

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FAMILY LISTENING SESSIONS PROJECT
Impact Monadnock Preschool Development Grant
December 2019

In 2019 Impact Monadnock (IM), the signature early childhood Initiative of the Monadnock United Way, received funding from the Preschool Development Grant, a one-year federal planning grant awarded to the state of New Hampshire in 2019. IM is using these funds to increase the region's capacity to engage families in improving early childhood systems. Here's what we did:

- (1) Engaged with families with young children to learn about their experiences;
- (2) Increased the capacity of agencies to engage families in their work by offering free trainings;
- (3) Increased the capacity of IM leaders to strengthen family engagement in systems building, by using the information gathered to update the IM Master Plan.

Here's what we learned from the Family Listening Sessions.¹

What are the essential components of the Early Childhood System?

Families with young children identified the major factors that impact their lives as being healthcare, child care, P-12 education, and employment.

What is working well for families?

Families value respect and open communication both within and across these sectors (healthcare, child care, education). Their confidence is increased when they feel supported through transitions. Families value opportunities to share stories with other parents and families within their community.

Where do families get information?

Families typically seek information from healthcare providers, child care and educational settings, home visitors, family resource centers, and financial support agencies as part of accessing the Early Childhood (EC) system. Friends, word-of-mouth, and Facebook/internet are primary 'informal' ways they receive support. They are interested in more opportunities for peer-to-peer support groups, play groups, and parent education. They identified libraries, newspapers, churches, and public events (e.g. Baby Expo) as other places where they get information.

What did families identify as opportunities within the Early Childhood System?

- Improve communication among providers of services to families with young children (healthcare, child care, P-12 education).
- Increase opportunities for connection; families want to gather, meet each other, share stories, socialize informally.
- Expand family-friendly work environments and policies (e.g. flexible schedules, lactation rooms, use of sick time/personal leave to deal with health needs, etc.).
- Increase understanding of issues facing families on the personal and emotional level, especially new parents with very young children (e.g. employment concerns, sick children, stresses of parenting).
- Increase understanding of issues facing new mothers (e.g. lactation, post-partum depression).
- Increase availability of quality affordable child care, especially for infants.
- Increase availability of before/after school care options for school-age children.
- Increase child care options for those with varied work schedules.
- Increase flexibility of transportation schedules (esp. public school).
- Increase knowledge and support for families, especially during life transitions.

¹ Everything mentioned in this summary was shared at more than one session and by more than one family.

- Increase availability of affordable pediatric dental care.
- Increase number of behavioral health care providers focused on young children and families in order to respond more quickly to referrals and to families in crisis.
- Establish additional family resource centers across the region.

How does the Monadnock Region align with other regions of the state?

Spark NH and the RAND Corporation conducted a state-wide needs assessment as part of the Preschool Development Grant, a one-year planning grant awarded to NH in 2019. As in this region, they found that families across the state are concerned about access to quality early childhood education, and that families gain information from friends and relatives and from the internet. They also found that child care providers need professional development support, that the early care and education system lacks funding from the state and local levels, and that there is a lack of consistent communication between child care centers and public kindergartens.

What projects are already underway?

Impact Monadnock and the Monadnock United Way work in support of children, education, financial stability and basic needs. In particular, Impact Monadnock has been focused on the needs of families, early childhood professionals, and children ages birth to age 5 since its inception. In 2016. Many projects are addressing the opportunities listed above.

Impact Monadnock supported projects:

- The Monadnock Home Visiting Alliance is strengthening and expanding home visiting services in the region.
- The Pyramid Model Leadership Team is collaborating with the NH Department of Education's *iSocial* project, to provide professional development for child care providers through the implementation of *Pyramid Model*, a national evidence-based framework for promoting young children's social emotional development.
- The Impact Monadnock Business Ambassadors, a group of business leaders committed to supporting family-friendly workplace policies and practices, offer free coaching to help other local businesses and organizations implement and enhance family-friendly policies.

Monadnock United Way funded projects:

- The Monadnock Parent Education Collective, comprised of four agencies, is working to instill positive parenting practices that help to heal families and to support emotional and developmental growth.
- The Monadnock Region Afterschool Collective is a collaborative consisting of six programs that offer afterschool enrichment opportunities in a safe environment.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Share this information with the people you work with, including boards of directors, community leaders, program administrators, staff, families, clients.
- Brainstorm how your agency/program/family can get involved to support families.
- Visit the MUW website for additional information about Impact Monadnock and any of our projects and partners.
- Link this document to your program's website (if appropriate).
- Sign up to receive the Impact Monadnock newsletter by emailing Paige Martin (paige@muw.org).
- Watch for the updated IM strategic project plan to see how we are incorporating this information in future activities (coming in 2020).
- Donate to MUW – visit www.muw.org.