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Synthesis of Findings from the 2011 Child Welfare-Early Education Partnerships to Expand Protective Factors For Children with Child Welfare Involvement

Submitted to:

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September 2015

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This publication was developed by James Bell Associates on behalf of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), under Federal Contract Number GS10F0204K, Order Number HHSP233201100391G. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACF, or HHS.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2011, the Children’s Bureau, through its discretionary grant program, funded eight grantees to “build capacity among State, local or tribal child welfare (CW) agencies and early childhood systems to increase the enrollment of infants and young children in foster care into comprehensive, high-quality early care and education services”. Protective relationships with care-giving adults, as in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs can alleviate the effects of early trauma as experienced by children exposed to abuse or neglect and mitigate negative outcomes. However, despite their categorical eligibility for participation in the nation’s federally and locally funded Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs, foster children’s enrollment remains low (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2011).

The purpose of the grantees’ projects was to build infrastructure to better address barriers to permanency and to enhance capacity to deliver multi-disciplinary interventions to improve the socio-emotional and behavioral well-being of infants and young children and their families through collaborative service delivery. Known collectively as the Child Welfare-Early Education Partnerships (ECCW) grantee cluster, the grantees implemented approaches to help:

- Foster strategic coordination and institutionalized communication among public CW, early childhood, and community organizations, and families with infants and young children;
- Support the development of policies and/or procedures to increase the identification, enrollment, and attendance of infants and young children in foster care into comprehensive, high-quality early care and education services;
- Promote the awareness and utilization of multi-disciplinary interventions and quality practice that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors to improve developmental outcomes and prevent subsequent child maltreatment for children, ages birth to 5 years, and their families;
- Promote the development of policy, quality practice, and other strategies across systems aimed at increasing parental protective factors, developing children's resiliency, and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma; and
- Collectively disseminate findings and support knowledge transfer from these projects to the field. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2011)

The eight grantees included the following organizations and locations:

- University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR
- University of California, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, Los Angeles, CA
- Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver, CO
- State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), Hartford, CT
- Family Central, Inc., North Lauderdale, FL (B-FL)
- Family Support Services of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL (FSS-FL)
- Augusta Partnership for Children, Augusta, GA
- Children's Friend and Service, Providence, RI

The grantees adopted a variety of approaches to their projects but in general they included:

- Developing and/or strengthening community agency partnerships and collaboration;
- Changing policies, procedures and data systems to facilitate access to enrollment in quality care for foster children;
- Increasing cross-discipline knowledge through training of child welfare and early education staff;
- Expanding the quantity and availability of quality early childhood care offered in the community;
- Collecting and disseminating information; and
- Conducting evaluations of project processes and outcomes.

All grantees conducted process evaluations that, together with the final project reports, form the basis of this synthesis report.

Findings by Activity

Within the general approaches, the grantees conducted a variety of collaboration, training, data system revision, policy and enrollment activities to implement their projects.

Collaboration

All grantees formed collaborations to guide their work. These collaboratives usually involved working groups or advisory committees that met periodically to facilitate interagency cooperation. They included representatives of CW and ECE agencies (such as Head Start providers) and most also included mental health services, schools, courts, training agencies and other nonprofits. Half of the collaborations were built on existing groups while the remaining half was new efforts. All collaboratives actively promoted referrals of young foster children from CW to ECE programs. This was accomplished through active review of agency barriers to referrals, education campaigns, and outreach activities. In an effort to increase referrals, many collaboratives provided training to CW and ECE agency staff.

Grantees often reported that having key agency leadership present in their collaboratives was essential for effecting real change in agencies. One of the most significant areas of success, as cited by all grantees, was the development of inter-agency partnerships.

Collaborations were evaluated using a variety of measures of collaboration and social network analysis and almost all found that while collaboration was relatively high at the beginning of the project, it still increased and strengthened over the grant period, in some cases showing statistically significant increases.

Training

Grantees reported that over 2,300 people received training through the projects. Training to increase knowledge and awareness of issues was a key focus for the grantees and usually included the following elements:

- Informing CW, court staff, and foster parents of the value of ECE for young foster children;
- Informing CW workers and foster parents about how to access ECE services;
- Informing CW and ECE staff about child trauma and protective factors for foster children; and
- Improving skills of ECE staff in response to difficult child behavior.

The types of training offered varied across grantees both in terms of the type of material taught as well as how the curricula were developed and customized to the audiences. Topics ranged from brain development and the benefits of ECE for young children for CW staff to how the child welfare system works and how children in foster care may have been affected by trauma for ECE staff.

Five grantees (CO, CT, CA, AR, and B-FL) assessed knowledge gained as a result of training through pre and post testing. All five grantees reported statistically significant, though modest, increases in knowledge from pretest to posttest for CW workers or ECE staff. In addition to increases in knowledge, trainings also served to foster collaboration between ECE and CW staff.

The grantees used a variety of strategies to sustain their training initiatives after the end of their grants. These efforts included train-the-trainer programs, innovative use of technology and electronic media such as DVD's and YouTube videos, and development of printed educational materials that were widely circulated to a variety of audiences.

Data Management Systems

A majority of the grantees uncovered issues in CW and ECE data management systems that hindered foster child referral and enrollment. Four grantees focused on improvements to data management systems to increase referrals. Improvements to data systems addressed five main challenges including:

- Improved tracking of foster children for ECE eligibility
- Interoperability of CW and ECE systems

- Electronic referral processes
- Identification of quality programs
- Quality and validity of data

Several grantees were able to modify data systems to improve referrals of foster children to ECE programs and to enhance the data available on high quality ECE programs and child eligibility for ECE. However, competing agency initiatives prevented other grantees from making desired improvements.

Policies and Processes

Grantees identified policies and processes at the organization and state levels that posed barriers to the enrollment of foster children in ECE programs. These efforts included systematic identification of barriers; changes in organization policies and processes; and making recommendations or advocating for changes in policy at the state level. A majority of grantees identified structural barriers to foster child participation in ECE including voucher distribution and information sharing limitations.

Some of the barriers to enrollment identified by grantees include:

- Lack of knowledge by CW workers of categorical eligibility of foster children for HS and misperceptions of EHS/HS services;
- Lack of easy or automated referral systems for foster children to EHS/HS or other high-quality ECE programs and challenges to the development of such systems;
- Enrollment periods for EHS/HS that are not compatible with year-round need for access to early education for foster children;
- EHS/HS programs that were at capacity and could not accommodate new foster children;
- HS programs that were part-day, part-year and so were not functional for the full-day, full-year child care needs of working foster parents
- Lack of widely used quality ratings for ECE programs;
- Lack of interest among caseworkers in referring children to ECE programs;
- Inadequate information exchange between ECE providers and caseworkers regarding children's needs and progress; and
- EHS/HS and other quality ECE programs not being conveniently located for foster parents.

Some of these issues were addressed through trainings and changes to data systems, while other changes required adaptations to organizational policies and processes.

Beyond agency-level changes, several grantees sought to influence state policies to facilitate the enrollment of foster children in ECE. AR identified a systemic issue in voucher distribution that was causing interruptions in foster child participation in ECE and sought to improve it. CT formed a state-wide Early Childhood Community of Practice to review policy as it relates to

young children and to recommend policy change and/or development that support a developmentally informed Child Welfare System.

Enrollment of Foster Children in Early Childhood Education Programs

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the grants was the increased referral and enrollment placement of young foster children in quality early childhood education programs. Four grantees were able to identify increased enrollment of children during the grant period, with a total of 430 children enrolled including increases of 52 percent and 88 percent in FSS-FL and CA, respectively. Grantees also saw increases in children screened for disabilities and receiving early intervention services as well as more children referred to higher quality ECE programs and fewer referred to lower quality programs.

Program Challenges and Successes

The grantees' projects were ambitious in attempting to overcome resource, informational, policy, practice and infrastructural barriers to foster child enrollment in high-quality ECE programs. The major barriers to their efforts were those below.

Lack of available high-quality ECE programs

Several grantees found the lack of high-quality ECE programs, exacerbated by the lack of vacancies in EHS/HS programs, was a major barrier to the enrollment of foster children. ECE programs, especially programs for infants, were often filled and waitlists were long. Further complicating availability was the seasonal nature of enrollment in ECE, especially EHS/HS in which enrollment fills in the fall, but children may enter the foster care system at any time during the year.

Lack of knowledge of the value of ECE for young foster children

Staff and officials in the child welfare and court systems may not understand the benefits of high-quality early education for young children, especially for children affected by trauma, making them less likely to refer children to these services.

Unclear or poorly understood definitions of high-quality ECE.

A lack of understanding of what constitutes "high-quality" ECE and how it is identified or rated was also an issue faced by many grantees. In the absence of a national quality rating system, grantees had to address the definition of quality within their individual states and communities.

Barriers to Collaboration

Grantees faced several barriers when developing collaborative relationships, including for some the absence of a history of collaboration between ECE and CW agencies and personnel turnover especially among leadership in collaborating agencies. Other issues many grantees encountered in fostering collaboration were continuation of participation in collaborative efforts and collaborators competing workloads.

Technological Barriers

Many grantees sought to make improvements to data systems to automate the referral process and improve tracking efforts. However, efforts to improve IT systems proved to be some of the

most difficult changes to implement, as they often required extensive resources and specialized staff. In some situations planned changes could not be implemented as they had to be prioritized against ongoing agency IT development efforts or were stymied by other IT system changes.

Training Barriers

Grantees successfully developed training approaches and curricula or contracted for existing training, but they faced challenges in the participation of targeted audiences in the training due to competing work demands and logistical challenges for CW, ECE and court personnel and foster parents. Furthermore, efforts to make trainings relevant and appealing to broad audiences also rendered some content too basic or redundant for certain groups.

Timelines

Many grantees felt that the grant period of 17 months was too short to effect meaningful changes and impeded both program implementation and evaluation efforts. Most grantees received no cost extensions of up to 23 months to address this issue. A second ECCW grant cohort was funded for 24 months.

Program Successes

Despite many challenges, grantees were successful in achieving many of the goals of their projects. As described earlier, grantee successes included:

- Implementation of successful partnerships and collaboratives;
- Modification of policies and practices that hinder the placement of foster children into high-quality ECE programs;
- Development and implementation of varied training opportunities for large numbers of participants;
- Improvement or development of effective processes for referral and enrollment of children in ECE;
- Creation of or improvement of data systems and protocols; and
- Increases in number and percentage of foster children enrolled in quality ECE programs, as well as those screened and referred to early intervention services.

Project Sustainability

All grantees addressed the potential for the sustainability of project activities and progress after the end of their grant through sustainability planning during the grant period. Approximately half of the projects were predicted to continue after the official grant funding period through development of ongoing interagency agreements, continuation of training, development of data infrastructure and procedures, and continuation of referral processes developed during the grant period

Dissemination

The grantees undertook a variety of dissemination activities, distributing both educational content and general information about the accomplishments and lessons learned from their

projects. They distributed information and curricula through brochures, videos, training materials, and policy and practice documents. They also produced conference presentations, posters, and journal and newsletter articles about their projects' accomplishments and evaluations.

Lessons Learned

Grantees were confronted with a complex challenge in attempting to increase foster child enrollment in high-quality ECE programs. The efforts of these projects resulted in many lessons that provide guidance for other organizations seeking to address these or similar issues.

Building solid collaborations is important when tasks cross organizational boundaries. The central task of these projects required the cooperation and participation of multiple systems, agencies, and organizations. To make progress it was important that both CW and ECE agencies be involved and committed. To make the partnerships work, however, it was important that they be staffed by individuals for whom the collaborative was a formal part of their work responsibilities. Furthermore, consistent participation by individuals in positions of authority is essential to effect change; progress was significantly impeded when these leaders were not available to help advocate for or facilitate project goals and activities.

Increasing enrollment of foster children in ECE is an achievable goal and valuable accomplishment. Despite challenges, many grantees were able to increase the number of young foster children enrolled in quality ECE programs.

The process of identifying barriers to enrollment is a worthwhile investment. While there were commonalities in some challenges and approaches, barriers to foster child enrollment in high-quality ECE programs also varied across grantees. It is important to take the time to systematically identify the barriers across organizations, stakeholders, and communities to effectively and efficiently address them.

The availability of high-quality ECE programs must be addressed more broadly to improve foster child participation. For grantees to succeed in increasing the enrollment of foster children in high-quality ECE programs, mechanisms for identifying high-quality programs must exist. Furthermore, a lack of available slots (especially for infants in EHS/HS and other programs) coupled with the misalignment of ECE enrollment periods with year-round needs for early childhood services, often made the placement of young foster children into ECE programs problematic.

System changes require major commitments of time and resources. Many grantees found that they were only able to lay the groundwork for changes within the limited grant period. Organizations embarking on similar efforts should begin preparing for sustainability early through interagency agreements, embedding collaborative efforts within existing agency structures, and prioritizing goals.

Training is worth the investment. Grantees provided training in various modalities and on a range of topics to CW and ECE workers, foster parents, and court personnel. Despite logistical, policy, and workload barriers, these trainings demonstrated both meaningful knowledge gains and high satisfaction ratings among participants in all categories.

Technology can facilitate ECE referrals and related activities. The use of electronic information systems to facilitate the referral and enrollment of foster children into ECE programs has great potential and some grantees were able to capitalize on that potential to implement system changes. However, grantees also encountered a variety of barriers to making changes in data systems that required substantial amounts of money, staff time, and specialized skills.

In conclusion, despite a number of major challenges the 2011 ECCW grantees demonstrated that efforts to increase the enrollment of foster children into high-quality ECE programs can be successful. Doing so requires a multi-pronged strategy that includes the fostering of inter-agency partnerships that include stakeholders with decision-making authority from the CW, ECE, and court systems; consistent and systematic training for ECE and CW staff as well as for foster caregivers and court personnel; the development of clear and uniform referral and enrollment procedures; comprehensive and reliable information management systems; and a commitment to rigorous evaluation to inform program development and improvement.

Introduction and Overview

In 2011, the Children’s Bureau, through its discretionary grant program, funded eight grantees to “build capacity among State, local or tribal child welfare (CW) agencies and early childhood (EC) systems to maximize the identification, enrollment, attendance and supports of infants and young children, ages birth to 5 years old, in foster care into comprehensive, high-quality early care and education services”(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). As the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for these grants explained, exceptionally stressful experiences early in life, such as abuse or neglect, may have long-term consequences for a child’s learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. However, protective relationships with care-giving adults through high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs can alleviate the effects of early trauma and mitigate negative outcomes. Children in or at risk of foster care placement could especially benefit from these interventions. However, despite their categorical eligibility for Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs, foster children’s enrollment remains low (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

The purpose of the grantees’ projects was to build infrastructure to address barriers to permanency and enhance capacity to deliver multi-disciplinary interventions that improve the socio-emotional and behavioral well-being of infants and young children and their families. Known collectively as the Child Welfare-Early Education Partnerships (ECCW) grantee cluster, the grantees implemented approaches to:

- Foster strategic coordination and institutionalized communication among public CW, early childhood, community organizations, and families with infants and young children;
- Support the development of policies and procedures to increase enrollment and attendance of infants and young children in foster care in high-quality ECE programs;
- Promote awareness and utilization of multi-disciplinary interventions and quality practices that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors for children ages birth to 5 years and their families;
- Promote the development of policy, quality practice, and other strategies across systems aimed at increasing parental protective factors, developing children's resiliency, and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma; and
- Collectively disseminate findings and support knowledge transfer from these projects to the field (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

The selected grantees included two state agencies, two universities, and four private, non-profit agencies; their project names, goals, locations and target populations are summarized in Exhibit 1: 2011 ECCW Grantees.¹

¹ James Bell Associates wishes to thank the directors and evaluators of these ECCW projects for making their final reports and related project materials available as information sources for this synthesis paper.

EXHIBIT 1: 2011 ECCW GRANTEES

Grantee Name and Abbreviation	Project Name	Project Goals	Geographic Location	Target Population
University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR (AR)	Building Bridges to Better Beginnings	<p>Overarching Goal: Address policy and training factors that impact the ability for the systems to collaborate effectively.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Review CW and early educational child care policies pertaining to service delivery, inter-agency communications, training, and other relevant areas as they relate to quality care and placement of children ages 0 to 5 years and their families. 2) Involve stakeholders from all regions of the state in the project process. 3) Advocate for policy changes to eliminate barriers identified that impede collaboration or access to quality care. 4) Identify CW and early educational child care personnel training needs as pertains to young children who have experienced maltreatment and their caregivers. 5) Establish training protocols focused on the needs of young children who have experienced maltreatment and their family systems. 6) Provide training to CW and early education child care personnel to improve quality care for young children who have experienced maltreatment. 	Arkansas	Young children age birth to 5, in poverty or experiencing maltreatment. Children who already attend child care, specifically foster children.

Grantee Name and Abbreviation	Project Name	Project Goals	Geographic Location	Target Population
University of California, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, Los Angeles, CA (CA)	Los Angeles Child Welfare-Early Education Partners Infrastructure Project (LACWEEP)	Increase access to high-quality early care and education services for young children in the child welfare system in Long Beach, California.	City of Long Beach	Children (birth through 4) with an open case in the child welfare system in Long Beach, California.
Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver, CO (CO)	Partners in Early Childhood Education Services (PIECES)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increase state-level coordination and collaboration to promote ECCW partnerships. 2) Build capacity in three local grantees to increase children’s access to early intervention, EHS, HS, and quality child care. 3) Develop model programs of CW-EC partnerships around the <i>Strengthening Families</i> framework, early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) and the Early Childhood Councils. These Early Childhood Councils in Colorado’s local communities brought together early care and education, family support, mental health and health agencies to improve the quality, access and equity of early childhood services to best serve young children and their families. 4) Evaluate PIECES implementation and outcomes. 	Statewide collaboration to promote CW and ECE Partnerships with local capacity building in El Paso, Fremont, and Jefferson Counties.	Children 0 to 5 involved with the child welfare system.

<p>State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), Hartford, CT (CT)</p>	<p>Early Childhood Collaborative</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Cross train partnership members on a shared protective factors framework for action, trauma informed interventions and infant mental health and resiliency. 2) Identify strategic opportunities to infuse a protective factors approach into policy and practice tools. 3) Enhance data collection by embedding additional fields into the DCF data system to more effectively track children by age and enrollment in early childhood programs. 4) Expand the DCF-HS partnership to include the broader Early Childhood community and state partners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) DCF Hartford Regional Office Catchment Area – focus of infants mental health training and reflective supervisions, and activities to enhance level of community collaborations. 2) All communities across the state of Connecticut were the recipients of supports to enhance their level of community collaboration and use of protective practice framework. 	<p>Infants and young children, birth to five years.</p>
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Grantee Name and Abbreviation	Project Name	Project Goals	Geographic Location	Target Population
Family Central, Inc., North Lauderdale, FL (B-FL)	Broward's Infrastructure Design to Guide and Sustain Permanency for Young Children in Foster Care (BRIDGES)	<p>Overarching Goal: To create early learning environments that meet the needs of children birth to 5 years of age in foster care to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Promote and sustain permanency of placement. 2) Create a system to identify child care programs that have the capacity to provide quality child care for foster children. 3) Provide child care programs the resources and support required to address the complex needs of foster children. 4) Establish and strengthen communication between key system players. 5) Build direct relationships between the CW system and community-based early child care programs that serve foster children. 6) Build system capacity for child advocates, parents, guardians, and foster parents to make informed choices in selecting child care programs that meet the needs of foster children. 	Broward County	Children in foster care ages 0-5.
Family Support Services of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL (FSS-FL)	Child Welfare-Early Education Partnership (CW-EEP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Build a strong infrastructure between the lead agency for CW services in Duval County and the leading agencies for child care and early education services in the County. 2) Create a seamless system where all children ages 0-5 are provided quality child care services and all stakeholders (parents, caseworkers and child care workers) are provided the appropriate training and support to provide quality services. 	Duval County	Children birth to five in foster care in Duval County, FL.

Grantee Name and Abbreviation	Project Name	Project Goals	Geographic Location	Target Population
Augusta Partnership for Children, Augusta, GA (GA)	Ensuring Positive Investment in Children (EPIC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create an interagency infrastructure to develop policies and processes to enable child serving organizations to provide child care, education and support services consistently to children in or at risk of foster care placement. 2) Increase ability of partner organizations to provide services through improved communication, shared information and cross agency training. 	Richmond County	Infants and young children birth to 5 at risk of foster care placement or currently in foster care in Richmond County Department of Children and Family Services.
Children's Friend and Service, Providence, RI (RI)	Rhode Island Early Childhood Child Welfare—HS Partnership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Identify and address pragmatic barriers to foster child participation in EHS/HS. 2) Identify strengths and gaps in knowledge and competencies of the workforce involved with children in foster care. 3) Recommend evidence-based programs and practices to meet outstanding workforce needs. 4) Disseminate findings and lessons learned. 	Rhode Island	Children in foster care in the state of Rhode Island.

The official grant period was 17 months, after which time all grantees received a three- to six-month no-cost extension for up to 23 months. Each grantee conducted a process evaluation. The majority used a third-party evaluator, however in a few cases the evaluator was part of the same organization as the grantee agency. Each grantee submitted a final report at the end of the grant period. These reports, as well as grantees' presentations and supplemental evaluation reports, are the basis for this cross-grantee synthesis. Unless otherwise noted, grantees are identified in this document by the abbreviations for the states in which they are located, with variations for Broward County BRIDGES (referred to as "B-FL") and Family Support Services of North Florida (referred to as "FSS-FL").

The grantees adopted varying approaches to their projects, but all included the following elements:

- A focus on collaboration between child welfare (CW) and early childhood education (ECE) programs, as well as with other programs or agencies;
- Efforts to increase referrals and enrollment of foster children into high-quality ECE programs, especially EHS/HS; and
- Training or professional development of child welfare and early education staff on the benefits of early education for young children, the procedures followed by CW agencies, and the challenges experienced by children in the CW system.

1. Background for ECCW Grants

Young children are one of the largest age groups in foster care today. In 1993, only 23 percent of U.S. foster children were aged birth through 5 (Maza, 1996) but this has risen to 39 percent today (Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 2014a). Infants and toddlers have been identified as one of the fastest growing groups being served by CW agencies (Wulczyn, Barth, Yuan, Jones-Harden, & Landsverk, 2005), with 17 percent of children being under one year of age (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014a). Moreover, these younger children are more likely than older maltreated children to experience developmental impairments, serious injury and death (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

As the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for this grant program stated,

Research in the neurobiological, behavioral and social sciences points to the critical importance of early life and early childhood experiences in shaping the developmental outcomes for children in later life...Protective relationships with care-giving adults can alleviate the effects of early trauma...Research on risk and protective factors...clearly shows the important of early childhood learning for young children...Yet connecting children and their families to services often proves difficult, requiring knowledge of programs and eligibility requirements and persistence in overcoming barriers. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011)

Indeed, children in foster care are underrepresented in early childhood programs as compared to all children under age 5. According to the National Survey of Child Well-Being, Wave 2 (NSCAW II), only 27.2 percent of children aged birth through 5 were participating in some kind of center-based early childhood education program—including only 20.2 percent of children two and under and 41 percent of 3 through 5-year-olds (Casanueva, Smith, Dolan, Tueller, & Lloyd, 2012). This is the case even though children in foster care are automatically eligible for EHS/HS regardless of level of family income.

The HS Program Information Report Enrollment Statistics from 2008-2009 showed that 14,639 of the children who received EHS/HS services during this time were eligible because of their status as foster children. However, this figure represented only 9.2 percent of American children ages birth to 5 years who were in foster care on September 30, 2008. Given the potential benefits of ECE for children in foster care, the eight grantees engaged in efforts to improve collaboration, training and placement processes to facilitate the enrollment of young foster children in high-quality ECE programs.

2. Grantees and Target Populations

The 2011 ECCW grantees included two public universities (University of Arkansas at Little Rock and University of California-Los Angeles); two state agencies (Colorado Department of Human Services and Connecticut Department of Children and Families); and four private, non-profit agencies (Augusta Partnership for Children, Children's Friend and Service, Family Central, and Family Support Services of North Florida). As stipulated by the requirements of the FOA, all grantees focused on foster children ages 0-5. A majority of the grantees (CA, CO, B-FL, FSS-FL, GA) chose to limit interventions to one or several counties or cities in their states.

3. Grantee Goals and Activities

All grantees aimed to promote collaboration among state and local agencies and other stakeholders to increase the enrollment of young foster children in high-quality ECE programs, especially EHS/HS. The more specific goals of the eight grantees were presented in Exhibit 1. As shown in the Exhibit, grantees' goals included:

- Strengthening community agency partnerships and collaboration;
- Expanding the quantity of quality early childhood care offered in the community;
- Expanding the availability of quality care;
- Changing policies, procedures and systems to facilitate access to quality care for foster children;
- Increasing knowledge through training of child welfare and early education staff; and
- Collecting and disseminating information.

Grantees engaged in a wide range of activities to achieve the goals described above, as summarized in Exhibit 2: Grantee Activities. The most common activity, executed by every grantee, was the formation of collaboratives, committees or working groups. The membership

of these groups included a variety of public and private agencies and other stakeholders who worked together to promote the enrollment of young foster children into ECE programs.

EXHIBIT 2: GRANTEE ACTIVITIES

Grantee	Project Activities
AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzed policies to identify potential changes that would foster improved collaboration. • Identified gaps in knowledge in three main intervention groups: CW workers, court officers, and ECE workers. • Developed and deployed trainings to improve communication, collaboration, and educate professionals on the needs of children who have experienced trauma. • Provided social media resources.
CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded electronic Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)-HS referral system to include infants and toddlers. • Implemented system for referring & linking DCFS children whom EHS/HS does not have capacity to serve to other high-quality ECE providers. • Developed and implemented a series of trainings for CW and ECE staff, as well as for other EC systems providers, Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, and parents/caregivers on the benefits of ECE. • Convened Advisory Committee to improve service coordination to better meet development and family support needs of children.
CO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executed changes in policies, procedures, and agency structure to facilitate improved collaboration. • Conducted <i>Strengthening Families</i> through Early Care & Education training. • Formed Early Childhood Council State Team, that participated in joint training and meetings that brought CW staff, community grantee representatives, and EC members together. • Developed child/family tracking and referral systems. • Enhanced sharing of information through brochures, toolkits and technology.
CT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted Protective Factors as DCF agency framework. • Developed tool kits for CW and Child Care Practitioners and State System. • Implemented cross sector training. • Proposed adaptations for data systems to support the identification, enrollment and monitoring of foster children.

Grantee	Project Activities
B-FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and delivered a training curriculum (Informed Choice) and a handbook to increase awareness and educate those who work with young children in foster care. • Developed a certification process to increase the number of quality child care centers that could serve young children in foster care. • Developed and piloted transdisciplinary staffings for young children in foster care. • Developed the foundation for a data sharing mechanism to track young children in foster care. • Developed and approved policy recommendations to sustain project activities.
FSS-FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created Early Learning Programs Brochure for Foster Parents—given to foster parents at time of placement explaining qualities to seek in child care. • Developed foster parent training video on ECE that was posted on YouTube. • Used train-the-trainer method to train 46 coaches to work with teachers in Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS).
GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner agencies reviewed policies to prioritize enrollment of foster children and children with open cases • Developed standardized referral process for CW children to HS. • Arranged joint trainings on topics of mutual interest. • Designated a liaison between HS and CW agency.
RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involved stakeholders in collaborative planning to identify policies and procedures that created barriers between CW and EHS/HS. • Worked with subcommittees to create plan of action to develop new polices that foster collaboration between CW and EHS/HS. • Conducted current workforce knowledge assessment. • Shared data on existing evidence-based programs and practices with the 2012 ECCW grantee in Rhode Island to address identified gaps in workforce capacity.

The majority of grantees also focused on the review, revision, or development of policies and processes to facilitate collaboration and increase ECE enrollments. This included the review of CW policies affecting the referral of children to EHS/HS, or the administration of funds to support foster children’s participation in EHS/HS. Many grantees conducted surveys or analyses of existing polices to identify areas in which greater synergy between organizations could be created. These areas included internal agency processes for handling enrollment and tracking attendance as well as barriers to the sharing of information between agencies.

In addition, four grantees focused on data system improvement or modification to improve tracking of foster child enrollment in ECE and/or collaboration. Changes in data systems management included improvements to facilitate tracking of children and create greater interoperability and automation of systems.

All grantees placed a clear emphasis on training. Seven of the eight grantees actively conducted training during the grant period. The target audiences for trainings included CW workers, ECE staff, foster parents, and members of the legal system. Training was primarily to inform CW workers on the importance of the early years of life and the value of early childhood education, and to inform early childhood educators about the experiences and needs of children in foster care. In some cases trainings were designed to support collaboration, and were held as joint training events for CW and ECE staff.

Six grantees also facilitated the dissemination of information and increased enrollment through the development of toolkits, handbooks, brochures, and other materials. Toolkits had a variety of audiences but were most often targeted towards front-line staff in an effort to educate and provide an easy-to-access, centrally located collection of resources. Handbooks and brochures were designed to provide information to those accessing early childhood education services.

4. Definitions of Quality

A key element in these grants was the focus on high-quality early care for children. In the absence of national child care standards, states and communities have developed a variety of quality rating systems, and grantees' definitions of quality reflected this variation. In general, grantees fell into three categories: 1) those with pre-established quality rating systems, 2) those with statewide quality rating systems in development, and 3) those with limited rating systems and/or capabilities. AR and RI were the only grantees in the first group. AR had a pre-established, statewide voluntary quality rating system known as Better Beginnings. Better Beginnings consists of a three-star rating system. Applying agencies receive training and technical support assistance. RI had the Bright Stars system, implemented in 2009, a five-star quality rating and improvement system developed through a multi-agency partnership.

In CO and GA, statewide quality assurance systems were under development during the grant period. In GA, a limited system known as Bright Stars could only produce licensing and compliance reports. At the beginning of the grant the state of Georgia began piloting its quality rating system. Initially none of the participating ECE agencies were quality rated, but at the end of the grant five had achieved this rating. This increase is attributed to information sharing as a result of the collaborative. In CO, refinement of the state's Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System (TQRIS) was a focus of the grant. The vision of Colorado's TQRIS was to be, "inclusive, accessible, and available to all providers; embedded in licensing; and reflective of evidence-based practices for successful outcomes for all children and families." This system sought to develop a rated license in Colorado that would include centers, family child care homes, pre-schools, and school-age programs. The program would continue to encourage quality by emphasizing its focus on continuous quality improvement. During the grant period the grantee developed a program design and implementation plan for the system that was set to launch in 2014.

B-FL, FSS-FL and CA developed their own rating systems as part of their grants. The BRIDGES accreditation system used by B-FL sought to be more stringent than previously existing state standards. During the course of the grant, eight local ECE agencies applied for and seven completed necessary BRIDGES training and other requirements. The pre-existing quality rating system in the area served by FSS-FL, the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County's Guiding Stars, was only available in one of the two counties served. As the grant intervention took place in Duval and Nassau Counties, the grantee's Child Welfare-Early Education Partnership created its own standard of quality. This standard included any center that was quality rated by the Guiding Stars program, DCF Gold Seal accreditation, a state standard Pre-K program, or was an EHS/HS program.

The grantee in CA did not develop a rating system *per se*, but developed criteria for determining the quality of ECE programs. To identify quality programs to which to refer families when EHS/HS programs were full, the grantee developed and administered a survey that included questions regarding various aspects of quality, such as child-to-teacher ratios. This resulted in the identification of 15 programs to which to refer children. One of the overall findings from the grantee's evaluation was that the definition of quality was not sufficiently expansive or transparent; therefore, CA intended to revisit its criteria for quality EC programs in the future.

A. Findings by Activity

The grantees' major efforts focused on the promotion of collaboration among agencies; provision of training to a various audiences (e.g., CW and ECE staff, foster parents); analyzing and making recommendations for revisions to policies and practices; development and/or improvement of data systems; and ultimately, increasing the enrollment of foster children into high-quality ECE programs. This section describes those activities.

1. Collaboration

As a key component of their activities, all grantees formed collaborations to guide their work. Four of these collaboratives were new, bringing members together for the first time, while others built on previously existing collaborations. The size and composition of collaborations varied. Each of these collaborations was staffed by the grantee. Some grantees used a multilevel approach to collaboration, with a small steering committee that met frequently and a larger body comprised of all relevant partnerships that met less frequently. Accordingly, the number of participants varied widely from four to in excess of 100 participants. All of the collaborations included representatives of CW and ECE agencies. A majority also expanded to include mental health services, schools, courts, training agencies, nonprofits, and numerous others.

a. Activities

The activities of collaboratives varied based on the grantees' individual goals and chosen interventions. All collaboratives actively promoted referrals of young foster children from CW to ECE programs. This was accomplished through active review of agency barriers to referrals,

education campaigns, and outreach activities. In an effort to increase referrals, many collaboratives provided training to CW and ECE agency staff. Collaboratives identified target audiences, developed training schedules, and either developed training materials themselves or hired private contractors to assist in the delivery of trainings.

Grantees often reported that having key agency leadership present in their collaboratives was essential for effecting real change in agencies. These leaders were able not only to help approve necessary policies but also to implement them. In contrast, when key partners were absent, grantees faced numerous challenges in implementing policies and increasing referrals.

One of the most significant areas of success, as cited by all grantees, was the development of inter-agency partnerships. Each of the grantees undertook efforts to increase collaboration between CW and ECE agencies and staff. This required overcoming organizational and cultural barriers. A successful partnership was defined in a variety of ways across grantees, for example, in terms of enhanced productivity and increased membership and participation. For CT, FSS-FL, and RI the creation or expansion of Memoranda of Understanding among agencies was an indicator of their partnerships' success. Other collaboratives were also successful in developing marketing and outreach materials that increased referrals.

b. Evaluation

Collaborations were evaluated using a variety of measures of collaboration and social network analysis. Three grantees used the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (Mattesich, Murray-Close, and Monsey, 2001) and three grantees used the Provan Network Analysis Measure (Provan, Veazie, Staten, and Teufel-Shone, 2005). The remaining grantees used a mix of surveys, interviews, and meeting attendance records to gauge the success of their collaborations. All but one grantee demonstrated that while collaboration was relatively high at the beginning of the project, it still increased and strengthened over the grant period, in some cases showing statistically significant increases. In B-FL the overall post-test Wilder score indicated strength in such areas of collaboration as skilled leadership, a shared vision and members sharing a stake in the process and outcomes. CO used the same measure with work teams in its three project communities and also found scores range indicating collaboration strength. CA used Provan's social network analysis approach to examine collaboration within its Advisory Committee and observed an increase in social network density over time. The findings reflected an increase in organizational ties among Advisory Committee members, as well as an increase in integration and cohesion within the group. CA's inter-organizational partnerships and information sharing became more diversified over time, with agency representatives communicating more widely with each other rather than with just a limited number of core partners.

2. Training

Training to increase knowledge and awareness of issues was a key focus for the grantees. All but one grantee developed and/or provided training. The goals of training varied across the grantees but often included the following elements:

- Informing foster parents, along with CW and court staff, of the value of ECE for foster children.
- Informing CW workers and foster parents about how to access ECE services.
- Informing CW and ECE staff about child trauma and protective factors for foster children.
- Improving skills of ECE staff in response to difficult child behavior.

a. Development and Selection of Training Content

The types of training offered varied considerably across grantees both in terms of the type of material taught as well as how the curricula were developed. Several grantees formed committees that reviewed data on gaps in knowledge before developing customized curricula for the target audience. Half of the grantees relied on external professionals and experts in training for specific content. Some grantees chose a nationally recognized training framework while others created entirely new content, or merged several existing curricula.

Training for CW staff usually focused on early brain development, the effects of trauma on young children, child welfare practices to address the effects of trauma, strength-based approaches to working with foster and biological families and the benefits of ECE for young children in foster care. It also included information on how to identify high-quality ECE and how to refer children to ECE. Training for ECE staff focused on how the child welfare system works, how children in foster care may have been affected by trauma, and how practices such as positive behavior intervention can be used with young children in ECE who demonstrate disruptive behaviors due to trauma. Training for other service providers such as judges and court personnel also provided information on the effects of trauma on young children and the benefits of high-quality ECE for them. The duration and intensity of trainings varied widely, with the most intense consisting of a series of full-day workshops while others lasted only 30 minutes. Training group sizes also varied, with some grantees conducting intentionally small groups of less than 10, while others held trainings reached 100 or more attendees at a time.

b. Training Content and Audience

Most of the trainings offered by grantees were for CW workers and ECE staff. The *Strengthening Families* framework was the most frequently used curriculum and was offered by CO, CT, and AR. *Strengthening Families* is a framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy for child care, ECE, and CW programs. It centers on five core parental protective factors: Parental resilience, social connections, concrete supports in time of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Exhibit 3: Trainings By Grantee, provides an overview of the types of trainings, audiences, and total attendance for trainings. This section discusses in more detail the types of training provided to various audiences, including ECE and CW workers, foster parents and caregivers, court personnel, and inter-agency representatives.

EXHIBIT 3: TRAININGS BY GRANTEE

Grantee	Type/Name of Training	Audience	Total Training Participants
GA	<i>Taming Transition Time</i>	Multi-agency	22
	<i>Creating Partnerships: Communicating with Parents and Families</i>		18
	<i>Child Welfare One on One</i>		8
	<i>Better Brains for Babies</i>		17
	<i>Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events</i>		26
B-FL	<i>Informed Choice</i>	Child care workers, foster parents, family support service staff, and school readiness coaches	63
	<i>BTI (Becoming Trauma Informed)</i>	Train the trainer course for child welfare and child care, health, mental health, and education trainers	15
CO	<i>Strengthening Families (Live)</i>	Child Care Providers	500 + (El Paso Co.) 87 (Jefferson Co.)
		Department of Human Services (DHS) Staff	Ongoing (El Paso Co.)
	<i>Strengthening Families (Online)</i>	DHS Staff	100% (Fremont Co.)
	<i>Brazelton Touchpoints</i>	DHS Staff	100% (Fremont Co.)
FSS-FL	<i>Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports</i> Trauma Informed Care	Local child care staff and caregivers	246 staff 46 Trainers
CT	<i>Strengthening Families</i>	ECE Providers, DCF staff, foster parents, non-profit organizations, behavioral health providers	300+
	<i>Reflective Supervision</i>	DCF and EHS staff	12

Grantee	Type/Name of Training	Audience	Total Training Participants
	<i>Infant Mental Health Training Series</i>	DCF and EHS staff	34
AR	<i>Early Child Care and Child Welfare Smooth Moves Intervention</i>	Division of Children and Family Services Early child care providers funded by Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education Administrative Office of the Courts and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)	644
CA	<i>Navigating Early Care & Education Systems</i>	CW Staff and ECE Service Providers	243
		Juvenile Court	37
		Parents and Caregivers	61
Total			2,379+

i. Cross-agency Training

In CO, *Strengthening Families* training was provided by the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children, at the state level as well as in the three project counties. At the state level, training was offered to *Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)* program coordinators targeted at helping them integrate the *Strengthening Families* framework into workshops for foster or biological parents. The *PSSF* program is a federally funded program that provides a variety of family preservation and family support services while also protecting children. In CO the program is managed through grants to local social service agencies, including county human and social services agencies, and other non-profits. In two counties (Fremont and El Paso) training was offered to all DHS caseworker staff and providers. El Paso County also expanded training beyond DHS to several local nonprofits that provided training to over 500 professionals. These numbers will continue to grow as new employees receive the training. In Jefferson County, *Strengthening Families* training was offered to child care providers and will become a requirement for receiving child care funding from the Early Childhood Council.

CT offered two cross-training opportunities on infant mental health to the Connecticut DCF and EHS staff. The first training, *Reflective Supervision*, is a “hallmark of infant mental health and refers to the relationship between a supervisee and supervisor that is focused on the emotional content of the work and how reaction to the content affects the work.” This training is administered as a series of recurring meetings held in small groups, in which a supervisor helps

staff reflect to discover their own perceptions and potential solutions to challenging situations. These groups are especially valuable in their ability to help staff process the emotions related to the demands and challenges of social work. Participants reported changes to their practices as a result of these sessions. The training was well received that participants sought to continue participation even after fulfilling one-year commitments to the program. The second training, *Working in Collaboration to Support Families with Challenges*, focused on infant mental health. This training was a series of eight full-day workshops focusing on the relationships between infants/toddlers and caregivers, including the integration of children and caregivers into their communities, and how this impacts the work of DCF/EHS. These workshops closely align with the competencies in Infant Mental Health and can lead to an endorsement of expertise in Infant Mental Health from the CT Association for Infant Mental Health, encouraging staff to commit to completing all workshops.

CA sought to increase collaboration and foster child enrollment in early childhood programs through a series of trainings offered to CW staff, ECE staff, parents and caregivers, CASAs, and the Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Court. The training was designed by the LACWEEP Advisory Committee, and titled: *Navigating Early Care & Education Systems*. The training covered eight domains including: (1) brief history of the CW system, (2) overview of CW services offered in the county, (3) the five *Strengthening Families* protective factors, (4) properly identifying quality ECE programs, (5) research on the benefits of ECE services for at-risk populations, (6) special considerations for providing ECE to the child welfare population (7) overview of electronic referral processes and systems, and (8) the limitations of these systems. The full curriculum was offered to CW caseworkers and ECE providers together. An abbreviated version of the training was provided to parents and caregivers of children in the CW system and CASAs. Finally, an even more abbreviated version was provided to the Los Angeles County Juvenile Dependency Court judges, staff and volunteer advocates.

AR provided three separate trainings for different audiences that focused on specific topics of importance in working key target populations. The first, *Early Child Care and Child Welfare*, included CW and ECE staff and focused on trauma, foster care, key characteristics of quality ECE, the Better Beginnings child care quality rating system, and the CW system. It also included training on the Child Welfare-Child Care Information Toolkit that includes a brief form completed by the child welfare worker and provided to the foster parent and ECE provider that includes information about the child such as health, allergies etc. to facilitate communication among all parties. The second, *Smooth Moves*, was a brief training (30 minutes to one hour) for child care and CW workers that focused specifically on interactions with children who had experienced trauma, facilitating transitions into and out of child care, appointments with professionals, and visitations with parents. The third training, *Interventions*, was a short training targeting EC workers and CW caseworkers that emphasized trauma-informed child behavior management techniques.

B-FL had a very specific focus on demonstrating the value of ECE for foster children. Its training, *Informed Choice*, was delivered to foster parents, family support service staff, and child care providers to build their capacity “to make informed choices in selecting child care programs that meet the needs of children birth to 5 years of age in the foster care system” (Kass Fischman, Klein, Whitney, and Hubbell McKey, 2014).

GA leveraged training as a key opportunity for collaboration. During regularly held meetings partners discussed training needs and opportunities, and generated a list of interests and trainings currently provided by various agencies. A policy was also developed allowing organizations to participate in Richmond County Department of Family and Children Services’ training at no cost. In addition to shared training opportunities, the project implemented five multiagency trainings: *Taming Transition Time*, *Creating Partnerships: Communicating with Parents and Families*, *Child Welfare One on One*, *Better Brains for Babies*, and *Helping Children Cope with Trauma*.

ii. ECE Practitioners

FSS-FL offered training exclusively to ECE practitioners by developing a Child Welfare-Early Education Certification program. This three-session training was targeted at child care directors and included explanation of the CW system, trauma-informed care, and the child behavior management curriculum *PBIS*. The oversight committee chose the *PBIS* curriculum because it is an evidence-based model for classroom management focusing on child behavioral issues. It was hoped that the tools provided in these trainings would prevent providers from expelling children from the program for behavioral problems. This training also facilitated meetings between ECE and CW agencies.

iii. CW Practitioners

Fremont County, a participant in CO’s *PIECES* initiative, offered a training exclusively for CW practitioners titled *Brazelton Touchpoints*. This training developed by the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Boston Children’s Hospital is rooted in an “evidence-based theory of child development that provides ongoing opportunities for parents and providers to help each other understand children’s behaviors, strengths and growing capacities.”

iv. Foster Parents and Caregivers

One of the barriers to foster child enrollment in ECE is a lack of knowledge among foster parents of the value of these services and of the categorical eligibility of foster children for EHS/HS. As previously discussed, CA and B-FL incorporated information on how to access ECE services into the trainings offered to foster parents. FSS-FL used similar methods by incorporating training on the importance of early education and local resources into all foster parent licensing courses and quarterly caregiver trainings, as well as pre-service and in-service trainings for CW caseworkers. The *Strengthening Families* framework was also used in training offered to foster parents and caregivers in CO. El Paso County infused the *Strengthening Families* framework into their “*The Nurturing Father*” course that was targeted at all fathers in

the community rather than just foster parents. The Early Childhood Council in Fremont County also provided a *Touchpoints* class.

v. Courts

CA condensed and revised its original training for use with CASAs and court staff. CASA training was reduced to a total of two hours to be more appropriate to the volunteer nature of CASA work. Grantees in CA found it particularly difficult to provide training to court staff, as there was no precedent for ongoing training for this audience. To provide this training the original curriculum was dramatically reduced to fit within the allotted time of a pre-existing meeting. The presentation was also modified to include specific actions that court officers can take, such as referring children to ECE programs and court orders for release of child development information to the California Department of Children and Families Services. Two other grantees (AR and FSS-FL) also provided training to court staff. In AR, the *Early Child Care and Child Welfare* core training was delivered to court personnel across the state, including training provided at the CASA statewide training conference. FSS-FL ensured that Guardians Ad Litem were educated on the importance of early education and local resources, as well as provided with a quality checklist and list of Guiding Stars of Duval providers.

c. Training Outcomes

Five grantees (CO, CT, CA, AR, and B-FL) assessed knowledge gained as a result of training. This was most often done through pretests and immediate posttests. While this method did not include control groups, follow-up testing, or measurement of application of knowledge to practice, some grantees planned to assess application to practice in the future. All five grantees reported statistically significant, albeit modest, increases in knowledge from pretest to posttest for CW workers or ECE staff. CA also found statistically significant increases in knowledge for parents and CASAs who received training. While GA did not test specifically for increases in knowledge, it did conduct an evaluation of satisfaction with the trainings. Scores averaged 4.3 out of 5 on quality, applicability of the information, and usefulness of information.

In addition to increases in knowledge, trainings also served to foster collaboration. Several grantees used training as an opportunity to bring ECE and CW staff together. However, conflicting staff schedules frequently made joint trainings logistically difficult. Bringing these two groups together created additional challenges as some concepts may have been new for ECE staff but paralleled or duplicated recent training for CW workers, such that CW staff sometimes found courses to be repetitive or lacking in value. However, for CW and ECE workers in CA, respondents reported finding value in breakout sessions that facilitated discussions between the two groups. Several grantees also reported that trainings provided a common language for communication. In CO, however, there were challenges in Fremont and Jefferson Counties with integrating the *Strengthening Families* training into other training frameworks that were already in use; this challenge was expressed in concerns about duplication of knowledge and conflicts in terminology.

In CT, training was considered to have led to changes in practices such as visitation. Training on infant mental health was also implemented state-wide and Reflective Supervision groups were continued.

d. Planning for Sustainability of Training

The grantees used a variety of strategies to sustain their training initiatives after the end of their grants. These efforts included train-the-trainer programs, innovative use of technology and electronic media, and development of printed educational materials.

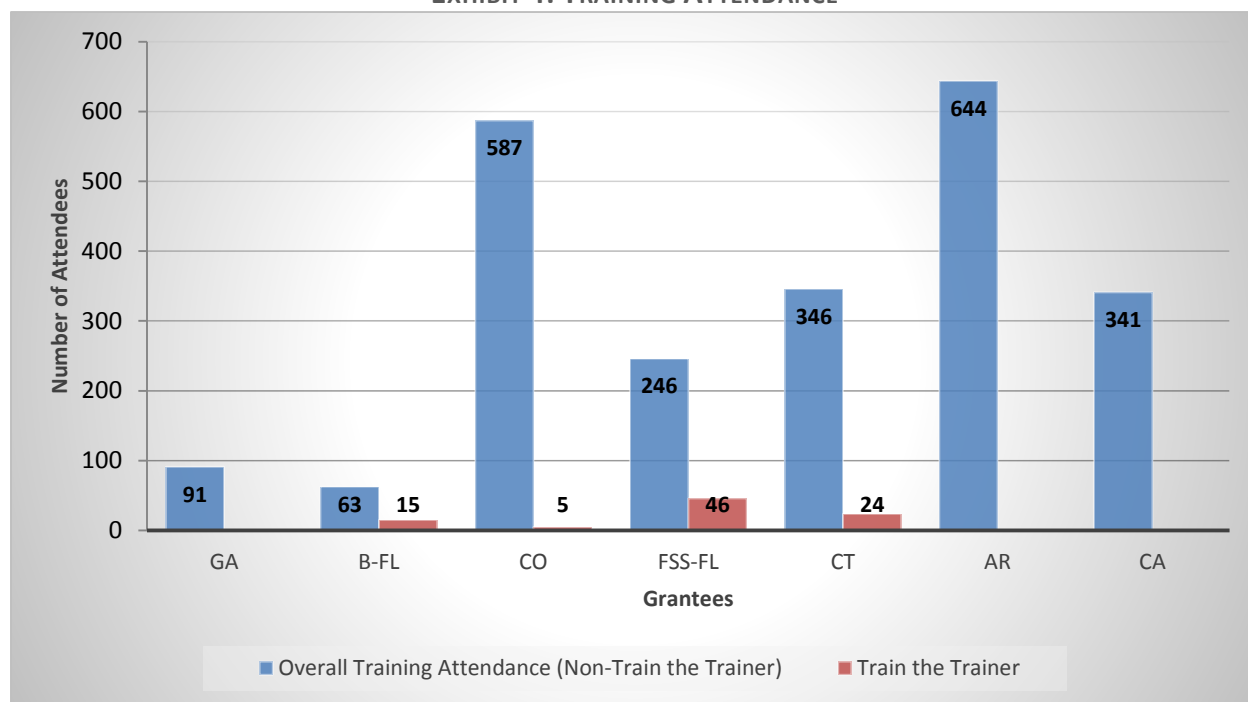
i. Train-the-Trainer Programs

As shown in Exhibit 4: Training Attendance, in addition to providing training to over 2,300 individuals, the grantees also began planning for sustainability by providing train-the-trainer sessions. Four grantees (FSS-FL, B-FL, CO, CT) specifically chose to implement train-the-trainer sessions. As the name implies, train-the-trainer courses generally target more senior, experienced employees so they have the necessary skills to conduct future trainings for other staff. Train-the-trainer sessions provided three important benefits: (1) internal training capacity allows agencies to continue training even in times of budget constraints; (2) training can continue beyond the end of the Federal discretionary grant; and (3) trainers (such as those in CT) can extend training to regional groups and organizations, thereby increasing their reach and penetration.

ii. Technological Innovations and Adaptations

Several grantees demonstrated innovative uses of technology for training. AR developed CDs listing resources for training session participants and provided DVD recordings of trainings for those unable to attend in person. The *Smooth Moves* video was also uploaded to the State's internal computer network for viewing by staff. Recognizing potential barriers to parent participation, FSS-FL developed a YouTube video of its training for foster parents. CA had intended to offer train-the-trainer opportunities; however, contracting issues precluded the implementation of this approach. To overcome this setback, CA planned to develop a video recording of the training complete with audio that would be publicly available for download. Development of this product had not occurred at the time the grantee's final evaluation report was completed.

EXHIBIT 4: TRAINING ATTENDANCE



**As participation data were not consistently reported, some grantees (CO and CT) may have attendance rates that are actually higher than suggested by the chart.*

iii. Educational Materials

Grantees also created written materials to disseminate information to a range of audiences. Four grantees (AR, CO, RI and FSS-FL) created brochures for foster parents, as well as CW and ECE staff. The Freemont County, CO site created a virtual brochure that was posted online as well as displayed on televisions in waiting rooms, with a plan to expand into community stores and pharmacies. RI distributed brochures to foster parents at open houses and through community groups. Brochures targeted to CW and ECE staff were used by AR to communicate information about the grant project and stimulate interest and participation. FSS-FL's early learning brochure and video were used to train caregivers and caseworkers about the importance of early learning, key indicators of quality child care, and local information resources, and were given to prospective foster parents during licensure training.

Three grantees (AR, CO, and CT) created training and communication toolkits. AR's toolkit consisted of tools for improving communication among direct service providers, including a brief form completed by the CW worker at intake and provided to foster parents and ECE providers. The goal of this form was to facilitate the exchange of information, allowing ECE providers to receive medical and mental health information among systems without violating HIPPA. The toolkit produced in CT was targeted at both CW and ECE practitioners to communicate practice expectations and information on ECE resources. Freemont County, a participant in CO's initiative, compiled a list of a variety of resources that it distributed on flash

drives to caseworkers, physicians, and the staff of any agencies that refer children to programs participating in their Early Childhood Council.

Two grantees (AR and Freemont, County, CO) attempted to use social media to disseminate information. This method of communication, while innovative, was also challenging. While a Facebook page was established by CO, there were concerns about the adequacy of resources to generate posts to keep the page current and active. AR created both a Facebook page and Twitter account but experienced difficulty in garnering followers and did not consider its social media campaign a success. However, these grantees' experiences have offered substantive lessons and guidance for future programs that consider the use of social media.

A majority of grantees experienced success in increasing awareness about the unique barriers to accessing high- quality ECE services. As discussed previously, one of the primary ways grantees achieved this was through training. Additional efforts included toolkits, brochures, and word of mouth through collaborative partners. Increasing awareness was a major thrust of RI's activities; specifically, this grantee held open houses and created and disseminated brochures. These efforts culminated in a large dissemination event, the Let's Get it Right Early Childhood Summit that was attended by almost 300 individuals. AR similarly reported success in increasing awareness of the priority of quality ECE among targeted groups, specifically by improving knowledge of the unique needs of young children with CW involvement. These efforts were supported by the availability of online trainings, DVDs of recorded trainings, and informational CDs. GA cited success in increasing awareness of community resources for children and families.

3. Data System Development

During the review of policy and processes a majority of the grantees uncovered issues in CW and ECE data management systems that hindered foster child referral and enrollment. Four grantees focused on improvements to data management systems to increase referrals. Improvements to data systems addressed five main challenges including:

- Improved tracking of foster children for ECE eligibility
- Interoperability of CW and ECE systems
- Electronic referral processes
- Identification of quality programs
- Quality and validity of data

The CA project specifically addressed data system and infrastructure issues involving referral systems. Prior to the grant caseworkers in CA had access to an electronic referral system that allowed a caseworker to refer an eligible child to HS in just two computer mouse clicks. However, the system only allowed referrals to one Los Angeles HS grantee, and this grantee did not serve the Long Beach community that was targeted by the grant. Other limitations of this system included prompting referrals only for 3 and 4-year-olds not for infants and toddlers as well; not allowing referrals to other ECE programs if HS was full; and not providing feedback to

the caseworker on the status of a referral. Through the grant the DCFS electronic ECE referral data system was expanded to include infants and toddlers, the referral process was modified to facilitate referrals to Long Beach HS programs, and an automated email confirming referral receipt was instituted. These improvements were later expanded to include an additional prompt for caseworkers that asked them to verify parent contact information, thereby improving the accuracy of data and the likelihood of a successful referral. As a result of these improvements referrals and enrollments of children increased.

FSS-FL also addressed potential referral barriers through an innovative approach of developing a Geographic Information System (GIS). The GIS was designed to map high-quality ECE providers in the area and thus facilitate the identification of ECE centers in close proximity to foster care placements.

Three grantees (CO, CT and B-FL) sought to make changes in data systems that would improve data collection. In Fremont County, CO one of the project's major accomplishments was the development of a data tracking system between the county office of the Department of Human Services and the Early Childhood Council in order to better identify children in the CW system who were eligible for EC services. The county's new procedures improved referrals from CW workers, increased screening of children for EC program eligibility and improved identification of children eligible for early intervention services, HS, or subsidized preschool. Fremont County further built upon these efforts by providing caseworkers and therapists with electronic tablets to facilitate easier, more efficient data entry. Therapists used tablets to report on child developmental progress while case workers used tablets to generate referrals by gaining parent consent in the field.

Data system improvement initiatives in CT and B-FL were less successful as both of these initiatives were stalled by complications due to other child welfare agency initiatives. CT sought to adapt its current CW agency data system by developing a web-based platform that would better manage information about young children's educational status, including enrollment in EHS/HS or other ECE programs. However, major changes in the agency's case management system and other concurrent program initiatives delayed the implementation of this change. B-FL intended to strengthen data-driven decision making between the key system players through the development of a data sharing mechanism to track children in the foster care system. In order to achieve this, the grantee sought to use a state-administered data system with a local module. Despite spending considerable effort developing a list of needed data elements, the effort was ultimately not successful due to delays in the launch of the statewide system.

4. Policies and Processes

Grantees also worked to identify and address policies and processes at the organization and state levels that posed barriers to the enrollment of foster children in ECE programs. These efforts included systematic identification of barriers; changes in organization policies and processes; and making recommendations or advocating for changes in policy at the state level.

a. Identification of Barriers

One of the main activities of the grantees was the identification of barriers to the referral of children in foster care to high-quality ECE programs. Many of the grantees formed specific subcommittees tasked with reviewing and assessing organizational and policy barriers to such referrals. This work often meant a detailed review of both organizational policies and processes and state policies. Through honest discussions with key stakeholders the collaboratives identified important barriers to referrals and were able to implement immediate policy changes in some cases. For other grantees some recommendations could not be accomplished within the grant period for a variety of reasons, including lack of authority and other policy obstacles.

The first activity undertaken by a majority of grantees was an analysis of policies and procedures to reveal structural barriers to foster child participation in ECE. Four grantees reported one of their successes as identifying these barriers. For example, AR identified a systemic issue in voucher distribution that was causing interruptions in foster child participation in ECE. The CA grantee established an advisory committee that identified systemic issues in information sharing and developed an Information-Sharing Protocol & Data Infrastructure Development Plan. This plan clearly identified current barriers in policies, procedures and regulations, and how these challenges could be overcome to increase the flow of information between organizations. FSS-FL also identified a series of inefficiencies including improvements needed in the child care subsidy referral system. RI systematically identified barriers through a series of interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, and also conducted a workforce competency survey that identified gaps in knowledge that were preventing children from receiving referrals.

Some of the barriers to enrollment identified by grantees as a whole include:

- Lack of knowledge by CW workers of categorical eligibility of foster children for HS and misperceptions of EHS/HS services
- Lack of easy or automated referral systems for foster children to EHS/HS or other high-quality ECE programs and challenges to development of such systems
- Enrollment periods for EHS/HS that are not compatible with year-round need for access to early education for foster children,
- EHS/HS programs that were at capacity and could not accommodate new foster children
- HS programs that were part-day, part-year and so were not functional for the full-day, full year child care needs of working foster parents
- Lack of widely used quality ratings for ECE programs
- Lack of interest among caseworkers in referring children to ECE programs
- Inadequate information exchange between ECE providers and caseworkers regarding children's needs and progress
- EHS/HS and other quality ECE programs not being conveniently located for foster parents.

Some of these issues were addressed through trainings and changes to data systems, while other changes required adaptations to organizational policies and processes.

b. Change in Organizational Policies and Processes

i. Improved Referral and Enrollment Systems

Grantees sought to adjust agency policies and processes that affect foster child enrollment in ECE. These efforts focused on impediments to caseworkers making referrals and having those referrals lead to successful enrollment of children. Several grantees faced a lack of caseworker investment in making referrals. While educating caseworkers about the value of ECE was a major thrust in addressing this issue, improved processes also increased caseworker referral rates. As mentioned previously, the automated referral system in CA was modified to notify caseworkers that a referral had been received and to later update the caseworker on the status of the referral. A similar process was used by FSS-FL that required ECE agencies to provide a caseworker with contact information upon receipt of a referral. To ensure referrals were successful, grantees in GA, CO (Freemont County), and CT streamlined forms and processes among partners by standardizing or establishing common enrollment procedures and screeners. In FSS-FL, a new child care subsidy referral system was created that decreased errors in referrals and increased the number of successful referrals, thereby increasing the percentage of children in high-quality ECE.

ii. Improved Information Sharing

Several grantees encountered impediments to the free flow of information between organizations, making referrals less effective. For example, caseworkers may be hesitant to share information about a child with ECE providers because of privacy regulations. To overcome this barrier, several grantees reviewed current policies and procedures to systematically identify and address such issues. In CA, a committee developed a detailed data infrastructure development plan that systematically addressed barriers to information sharing, even developing necessary forms to facilitate the free flow of information between organizations. New policies developed by FSS-FL now facilitate direct communication between caseworkers and child care providers by requiring caseworkers to exchange contact information within two weeks of receiving a new case in preschool. Caseworkers are also being encouraged to avoid taking children out of child care during the morning lesson time. The goal of this change is to improve the relationship between caseworkers and providers, while also improving the child's education by reducing the number of lessons missed.

iii. Improved Follow-Up and Tracking of Referrals

Another issue identified by grantees included policies and procedures governing the follow up or tracking of referrals. Many grantees found that once a referral had been made there was no follow-up to ensure that a) the referral was successfully received by the service provider, b) the family was contacted and completed necessary steps for enrollment, and c) if the family was waitlisted it was directed to appropriate high-quality alternatives. To ensure timely follow-up

on referrals, CA developed the position of Community Liaison. The Liaison followed up on all referrals to EHS/HS, communicated with families and caseworkers about the status of the placement, provided referrals to other high-quality ECE programs if EHS/HS did not have availability, and tracked all referral outcomes. The Liaison also prepared a brochure with information about additional high-quality child care in the area, and followed up with parents informing them of their ability to enroll in other services while remaining on the EHS/HS waitlist. She also helped parents complete applications and provided parents with additional tools to help them judge whether an ECE center was the right fit for their child. In addition to generating a list of local high-quality EHS/HS programs, the Liaison also worked with EHS/HS centers and DCF when families could not be reached. The goal of this initiative was to bridge any disconnect between referral and receipt of service.

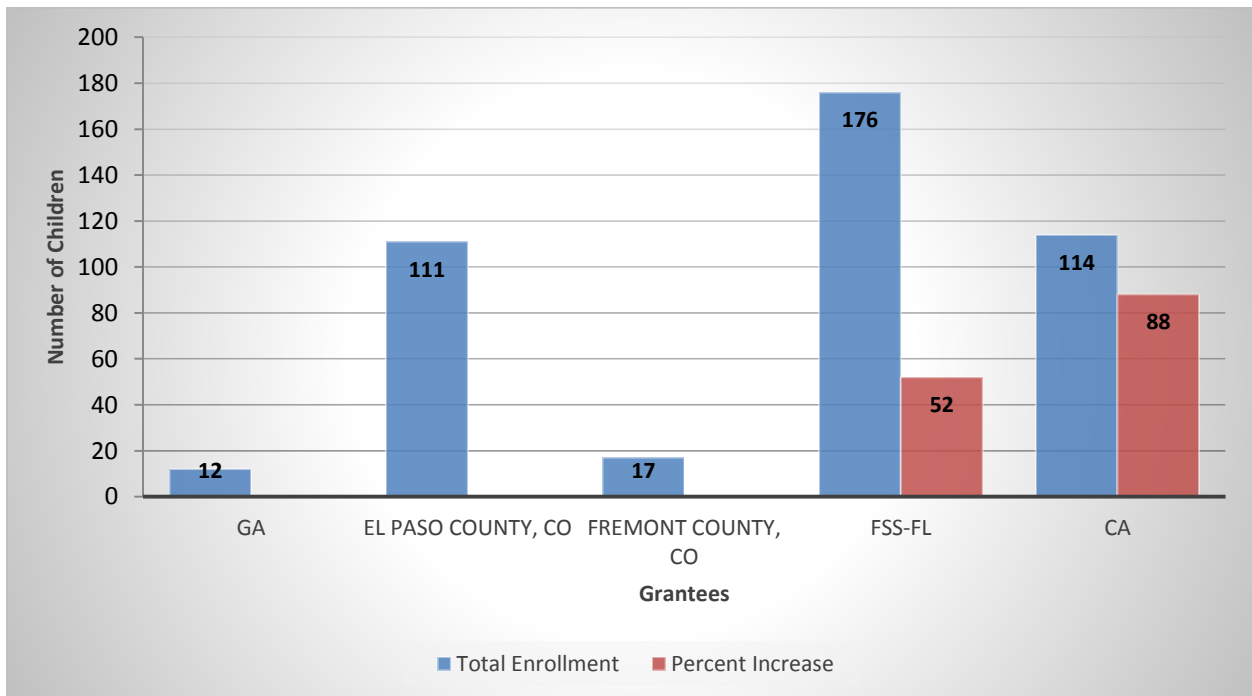
c. Recommendations and Advocacy for State-level Change

Beyond agency-level changes, several grantees sought to influence state policies to facilitate the enrollment of foster children in ECE. AR identified a systemic issue in voucher distribution that was causing interruptions in foster child participation in ECE. Vouchers were distributed to the child care providers, which for this population could change frequently. The grantee recommended that vouchers instead be awarded to follow the child in order to facilitate continued participation in ECE services. Furthermore, a proposal was made to provide the voucher even after the child returns home. Due to budget constraints this change was not realized, but remains a top priority should funding become available. CT also sought to address change at the state level by creating an Early Childhood Community of Practice. Through monthly meetings the group gathered key representatives from around the state to “review current policy as it relates to young children and to recommend policy change and/or development that supports a developmentally informed Child Welfare System.” Among other activities, the group made recommendations on visitation practices for infants and young children to senior leadership in the Connecticut DCF. The Early Childhood Community of Practice continued to meet after the end of the grant.

B. Enrollment of Foster Children in Early Childhood Education Programs

Four grantees—CA, FSS-FL, GA and CO-- showed increases in the placement of young foster children in quality early childhood education programs. Exhibit 5: ECE Enrollment by Grantee, depicts total enrollment in ECE programs among grantees that provided this information, as well as the percentage increase in enrollment where available. In all, 430 children were enrolled in ECE programs during the grant period. In CA, in the year following the grant a total of 316 children were referred for ECE placement, an 88 percent increase in aggregate referrals from the previous pre-grant year. Of these 316 children, 114 were enrolled in ECE. In the FSS-FL project in Jacksonville, ECE enrollment of foster children increased from 116 at baseline to 176 in month 15, an increase of 52 percent. In addition, the number of children enrolled in EHS/HS increased from zero to eight; the number in centers that did not have a quality rating dropped from 133 to 124; and the number not enrolled dropped from 56 to 42. In GA, 49 foster children eligible for ECE were identified over the 18 months of the project, of whom 12 (24 percent) were enrolled in HS or another ECE program. In RI, small increases in the population of foster children enrolled in EHS/HS were observed but it could not be determined whether these increases were directly attributable to the project due to design factors.

EXHIBIT 5: ECE ENROLLMENT BY GRANTEE



In CO, two of the three participating counties (El Paso and Fremont) increased the referral and enrollment of children into ECE programs. In El Paso County, a specially designated staff member screened 271 children in the county's child welfare system for developmental concerns. Of these, 88 children were enrolled in HS and 23 were enrolled in the CO Preschool

Program, for a total enrollment of 111 children. Of these 111 children, 84 were also referred to early intervention services. Of these 84 children, over half (44 children) received IEPs or IFSPs. In Fremont County, prior to the initiative there had been 12-15 children referred to ECE services; however, following changes to data bank procedures a total of 52 children were referred. Of these 52 children, 17 qualified for ECE services for children with special needs.

C. Challenges and Successes

1. Program Challenges

The grantees' projects were ambitious in attempting to overcome resource, informational, policy, practice and infrastructural barriers to foster child enrollment in high-quality ECE programs. These barriers occurred across grant activities relating to collaboration, training, and changes to data systems, policies, and procedures.

a. Lack of available high-quality ECE programs

Several grantees found the lack of high-quality ECE programs, exacerbated by the lack of vacancies in EHS/HS programs, was a major barrier to the enrollment of foster children. ECE programs, especially programs for infants, were often filled and waitlists were long. This was especially true for higher quality programs. The lack of sufficient EHS/HS slots generally was further affected by Federal sequestration that had reduced the net number of slots available, especially in CA and RI. Further complicating availability was the seasonal nature of enrollment in ECE, especially EHS/HS. Children may enter the child welfare system at any point during the calendar year; however, ECE slots are usually only available in the fall when children move into kindergarten and/or transition into other classes. As discussed previously, this affects foster child enrollment and can also discourage caseworkers from making referrals.

b. Lack of knowledge of the value of ECE for young foster children

Grantees faced the lack of understanding by those in the child welfare and court systems of the benefits that can accrue to young children from high-quality early education, especially for children affected by trauma. The research that high-quality ECE can benefit the development of young children in general and especially those exposed to the trauma of neglect, abuse and separation was not understood by many child welfare and court staff. Both AR and CA found that child welfare and court personnel increased their understanding of the value of high-quality ECE for young children in foster care after participating in training provided by the project.

c. Unclear or poorly understood definitions of high-quality ECE.

A lack of understanding of what constitutes "high-quality" ECE and how it is identified or rated was also an issue faced by many grantees. In the absence of a widely used quality rating system, FSS-FL's CW-ECE partnership considered a variety of approaches to defining quality and agreed on a standard of a quality rating by an external organization, whether it is a rating system, accreditation or national standard as exists for EHS/HS. AR had to address a poor understanding of the state's quality rating system. This was exacerbated by few incentives for

providers to participate in the rating system. It was also difficult for providers to attend the training required for a rating because of inconvenient training times and locations. This resulted in few providers completing the rating process. Furthermore, CW workers did not always have a clear understanding of what qualified as a quality ECE program or of the ECE referral process, resulting in few overall referrals.

d. Barriers to Collaboration

Grantees faced several barriers when developing collaborative relationships, including for some the absence of a history of collaboration between ECE and CW agencies. One issue many grantees encountered in fostering collaboration was personnel turnover. While grantees were able to initially develop collaborative committees, leadership teams, or task forces, collaboration suffered when agency representatives changed. For example, both AR and CA experienced turnover in team members responsible for training, which caused delays in the delivery and coordination of training. Ongoing participation in collaboratives was also a challenge. Four grantees (CA, CO, AR and RI) experienced difficulties with consistent attendance, especially by key stakeholders, and completion of key tasks between meetings. A related issue experienced by two grantees (CA and RI) involved sustaining the participation of stakeholders with sufficient authority to effect change. When members of steering committees with authority were absent, committee findings could not be effectively implemented. One issue impacting participation was the very nature of stakeholders' jobs, e.g., increasing workloads that prevented them from participating more actively.

e. Technological Barriers

Data systems also posed barriers for many grantees. As discussed previously in the report, many grantees sought to make improvements to data systems to automate the referral process, and improve tracking efforts. However, efforts to improve IT systems proved to be some of the most difficult changes to implement, as they often required extensive resources and specialized staff. In some situations planned changes could not be implemented as they had to be prioritized against ongoing agency IT development efforts or were stymied by other IT system changes.

f. Training Barriers

Grantees' successfully developed training approaches and curricula or contracted for existing training, but they faced challenges in the participation of targeted audiences in the training. Most specifically, consistent participation throughout a course so that participants received the full complement of training content was a challenge. For example, CW caseworkers were often overwhelmed with intense case demands, thus making their consistent or uninterrupted participation difficult. While CT's training workshops were generally well attended, some participants did not attend every session and thus did not receive the training's full benefits. Foster parents' participation was also a challenge due to their busy schedules; participation was particularly difficult for parents in CA, even after incentives were offered and other barriers to

participation had been addressed. Similarly, participation by court personnel was often low due to busy work schedules and lack of a precedent for such training.

Grantees that implemented joint trainings that physically brought ECE and CW staff together also faced unique challenges. ECE and CW staff may be available for training at different times during the work day; while participation by CW staff may be limited by institutional regulations such as those that specify workers cannot be required to attend non-mandatory trainings. Furthermore, efforts to make trainings relevant and appealing to broad audiences also rendered some content too basic or redundant for certain groups. For example, content regarding the history of CW is likely repetitive for a CW worker while details on ECE services may be less useful for ECE service providers.

g. Grant Timelines

Many grantees felt that the grant period was too short to effect meaningful changes and impeded both program implementation and evaluation efforts. In terms of implementation, many grantees reported that by the time collaborative groups were established and momentum developed, the grant period had ended. In other areas, such as policies, procedures and data systems, changes were not actualized but instead remained recommendations. In terms of evaluation, grantees expressed concern that grant periods were not long enough to demonstrate the long-term outcomes and benefits of their initiatives.

2. Program Successes

Despite many challenges, grantees were successful in achieving many of the goals of their projects. As described earlier, grantee successes included:

- Implementation of successful partnerships and collaboratives
- Modification of policies and practices that hinder the placement of foster children into high-quality ECE programs
- Development and implementation of varied training opportunities for large numbers of participants
- Improvement or development of effective processes for referral and enrollment of children in ECE
- Creation of or improvement of data systems and protocols
- Increases in number and percentage of foster children enrolled in quality ECE programs, as well as those screened and referred to early intervention services.

D. Project Sustainability

All grantees addressed the potential for the sustainability of project activities and progress after the end of their grants. Sustainability efforts varied across grantees, with some focusing on overall project sustainability while others focused on the continuation of specific project elements. Approximately half of the projects were predicted to continue after the official grant funding period. For the remaining grantees it was unclear whether the projects themselves would persist or if only specific activities (such as training or improvements to referral processes) would continue.

During the grant period, CA and FSS-FL actively planned for sustainability. CA developed a sustainability plan targeted at the continuation and scaling up of the project's most successful efforts. This plan included provisions for the continuation of training, data infrastructure, and efforts around the linkage of children supervised by Los Angeles County DCFS to ECE programs. Plans for sustainability included the identification of additional funding sources, making training materials publicly accessible, and otherwise outlining plans for agencies continued collaboration. Over 90 percent of stakeholders interviewed as part of the evaluation of B-FL's project believed that the initiative would continue beyond the grant funding period. Respondents suggested several continuation methods, including ongoing collaboration and trainings, future policy changes, and the continued analysis of child outcomes.

For FSS-FL, sustainability was ensured through an interagency agreement that provides for the continuation of specific activities after grant funding ended. The grantee's activities were also able to continue as the result of an additional grant awarded by the Children's Bureau. CO planned for the sustainability of grant activities in each of the three implementation counties. The State's PIECES project had built on existing partnerships in each of these counties, and as a result strengthened the partnerships through commitments made during the grant period. In Fremont County, these efforts will include the continuation of a new referral process. In Jefferson County, project efforts have been incorporated into partnering agencies' projects and resource development efforts. In El Paso County, project efforts have been bolstered by positive effects seen from introducing *Strengthening Families* training. Similarly, grantees in RI provided for sustainability by developing connections with other ongoing projects occurring within the state.

E. Dissemination

The grantees undertook a variety of dissemination activities, distributing both educational content and general information about the accomplishments and lessons learned from their projects. As described earlier, grantees distributed information and curricula through brochures, videos, training materials, and policy and practice documents. They also produced conference presentations, posters, and journal and newsletter articles about their projects' accomplishments and evaluations. Joint papers and presentations that were developed as the result of collaboration among several grantees' evaluators were also developed. Exhibit 6: Grantee Dissemination Activities, summarizes these efforts.

EXHIBIT 6: GRANTEE DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Grantee	Mode	Activity Title, Venue, and Publication (if relevant)
B-FL, CO, CT, CA, RI, AR	Poster Symposium	<i>Making Connections between Child Welfare and Early Childhood Programs: The Experiences of the 2011 Child Welfare-Early Education Partnership Grantees</i> . Presented at Head Start's 12 th National Research Conference on Early Childhood-Collaboration and Coordination, Washington, DC, July 2014.
CA, CO	Article	Collaborative relationships and improved service coordination among child welfare and early childhood systems. <i>Child Welfare</i> (in press).
CA,	Article, under review	Accessing early care and education for children in the child welfare system: Stakeholders' perspectives on systems-level obstacles and opportunities. Submitted to the <i>Children & Youth Services Review</i> (under review).
CA, B-FL	Article, under review	Early care and education for children in the child welfare system: evaluations of two trainings. Submitted to the <i>Journal of Public Child Welfare</i> (under review).
CA	Article, in development	Increasing access to early education services for child welfare supervised-children: Lessons from the Los Angeles child welfare department's electronic Head Start referral system.
CA	Article, In Development	The benefits of early education for child welfare-involved children & families: Perspectives from the field.
AR	DVDs, CDs, Toolkit document	Early Child Care and Child Welfare (including the Child Welfare Toolkit); Smooth Moves; Interventions (all on DVD); Helpful Resources-CD-ROM; Child Welfare Toolkit (document)
AR	Brochure	Building Bridges

Grantee	Mode	Activity Title, Venue, and Publication (if relevant)
CA, CT, CO, B-FL	Presentation	Making Connections between Child Welfare and Early Childhood Programs-The Experiences of the 2011 Child Welfare-Early Education Partnership Grantees, presented at the 19 th NCCAN Conference, April 2014
CA, B-FL, CO, CT	Presentation	Evaluations of Collaborations that Engage Early Childhood Education and Child Welfare: Methodological Approaches and Evidence Across Multiple ACF Grants, presented at the 19 th NCCAN Conference, April 2014
FSS-FL	Presentation	Presented baseline findings at Quality Parenting Initiative, a statewide initiative on child welfare issues, October, 2012
FSS-FL	Presentation	Project hosted a luncheon to present findings, strategies, and future plans, February 2013.
FSS-FL	Presentation	Presentation to the 2013 Daniel Memorial National Foster Care Conference in Clearwater Beach, FL, May 2013.
RI	Grantee Hosted Dissemination Event	Let's Get it Right Early Childhood Summit, May, 2013.

F. Lessons Learned

Grantees were confronted with a complex challenge in attempting to increase foster child enrollment in high- quality ECE programs. To increase foster child enrollment grantees had to identify barriers and overcome cultural, structural, and infrastructural barriers. To address these challenges grantees formed partnerships, identified barriers, conducted training, disseminated information, and improved referral processes. The efforts of these projects resulted in many lessons that provide guidance for other organizations seeking to address these or similar issues.

Building solid collaborations is important when tasks cross organizational boundaries. The central task of these projects required the cooperation and participation of multiple systems, agencies, and organizations. To make progress it was important that both CW and ECE agencies be involved and committed. As ECE services encompass a variety of organizations, it was important that they, as well as other service and advocacy agencies that work with foster children, be included in the process. Working through established collaboratives or developing new ones were both successful strategies as long as key personnel from the organizations were involved. Over time, collaboratives were strengthened as their members came to know each other better. To make the partnerships work, however, it was important that they be staffed by individuals for whom the collaborative was a formal part of their work responsibilities. Furthermore, consistent participation by individuals in positions of authority is essential to effect change; progress was significantly impeded when these leaders were not available to help advocate for or facilitate project goals and activities. In many cases, child welfare agency

reorganization and competing programmatic innovations conflicted with the goals of the ECCW effort. In order to overcome these challenges, organizations should identify and support multiple program champions to ensure some continuity in the event of turnover or other organizational transitions. Written commitments by collaborative participants can also support transitions by documenting agreements and holding parties accountable. In situations in which key leadership simply cannot participate consistently, it may be necessary to develop other mechanisms to ensure that agency leaders delegate authority or are otherwise kept informed of activities, progress and barriers.

Increasing enrollment of foster children in ECE is an achievable goal and valuable accomplishment. Despite challenges, many grantees were able to increase the number of young foster children enrolled in quality ECE programs. These gains were accomplished by increasing awareness of the categorical eligibility of foster children for enrollment in EHS/HS and the importance of ECE for young children, promoting collaboration between agencies, providing information and training on both child welfare and ECE, and improving referral processes by improving agency procedures and electronic processes.

The process of identifying barriers to enrollment is a worthwhile investment. While there were commonalities in some challenges and approaches, barriers to foster child enrollment in high-quality ECE programs also varied across grantees. It is important to take the time to systematically identify the barriers across organizations, stakeholders, and communities to effectively and efficiently address them. The systematic identification of barriers highlights nuances in complex issues and treats collaborative partners fairly by ensuring the multiple perspectives are heard. Some grantees developed lists of multiple barriers, but given restrictions on resources and time, chose to target only a few issues in an effort to maximize project impact.

The availability of high-quality ECE programs must be addressed more broadly to improve foster child participation. For grantees to succeed in increasing the enrollment of foster children in high-quality ECE programs, there must be mechanisms in place for identifying high-quality programs. Despite general progress in the development of state and local ECE quality rating systems, grantees often confronted limited participation in rating systems by ECE providers and unclear definitions of “quality.” Furthermore, a lack of available slots (especially for infants in EHS/HS and other programs, coupled with the misalignment of ECE enrollment periods with a year-round need for early childhood services, often made the placement of young foster children into ECE programs problematic.

System changes require major commitments of time and resources. Many grantees found that they were only able to lay the groundwork for changes within the limited grant period. This situation was the result of many factors, including slowly changing organizational cultures, the substantial time it takes for consensus to be achieved among organizations, and the difficulties encountered when making significant changes to already intricate and complicated systems.

Organizations looking to embark on similar efforts should begin preparing for sustainability early through interagency agreements, embedding collaborative efforts within existing agency structures, and prioritizing goals. In order to achieve maximum impact, collaborative initiatives require many years of consistent participation, access to relevant data systems, systematic evaluations to convincingly demonstrate the effects of project efforts, and ongoing work to increase awareness and disseminate new best practices.

Training is worth the investment. Grantees provided training in various modalities (including cross-agency trainings) and on a range of topics to CW and ECE workers, foster parents, and court personnel. Despite logistical, policy, and workload barriers, these trainings demonstrated both meaningful knowledge gains and high satisfaction ratings among participants in all categories. The training provided the basis for understanding why ECE is so valuable for young foster children as well as the challenges faced by these young children that may be expressed during their ECE participation.

Technology can facilitate ECE referrals and related activities. The use of electronic information systems to facilitate the referral and enrollment of foster children into ECE programs has great potential and some grantees were able to capitalize on that potential and implement system changes; however, grantees also encountered a variety of barriers to making changes in data systems that required substantial amounts of money, staff time, and specialized skills. Some grantees sought to address these resource barriers by adapting existing information systems or by attaching their projects to other information technology investments. While this approach may save money in the short run, it is susceptible to delays and other challenges if changes to enhance the collection of data on ECE referrals and enrollment are preempted by other agency priorities. Such efforts remain important however they are done; improvements to data systems not only improve referral processes but also increase the volume and quality of data available to assess project impacts. To ensure the effectiveness of these efforts, organizations should seek support from project champions and agency leaders who have the power to realize investments in improved ECE information systems.

In conclusion, despite a number of major challenges the 2011 ECCW grantees demonstrated that efforts to increase the enrollment of foster children into high-quality ECE programs can be successful. Doing so requires a multi-pronged strategy that includes the fostering of inter-agency partnerships that include stakeholders with decision-making authority from the CW, ECE, and court systems; consistent and systematic training for ECE and CW staff as well as for foster caregivers and court personnel; the development of clear and uniform referral and enrollment procedures; comprehensive and reliable information management systems; and a commitment to rigorous evaluation to inform program development and improvement.

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