work in terms of increasing access to early care and education.
- Create evaluation and accountability expectations and better demonstrate community impact.
- Demonstrate the value of Sixpence as a preventative program. This goal is wrapped into the Family First Prevention Services Act goals in Nebraska and seeks to show Sixpence’s value as a conduit for these federal dollars.
- Improve the retention of quality Sixpence staff and programs by leveraging additional funding and technical assistance support.
- Support literacy efforts in Nebraska by facilitating the Nebraska Growing Readers program via Sixpence programs, creating access to books, and helping children and families discover a love for reading through supporting positive family reading practices.

Sixpence also had a successful “Data Day.” The day included 160 registered attendees representing 42 communities. At Data Day, annual data from Sixpence was reviewed across the state with partners and stakeholders. Each of the 46 Sixpence communities reviewed previous goals and set new goals based on statewide and community level data. A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion presentation was also given. Communities and Sixpence staff had the opportunity to learn and network with other Sixpence programs.

Food Security

The Local Food Purchase Assistance program grant was in its planning year during the 2022-2023 evaluation year. Food purchases and network building are actively underway and will be detailed in next year’s report.

Beyond School Bells

Like many NCFE initiatives, 2023 was a pivotal year in Beyond School Bells’ development. Coming out of the COVID pandemic, the US Department of Education, NDE and School Districts across the state recognized the need to utilize ELO programs to reinvigorate disrupted learning and create new opportunities to enhance informal learning and support positive youth development. This recognition allowed BSB to enhance existing programs and importantly, expand into critical new areas. Highlights from BSB’s work in 2023 include:

- Supporting ESSER III-funded ELO programs in over 20 Nebraska school districts hard hit by the pandemic through a partnership with NDE. This \$11 million investment of Federal resources, and related NDE support to BSB for staff, allowed for growth in BSB’s capacity to support underserved rural and urban communities in initiating new ELO programs or

expanding existing ELO initiatives. Importantly, this work also allowed BSB to strengthen their working relationship with NDE, philanthropic partners, and communities.

- Launching a greater Nebraska ELO Engineering Pathways initiative through a partnership with the Peter Kiewit Foundation. This included designing and piloting an Elementary to College continuum of ELO experiences in four communities. The project envisions new opportunities for rural Elementary and Middle School youth to better understand Engineering/STEM fields and career opportunities through hands on experiences led by high school students and designed and supported by college students. This pathway concept is already influencing future BSB design efforts.
- Continued refining of BSB’s Environmental-Conservation Action Plan (E-CAP) by reinitiating and expanding our Conservation Management Summer Internship program into a year-round series of field experiences; expanding K-12+ Food Systems work; and continuing support for outdoor education experiences, such as community gardens and outdoor classrooms. This programming reflects youth interest in and concern for environmental and conservation-related issues and promises areas for growth in future years.

Services Infrastructure-focused Findings

Community Collaboratives

In the 2022-2023 evaluation year, Community Response served 13,288 participants and 9,711 children. Central Navigation is the component of Community Response through which parents, community members, and young adults are matched to services. Services may be formal or informal, are voluntary, and matched to individual needs. Common evidence-informed strategies for parents connecting to local prevention systems include Circle of Security Parenting (COSP), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), and Parents Interacting with Infants (PIWI). The Connected Youth Initiative is a system of prevention services and evidence informed strategies targeted for unconnected youth and young adults. Local prevention strategies are those implemented by individual collaboratives that are responsive to community-specific needs. Statewide prevention strategies include Camp Catch-Up and Legal Services provided through Legal Aid in partnership with the Social Services Block Grant. While not directly coordinated or funded by a collaborative, these statewide strategies are aligned with community-based priorities, accessed by collaborative prevention systems, and funded or coordinated, at least in part, by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation as a key partner. Table 3 details how participants were served.

Community Response Component	Participants	Children
Community Response (OVERALL)	13,288	9,711
Central Navigation (Total)	4,019	5,856
Central Navigation (14-25)*	2,181	1,436
Evidence-informed Strategies for Parents (COSP, PCIT, PIWI)	412	980
Evidence-informed Strategies for Young Adults (CYI)	5,036	3,725
Local Prevention Strategies	738	586
Statewide Prevention Strategies	3,023	-

Table 2: Community Response Highlights

Central Navigation

Central Navigation is the component of Community Response through which parents, community members, and young adults are matched to services. Central Navigation is also the intersection point of community partners to increase community capacity through training, as well as identifying and lifting up barriers to thriving. A total of 4,019 heads of household completed an in-take through Central Navigation during the 2022-2023 evaluation year. These numbers are inclusive of the 19 collaboratives across the state that fully participated in the 2022-2023 evaluation. Note that more individuals may have been served by the collaborative, as their intake form may have been completed in a previous year. Approximately 77% of those who entered through central navigation were women, and 68% of participants qualified for public assistance.

Support Service Funds

Support Service Funds are flexible monies that are available through Central Navigation when needed. These funds are intended to “fill gaps” when other funding sources are not available, or the participant doesn’t meet the criteria for other publicly available programs or resources. Over 4,400 requests were approved during the 2022-2023 evaluation year totaling just under \$2.1 million. Over 80% of the requests for support focused on housing or utilities, highlighting a need to continue focusing statewide efforts in these areas.

Connected Youth Initiative (CYI)

CYI serves youth aged 14-26 who are unconnected, or at-risk of becoming unconnected. Unconnected youth include those with previous experience in the child welfare system, homeless/at-risk for homelessness, have been a runaway, are pregnant or parenting, or are at-risk for human trafficking. CYI’s four major activities include central navigation/support services funds, coaching, youth leadership, and financial education/asset purchases through Opportunity Passport™.

CYI Coaching

During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, 2,297 youth participated in CYI coaching. Of these youth, 399 reported being parents or pregnant and 64.5% of participants were female. Just under 27% of participants were 14-18 years old (619 youth) and approximately half of participants identified themselves as White (1147 youth). One of the groups of focus for CYI is youth at-risk of homelessness.

The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

(YHDP) is a US Department of Housing and Urban Development funded program designed to drastically reduce the number of youths experiencing homelessness. Eligible youth populations include those ages 24 and under who are unsheltered, temporarily, or unstably housed (in a shelter,

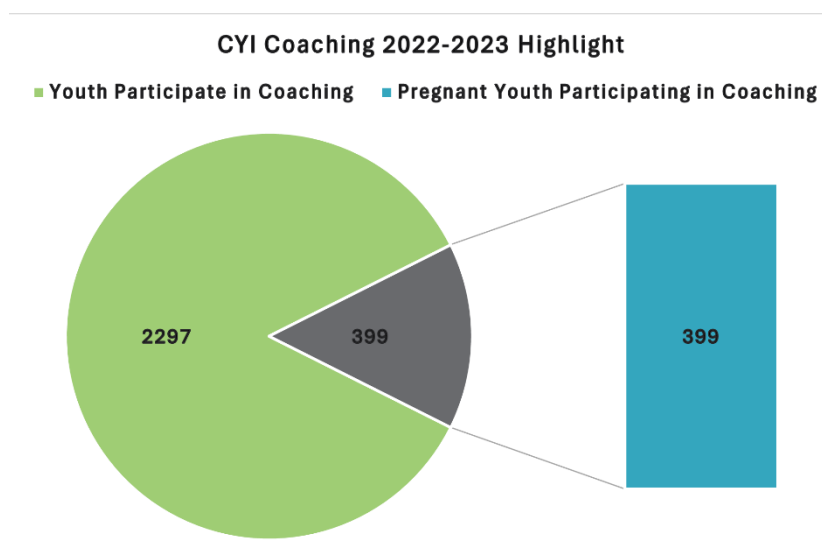


Figure 11: CYI Coaching Participants

“couch surfing,” etc.), or fleeing violence, as well as those who are at imminent risk of homelessness. During the period of October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023, 441 young adults were served through YHDP Coaching and 64 young adult households were served through the Nebraska Balance of State¹ Rapid Response Project. In all, 505 youth participated in YHDP projects for coaching support and/or Rapid Response assistance in the form of rental assistance, outpatient medical, or basic need support. When coaching participants experience housing instability, CYI Coaches take them through the All Doors Lead Home Nebraska Coordinated Entry system for referral to the YHDP Program. Youth completing coaching had experience in the foster care system, juvenile justice system, or were pregnant/parenting (see Figure 11). Importantly, youth engaged in coaching ended up in permanent housing in 82% of cases and many youth reported positive outcomes over their coaching experience (see Table 3).

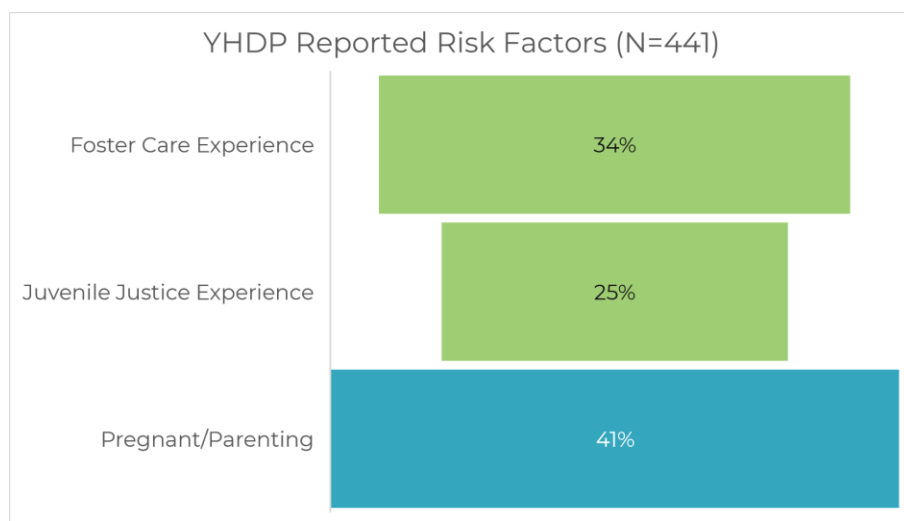


Figure 12: YHDP Reported Risk Factors

Youth Destination at Exit from Central Plains YHDP

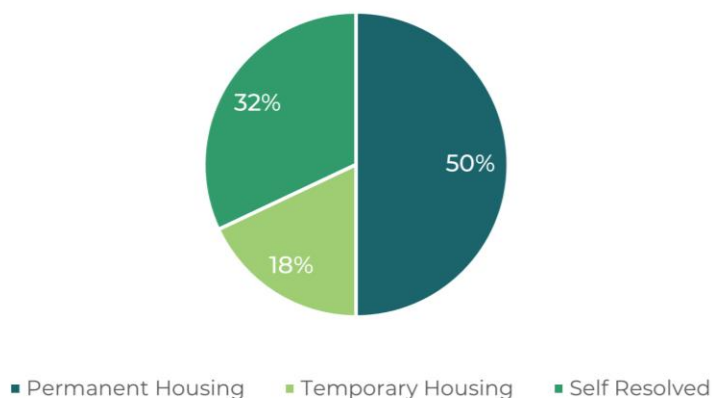


Figure 13: Youth Destination at Exit from YHDP

Percentage of YHDP participants report personal or community supports	100%
Percentage of YHDP participants report being employed after 1 year	83%
Percentage of YHDP participants report they are involved in education if desired	55%
Percentage of YHDP participants report they increased income from entry to exit	35%
Percentage of YHDP participants report being arrested with at entry into YHDP	22%
Percentage of YHDP participants report being arrested after 6 months of YHDP Coaching	3%

Table 3: YHDP participant outcomes

CYI Youth Leadership

The Youth Leadership component provides empowering opportunities for young people for leadership and advocacy. In the past evaluation year, 161 youth and young adults accessed youth leadership opportunities, with over three-quarters of young adults accessing opportunities through their local chapter. It is important to note that the total number of young adults involved in all activities may contain duplicates as young adults who accessed opportunities at the state level may have accessed opportunities at the local level and vice versa. Additionally, 129 different young leadership activities were offered in the past year, with the vast majority occurring at the local chapter level. Some of the major events this year included Legislative Days, LEAD the Summer, and the Leaders 4 Change Conference.

Financial Education

The Opportunity Passport™ program had a notable impact in 2023. Participants saved over \$400,000 on their own, which was matched with \$1.1 million in funding, resulting in a total of over \$1.5 million supporting purchases that increase financial well-being for young people and families. This included the purchase of 134 vehicles. The program itself grew as well, enrolling over 350 new participants. Nearly 500 participants (n=480) completed their 8-part KEYS To Your Financial Future financial literacy training across the state. More information about the distribution of this program can be found in Table 4.

Component	Jan 2021-Sept 2022	Jan 2022-Sept 2023
New Enrollments	259	476
Exited	268	351
Currently Enrolled	747	903
Total Participants All Time	2535	3011
Participant Savings	\$196,628.23	\$405,395.93
Match Funding Leveraged	\$370,818.17	\$1,104,524
Total Asset Purchases	208	318
Vehicle Purchases	47	134
Asset Purchaser/Participant Ratio	5.33%	7.04%

Table 4: Opportunity Passport Financial Education Information

Anti-Human Trafficking

NCCF plays an important role in coordinating anti-trafficking work in Nebraska by being a major convener of stakeholders and administering an Office for Victims of Crime “Improving Outcomes for Youth Victims of Human Trafficking” grant. There are now two anti-trafficking specific MDTs (Multi-Disciplinary Teams) in Nebraska, one covering Douglas and Sarpy Counties and the other covering Lancaster County. These teams work collaboratively to enhance and coordinate the response to children and youth who are victims of trafficking. Lancaster County reviewed cases involving 287 children (245 from Lancaster and 42 from rural counties) and Douglas and Sarpy reviewed 29. Additionally, the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition (NICWC) conducted 2 virtual trainings addressing Tribal Response to Human Trafficking in Nebraska. In total, 82 registrants representing 12 agencies from across the state were provided culturally specific information, resources, and tools to better support child and youth victims of trafficking.

Rooted in Relationships

In addition to its systems infrastructure-focused work, Rooted in Relationships supports a number of evidence-based practices both at the state infrastructure and community levels, including Circle of Security Parenting (COSP). During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, COSP served 367 parents and impacted 935 children. Over 360 parents completed evaluation surveys and showed a significant increase in positive parent-child relationships and positive parent-child interactions. Moreover, stress related to parenting decreased significantly for those providing information. Figure 14 demonstrates this. Circle of Security Classroom (COSC) continues to be offered and is supported by RiR as well. In 2023, 10 additional COSC facilitators were trained and more than 50 COSC programs were supported.

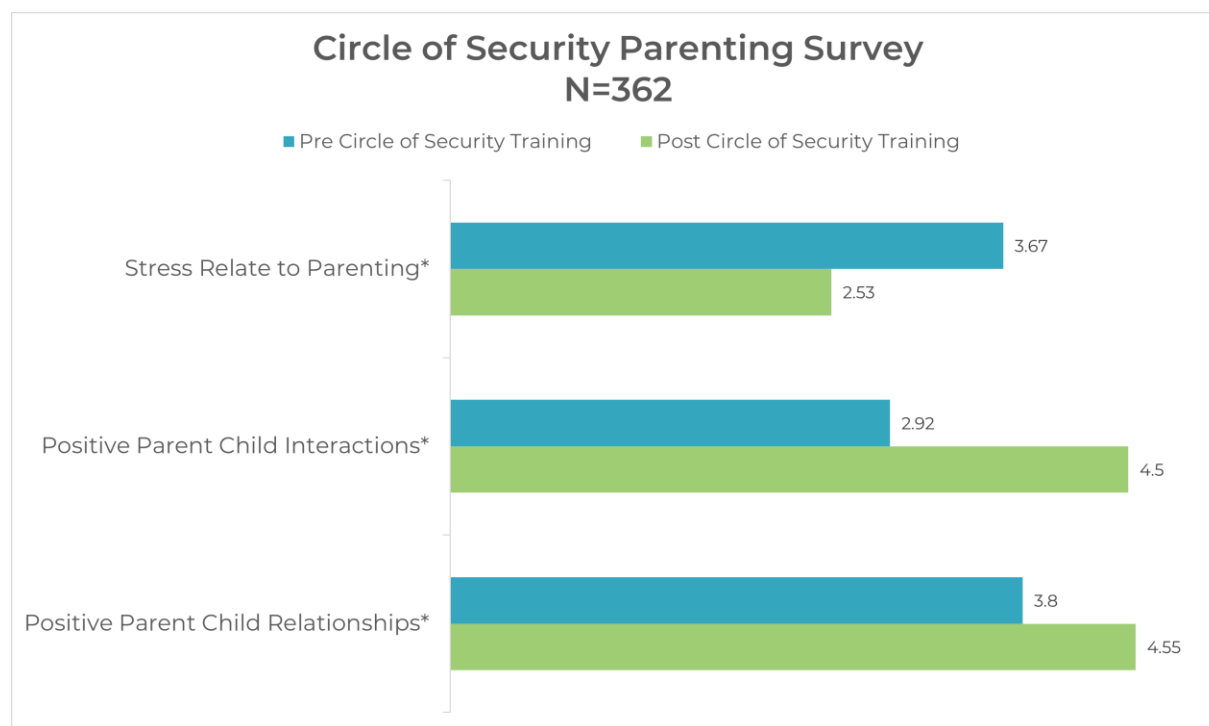


Figure 14: RiR Stress Related to Parenting

Rooted supports training and infrastructure development to expand the implementation of Parents Interacting with Infants (PIWI) which aims to increase confidence, competence, and positive relationships for parents and children 0-2 years of age by engaging parents with their young child to learn interactive play and relationship building. A total of 6 PIWI classes were offered in Saline, Lancaster, Colfax and Platte Counties in 2022. Attendance data was collected for 47 participants; a total of 43 participants completed a participant survey with 21 participants completing the survey in Spanish. **100% of PIWI class participants** agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: the leader did a good job working with my group; I felt respected and valued as a participant; I have learned new techniques that improve my interactions with children; I feel my family relationships are better than before. All but one participant (97%) agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: Meeting with a group of parents was helpful to me.

Sixpence

During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, Sixpence served 1,176 children from 1,004 families. Just under half of all families (48%) served lived in rural communities (e.g., Falls City, Ord), while remaining families lived in mid-sized communities (e.g., Grand Island, Kearney, 24%) and urban communities (Omaha and Lincoln, 28%). Sixpence served families with a diverse set of needs.

Over 90% of families were low income, 43% were single-parent households, in 36% the head of household did not have a high school diploma, 36% were English Language Learners, and in 21% of families the head of household was a teen. The children served by Sixpence had a high rate of trauma. Of the 876 families that completed the program survey, 47% of the children had experienced a potential trauma and 19% had experienced more than one (see Figure 15). After working with Sixpence, however, almost all families met important health indicators (Figure 16) and half of children met program goals for English language skills for receptive and expressive language (Figure 17). Few children (28%) met program goals, but the majority of children were still in the average range or higher.

THE MOST COMMON TRAUMA FOR SIXPENCE CHILDREN WAS HAVING A PARENT WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

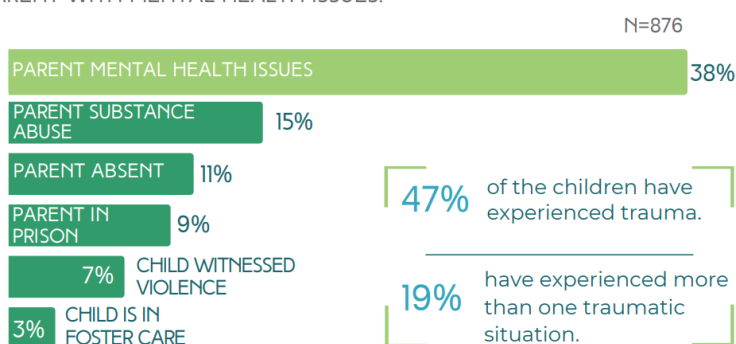


Figure 15: Most Common Trauma for Sixpence Children

MANY OF THE CHILDREN MET EVERY SIXPENCE HEALTH INDICATOR. N=876
Families came close to meeting the goal for smoke-free environment.

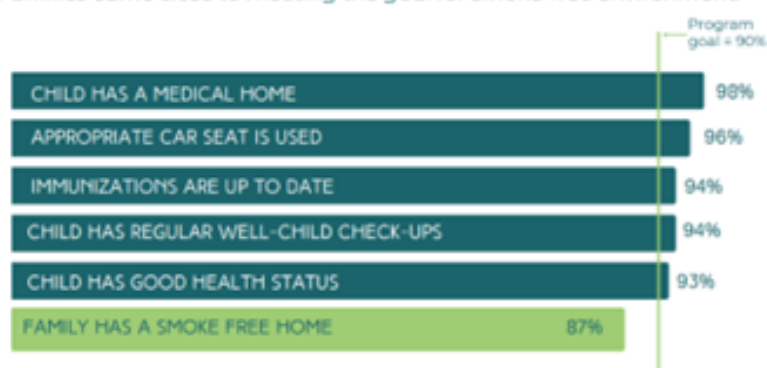


Figure 16: Children Meeting Health Indicators

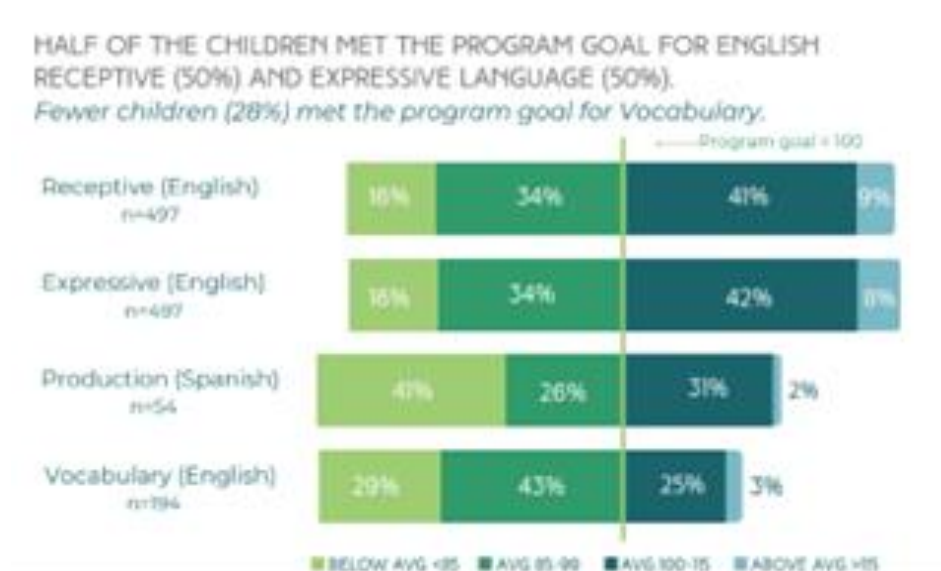


Figure 17: Children Meeting English Receptive and Expressive Language

Nebraska Growing Readers

Nebraska Growing Readers (NGR) is a significant effort focused on providing exposure to reading to Nebraska's youngest children. NGR is designed to create access to relevant books for all children birth to age five, regardless of location within the state. Before this decade ends, NGR aims to transform the literacy landscape of our state and aspires to cultivate a love of reading in communities by fostering an early love for books and shared reading, to develop "book gardens" (easily accessible distribution sites for books) across our state, and, most of all, to remind parents that they are their child's first teacher (<https://www.singasongofsixpence.org/news/nebraska-growing-readers/nebraska-growing-readers.html>). Nebraska Growing Reader Initiative will utilize the Sixpence platform for statewide book distribution. The year one goal is to distribute books to 1,000 child care providers for monthly distribution to over 12,000 children. Nebraska Growing Readers will include books with Nebraska content. Seven books have been written to date.

Medical Pathways

Prenatal Plan of Safe Care Binders have been piloted with the Community Impact Network (Adams County) and Families 1st Partnership (Lincoln County) with pregnant women being offered the opportunity to utilize the binder on their recovery and pregnancy journey. In Hastings, The Bridge, which is a therapeutic community for women recovery from alcohol and drug addiction, has been the primary partner in engaging women with the Prenatal Binder. The Bridge can engage women upon entering the treatment facility when they are identified as also being pregnant. This has led to multiple women being introduced to the Binder and starting to use it. In North Platte, there isn't a treatment facility, but through a strong partnership with each of the Managed Care Organizations (MCO's) through Medicaid, referrals and connections with pregnant women struggling with substance misuse have been made. These women have then been engaged by community agencies to be connected to services/referrals and the Prenatal Binder. Collaboration continues with both communities as the binders have been piloted to ensure they are meeting the needs of pregnant women and their families. Additional conversations and planning are starting with additional community collaboratives, including Growing Community Connections in Dakota County. While plans are being made to expand the use of the Prenatal Binder, work is also being done with

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFE) Research and Evaluation (R&E) team to start data collection on the binders. Not only will there be data collected by those using the binders, but also by the organizations that are helping to disseminate the binders.

In Hastings, the Prenatal Plan of Safe Care work involves participation from slightly over 20 agencies, spanning the Department of Health and Human Services, treatment providers, medical clinics, managed care organizations (MCOs), schools, regional providers, advocacy organizations, and resource providers. This collaborative effort aims to optimize both individual and collective efforts among these partners toward a shared goal.

Similarly, North Platte engages approximately 20 organizations in its Prenatal Plan of Safe Care initiatives, encompassing entities such as DHHS, Region 2, public school district, MCO's, health services, coaches, and women's resource centers. Following the Binder's launch in June, this collective convenes every three weeks to ensure robust community connections. Concurrently, efforts in North Platte focus on introducing pregnant individuals to the Binder, while planning a relaunch event to showcase progress and gather feedback from those utilizing the Binder.

Beyond School Bells

Reflecting BSB's understanding of the need to root programming in approaches meeting their ultimate stakeholder needs, BSB elevated their youth and family engagement efforts, including launching a youth advisory council, a youth brainstorming process, youth-led design studios, and youth staffing models. There was also an intentional focus on parent engagement including developing and scaling up take home STEM backpacks and supporting Family Engagement nights.

Cross-Cutting Coordination Findings

This section contains a summary of key highlights of findings/achievements across NCFE that reflect our cross-cutting coordination work.

Synergy and Alignment Support Team

During September and October 2023, the Synergy and Alignment Support (SAS) Team split into three subgroups and completed a process of reflective interviews. The subgroups were SAS members – which included individuals who were in the SAS role supporting one or more community collaboratives at any point throughout the pilot's lifespan, Consultants who supported one or more community collaboratives, and internal NCFE support staff representing organization wide work. Analysis of the reflective interview data from the three groups identified responses in three focus areas: Role Structure, Data Opportunities and Recommendations.

Role Structure

The structure of the SAS role appears to be pivotal in its success. It serves as a central point of contact, streamlining communication between NCFE and community collaboratives. This structure is instrumental in reducing the confusion and inefficiencies that were previously experienced when there were multiple NCFE contacts. Recommended improvements have been identified, including specific competencies, baseline training, connection to job descriptions, concrete expectations for the position and internal colleagues, and established communication processes.

Data Opportunities

There was an acknowledged need for additional data collection regarding the SAS role. To best construct and streamline the SAS position, data is needed on issues including communication, core competencies needed, and the impact of the SAS role on programs, initiatives, and communities.

Recommendations

The recommendations focused on ways to continue developing this role and enhance this team's effectiveness. While not in a specific order, to the degree possible, the following list is reflective of how frequently a recommendation was made. Recommendations included a) clarifying roles and responsibilities; b) communication; c) dedicating staff to the SAS role; d) emphasizing trust building activities; e) clarifying budget needs; and f) developing community crisis plans.

In summary, the reflective process concluded that the SAS role at NCFE is pivotal in community support and collaboration and holds significant value and potential for enhanced effectiveness. The SAS program implementation and evaluation will continue in 2024.

Race Equity, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion

The READI team achieved three significant outcomes in the past evaluation year. First, the READI team developed a strategic plan. This is a critical achievement as it sets the foundation for the READI work moving forward, identifies priorities, and establishes benchmarks for progress.

Second, the READI team garnered financial support and had a budget approved to prioritize READI work. Included in that budget is funding for an Equity Audit to help understand where NCFE is currently with regards to equity. This information, which includes outside consultants to provide an objective assessment of the organization, will be used to establish priorities, and focus efforts with respect to the READI work at NCFE. Moreover, the budget includes resources for NCFE's language justice efforts, lived-experience partner engagement, and a fund to take advantage of opportunities to advance READI goals as they arise.

Third, the READI team created and rolled out a series of internal trainings. These trainings were offered over the second half of 2023 and covered topics including an overview of READI work, equity and equality, implicit bias, language justice, LGBTQIA+ topics, microaggressions, and understanding race and racism. During the next year, completion of all trainings will be mandatory for existing staff and will become a part of the new employee on-boarding experience.

Research and Evaluation

While there has been a team at NCFE in the past, the current Research and Evaluation (R&E) Team is larger than previous teams with a broader set of skills and experience that are critical to meeting the needs of NCFE, the CCs, and statewide partners moving forward. The team added 5 new members in 2023 and has rapidly integrated into the broader work of NCFE. Specifically, the R&E team has been working to build relationships across the organization, and with external partners to implement consistent best practices in evaluation. Additionally, the R&E team has worked to solidify relationships with existing external evaluation partners and to redefine the role of and process for local evaluation in the context of the collaboratives.

Further, the R&E team has restructured the annual reporting process and associated reports increasing their utility and moving toward more robust reporting of NCFE's impact in areas critical

to the organization and external partners. This work will continue to evolve as the system Logic Model and indicator work advances and influences the structure and focus of reporting efforts.

Finally, the R&E team has worked with internal and external partners to advance a systems level approach to understanding NCFE's impact, to integrating evaluation and research practices throughout the organization, and to develop methods and models for understanding the impact of NCFE's work. Specifically, the R&E team has led or contributed substantially to:

- Defining and refining the Results Areas and associated indicators;
- Updating the system-level Logic Model;
- Advancing the focus on data quality and processes.

Summary and Future Directions

As this document details, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is a large and complex organization supporting Nebraska families through diverse and interconnected programming. As also presented, there were a significant number of successes at NCFE during the 2022-2023 reporting year. The Community Collaboratives continue to promote community-based prevention systems and coordinate resources to keep families from needing to enter high-intensity systems of care like the Child Welfare system. Established initiatives continue to thrive and expand. In one example, Sixpence's work to improve early child care and child development outcomes is expanding to include child and family literacy with the Nebraska Growing Readers program. Early childhood literacy is associated with a number of important behavioral, socioemotional, and educational outcomes (Niklas, Cohrsen, Lehl & Napoli, 2021). This is a clear example of how NCFE's work is able to be flexible and comprehensive in supporting positive outcomes for children and families.

While this report highlights the successes of NCFE, it also calls out places where improvements and further development are needed. One of these areas is the need to coordinate and integrate the diverse activities of NCFE to a greater degree. The work of the SAS teams and Priority areas has begun to address this area of need and that work will continue in 2024. Relatedly, more work is needed to show the impact of the work that the CCs, initiatives, and programs engage in. Particularly, much of NCFE's work is interconnected: the impact of early childhood development is felt in child care settings and schools, but also has major implications for workforce development over time. While this is known and appreciated at NCFE and by statewide partners, measuring and demonstrating the way that NCFE's work interacts with itself and the work of CCs, statewide partners, and national entities is a complex and evolving undertaking. Notably, in 2024 NCFE is working to implement a universal data system for use across all CCs and initiatives. This step will be critical in enhancing our ability to demonstrate the impact and interconnectedness of NCFE's work across the organization. Moreover, higher quality data showing the importance of each aspect of NCFE's work will be vital for sustainability efforts. While this process will not be complete in 2024, NCFE is positioning itself to continue to be a statewide leader in supporting children and families, and to take this leadership to the national stage.

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Appendix

Interim Indicators	2021	2020
Nebraska Education Profile (3rd Grade) ¹	50%	<i>Not available</i>
High School Graduation Rate ²	87.56%	87.51%
Juvenile Arrests ³	4,134	6,688
Children entering the child welfare system ⁴	1,965	1,979
Generational involvement in Child Welfare System ⁵	46.0%	46.8%

Table 5: Interim Indicators and the Historical Data + Sources

¹ Data drawn from the Nebraska Education Profile published by the Nebraska Department of Education (<https://nep.education.ne.gov//State/Index/00-0000-000?DataYears=20212022&type=state#>) and (<https://www.launchne.com/20-21/covid-19-special-report/>). Data was not collected in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022 data is for the 2021-2022 school year, 2021 data is for the 2020-2021 school year, 2020 data is for the 2019-2020 school year.

² Nebraska Department of Education 4-year graduation rate (<https://nep.education.ne.gov//State/Index/00-0000-000?DataYears=20212022&type=state#achievement>). 2022 data is for the 2021-2022 school year, 2021 data is for the 2020-2021 school year, 2020 data is for the 2019-2020 school year.

³ Data drawn from “Crime in Nebraska (2021)” by the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Nebraska Crime Commission). <https://ncc.nebraska.gov/sites/ncc.nebraska.gov/files/doc/2021%20Crime%20in%20Nebraska.pdf#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20adult%20arrests%20%28age%2018%20and,to%206%2C449%20in%202020%2C%20a%20decrease%20of%2035.9%25>.

⁴ Data provided by the Casey Families Foundation, drawn from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting database, US Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families.

⁵ Data provided by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and represents the % of children 0-5 in the NC child welfare system that have at least one parent that was in foster care.