



ALLIANCE FOR KIDS QUARTERLY REPORT

YEAR 1 | QUARTER 1

July 1–September 30, 2025



**STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-30**

Alliance for Kids, El Paso County's Early Childhood Council is housed under the Foundations program of Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families

THRIVING FAMILIES



FAMILY RESOURCE NAVIGATION



1,900

AVERAGE OF 1,900 FAMILIES SUPPORTED THIS QUARTER



30 NEW CONNECTIONS MADE WITH ORGANIZATIONS



6 PLAYGROUPS HELD

GOAL 1

Strengthen families by providing parents with essential support.

Our Family Resource Navigators have engaged with over **1900 families** in this quarter, **providing essential support to help them navigate the Universal Preschool (UPK) system and access local community resources**. While the majority of the supports were around UPK, our team supported families across a range of needs, including **13 calls related to non-UPK childcare navigation and 23 contacts from military-connected families**, highlighting the importance of specialized support for this population.

Family Resource Navigators have strengthened collaboration and service coordination by **building new relationships with more than 30 community organizations that serve children and families including military installations, libraries, ARC, and local community centers**. These are just some of the organizations we have outreachted to and connected with this quarter, expanding the reach of navigation services, creating more direct referral pathways, and ensuring families have access to a broader network of support tailored to their needs.



CONNECTED 19 FAMILIES WITH CHILD FIND SERVICES

Our partnership with **Child Care Aware supported 11 families, and we connected 19 families with Child Find services**, ensuring access to developmental screenings and early intervention pathways. We also provided targeted referrals and resource connections, linking families to parenting supports, connecting them with JI staff and community partners, and helping them access essential services such as Medicaid and DHS.



SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS + CAREGIVERS

This quarter, **six playgroups were held, each averaging participation from 41 children and 22 adults**. These gatherings continue to be a valuable opportunity for families and caregivers to connect and engage in meaningful early learning experiences.

THRIVING FAMILIES

Needs

As we continue to connect families to critical supports and services, we recognize the need for a consistent and intentional way to gather feedback directly from those we serve. **Developing a family survey or similar feedback tool will help us better understand families' experiences, measure satisfaction with navigation services, and guide continuous improvement based on their perspectives.** Capturing family voice in a structured way is essential to shaping more responsive and impactful supports moving forward.

FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT PUBLIC AWARENESS

Jl continued moving the Family Friendly Initiative (FFI) forward by developing a **public awareness plan that will inform families and the community about early childhood and the resources** and supports available to them.

GOAL 2

Increase families' access to resources and information to support them in successfully parenting their children.



7 FAMILY-FOCUSED OUTREACH EVENTS

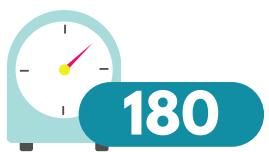
OUTREACH + FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

This quarter, JI focused on expanding families' access to critical early childhood information and supports through community events and targeted outreach. **Across seven events**, staff connected with more than **900 families**, providing materials and guidance on **topics such as the importance of the early years, trauma-informed care, equity, and healthy child development**. Families also received information about **developmental screenings, early intervention, home visiting opportunities, and parenting classes**, equipping them with practical next steps to support their children's growth and well-being.



ECMH CONSULTATION SERVICES

Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) consultation remained a vital support for children, families, and providers. Across July through September, our **ECMH practitioner supported up to seven early childhood centers** and delivered over **180 hours of direct services**, including program, classroom, and child-specific consultation. In total, **222 children were impacted** through these services, six of whom were identified as at risk for suspension or expulsion. While two children were expelled during this period, early intervention and collaboration helped prevent additional expulsions and supported stronger inclusion practices within classrooms.



180 HOURS OF ECMH SERVICES IMPACTING UP TO 222 CHILDREN

THRIVING FAMILIES

EMBED MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

JI currently has one EMBED site, where a practitioner is consistently present to support children, families, and staff.

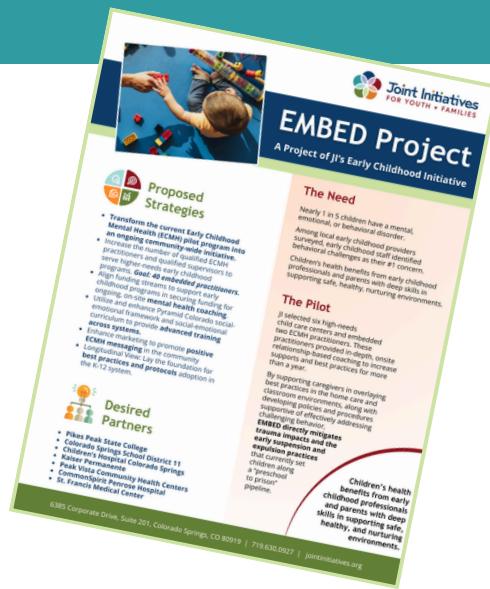
JI is also in the process of hiring an additional ECMH consultant to expand our capacity and deepen our impact in more early childhood programs across the community.

Highlight

Referrals continued to grow, with new community referral cases opened each month and ongoing follow-up to ensure children and families receive coordinated support. **One highlight this quarter was a high-risk child previously receiving ECMH services who transitioned successfully into kindergarten with no concerns from their new teacher.** A young child last school year who was experiencing significant impulsivity and unsafe behaviors, making it hard for him to participate in daily routines or build friendships. After months of coordinated work with his teacher and ongoing coaching with his mom on self-regulation, social skills, and co-regulation, he made remarkable progress, even joining circle time successfully by the end of the year. Over the summer, his family continued practicing the strategies they learned, and when he transitioned to a smaller preschool environment this fall, our consultant checked in to support the adjustment. His new teacher shared that he is doing amazingly well, showing none of the previous unsafe behaviors and only needing light support with friendship skills. This is a powerful reminder of how early behavioral health intervention and strong family partnership can truly transform a child's experience.

Needs

As we look ahead, several priorities will guide our work in expanding families' access to resources and information. **Developing a family feedback tool** remains a critical next step to help us better understand families' experiences and shape outreach that meets their needs. **Expanding our ECMH capacity by hiring an additional consultant** and increasing the number of embedded sites will strengthen our ability to provide consistent, relationship-based support to more children and programs.



FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT EMBED SUPPORTS

This quarter, the **Behavioral Health** subcommittee under the Family Friendly Initiative has focused on building the **core policies, procedures, and programming that will guide how EMBED mental health supports are delivered across centers**. The group has also been working closely with UCCS to develop a clear, consistent Pathway that outlines each step from initial outreach through ongoing support. This work is setting the stage for a more aligned, accessible, and responsive system for families and educators.

THRIVING CHILDREN



\$25,000

\$25,000 GRANT FROM GARY COMMUNITY VENTURES TO EXPAND STORYTELLING EFFORTS

FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHTS

A major focus this quarter has been laying the **groundwork for the public awareness campaign, part of our broader Family Friendly Initiative to build a more coordinated early childhood system.**

The campaign is designed to raise community understanding of how early childhood education and childcare shape family well-being and strengthen the local economy.

Through **storytelling, social media, and community conversations**, it will highlight key messages around brain development, affordability, teacher shortages, and the essential role childcare plays in supporting families and employers. To support this work, **JL received a \$25,000 grant from Gary Community Ventures to expand our storytelling efforts and build a library of family, provider, and community stories that illustrate the real impact of early care and education.**



The **FFI Partnership Committee** made meaningful strides this quarter in building relationships and expanding early childhood opportunities across the community. **The committee hosted a gathering with local churches on October 1, where several congregations expressed interest in exploring ECE partnerships as part of their mission.**

Follow-up meetings are now underway with those seeking more information. The committee is also **collaborating with the local Chamber to identify strategies and potential legislative pathways that could support expansion efforts.** Current discussions include focusing on testimony opportunities that highlight the need for waivers or regulatory relief, rather than pursuing a complex bill with extensive requirements. They are also exploring legislation that would call for a statewide study to better understand and reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers to expanding early childhood education in Colorado.

EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUPPORT



While progress remains strong, demand for quality improvement support continues to grow while State funding dwindles. **Providers are eager to engage in coaching, access materials funding, and participate in rating support, but current resources limit the number of programs we can serve at one time.** Addressing this need will be a key focus in the coming year as we work to increase funding, expand coaching capacity, and ensure that more children have access to high-quality early childhood education.

GOAL 3

Increase access to a coordinated mixed-delivery model of affordable quality early childhood education.

THRIVING CHILDREN



EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY INITIATIVES



23 PROVIDERS IN RATING QUEUE



37 ACTIVE MOUs



149 GAE + CSQI COACHING HOURS



5 PROGRAMS ACHIEVE HIGH QUALITY LEVEL 3-5 RATING

The Quality Improvement (QI) team conducted **outreach to 70 providers** and **engaged directly with 99 programs** to offer technical assistance, share grant opportunities, and provide updates on Colorado Shines systems. In total, the team dedicated **107 hours of direct technical assistance** support to providers.

COLORADO CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



2,000 CHILDREN ON CCCAP WAITING LIST

One area that continues to present challenges is increasing the number of providers accepting children through the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). Due to the ongoing CCCAP freeze, many providers are unable to fill their existing CCCAP slots, which has led to a noticeable decline in interest in pursuing new fiscal agreements. This creates barriers not only for families seeking affordable care but also for our efforts to grow the number of programs participating in CCCAP as outlined in our strategic plan. The impact is especially significant in **El Paso County**, which currently has the highest number of children on a CCCAP waitlist, with close to 2,000 applications pending.

Highlight

A highlight of this quarter was the success of a family child care home provider who faced a significant challenge after receiving a decreased rating during her Colorado Shines evaluation in July. A lower rating would have directly impacted her business by reducing the CCCAP reimbursement rates she relies on to serve families. **With dedicated support from the JI Quality Improvement Coach, who not only provided targeted guidance but also attended the appeal meeting alongside her, the provider successfully retained her Level 4 rating.** This outcome protected her revenue stream, ensured continued access to affordable care for families, and reinforced the critical role that hands-on coaching plays in supporting providers as they navigate complex quality rating processes.

THRIVING CHILDREN

MORE HIGHLIGHTS

- 33 programs engaged in support to move from Level 1 to Level 2
- 7 programs that increased from Level 1 to Level 2
- 23 programs currently queued for rating (17 are MOU holders)
- 142.5 GAE coaching hours
- 4 new or expanding providers supported
- QI funds spent on materials: \$5,535.04

Needs

We are seeing a growing demand for quality improvement support among providers, but current funding levels are insufficient to meet this need.

THRIVING COMMUNITY



UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL (UPK)

A total of 231 early childhood programs are now participating in UPK across El Paso County, reflecting strong engagement across the mixed-delivery system. This includes

73 school district-based programs across all 15 school districts, 56 family child care homes, and 102 center-based programs, with 66 programs accepting CCCAP to support equitable access for families who qualify for child care assistance. The number of registered UPK seats grew from 6,916 in July to 7,142 by September, including 5,811 general education seats and 1,317 IEP seats, showing continued momentum in building capacity.

Increasing family access remains a central focus. By the end of the quarter, 4,978 four-year-olds (92%) were matched with a provider, up from 4,561 (90%) in July, while the number of unmatched children dropped from 501 (10%) to 450 (8%). The UPK team worked closely with families to support placement, resulting in 890 additional children being successfully matched

this quarter. A total of 5,428 family applications were submitted, and while 744 were withdrawn, the number of applications in progress grew to 1,706. This shows strong family engagement but also highlights the continued need for targeted follow-up and navigation support to help families complete the process and access available seats.

GOAL 4

Facilitate the implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and promote UPK and early childhood education to the business community.



231 PROVIDERS



7,142 SEATS REGISTERED



4,978 CHILDREN MATCHED (92%)

THRIVING COMMUNITY



UPK PROVIDER RECRUITMENT

Provider recruitment and system growth remained priorities. **Five new providers joined the UPK system in August, with five more pending or in process**, expanding program availability and strengthening the mixed-delivery model across the community. These partnerships are essential to increasing capacity and ensuring UPK opportunities are available in more neighborhoods, particularly where access remains limited.

GOAL 5

Support recruitment, qualification, and retention of professionals within the Early Childhood Field



230.4

NAVIGATION HOURS FOR 209 PROFESSIONALS



160

160 PARTICIPANTS TRAINED – 103 HOURS
11 TRAININGS

THRIVING WORKFORCE



CAREER NAVIGATION + TRAINING

Career navigation remained a core focus this quarter, with **209 early childhood professionals receiving individualized support totaling 230.4 hours**. Among them, 45 were new to the field, reflecting continued momentum in expanding the workforce and welcoming new educators into early childhood roles. The growing demand for navigation services shows a steady interest in entering and advancing within the field, and tailored one-on-one support continues to be essential for helping professionals chart sustainable career paths.

From July through September, **160 professionals took part in 11 professional development trainings, representing 103 hours of learning and skill-building**. These sessions addressed a range of topics designed to strengthen practice and support career growth. A highlight of the quarter was a Pre-Licensing training held in August, which helped prepare new providers to open programs and increase the availability of care in our community. Together, these efforts demonstrate an ongoing commitment to strengthening the early childhood workforce and supporting both new and experienced professionals in their growth.

FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT

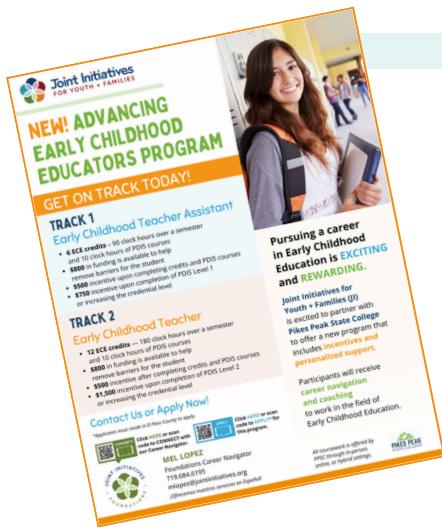
WORKFORCE NEEDS

The workforce team also continued efforts to recruit and strengthen the early childhood pipeline.

Staff participated in a career fair to connect directly with prospective educators and share information about opportunities in the field. **As part of our Family Friendly Initiative Workforce Committee goals, we successfully applied for and obtained a SPA license for our sub-agency, an important milestone in our work to expand workforce supports.** Looking ahead, we are actively planning a large early childhood hiring event in January that will bring together providers, partners, and potential candidates to address ongoing workforce needs.

THRIVING WORKFORCE

ADVANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS



The Advancing Educators Program continues to be a vital part of our workforce development strategy, helping current and future early childhood professionals advance their education and credentials. Currently, **13 students are enrolled in Track 1**, receiving targeted career navigation support to help them begin or strengthen their careers in early childhood education. **Seven students are participating in Track 2**, where they receive deeper guidance as they continue along their professional pathways. Track 3's CDA+ course has 17 students enrolled, exceeding the original goal of 15 and demonstrating strong interest in advancing credentials within the field. To date, five students have submitted their ECE credential applications and completed their track, marking an important step in building a more qualified workforce in El Paso County.

We continue to see **lateral movement between Track 1 and Track 2 students**, as participants refined their career goals and progress through the credentialing process. Additionally, many Track 2 students are opting to split their required four courses into two semesters to better balance school, work, and family responsibilities. This flexibility supports retention and helps more professionals remain engaged in the program.



37

COMBINED NUMBER OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN TRACKS 1, 2, AND 3



5

5 STUDENTS APPLIED
FOR ECE CREDENTIAL

Needs

To support long-term workforce stability, we must **expand mentorship and on-the-job training opportunities and grow partnerships with high schools, colleges, and workforce agencies to create clearer entry points into the field**. Finally, implementing innovative retention strategies such as wage supplements, tuition reimbursement, and wellness initiatives will be critical for keeping professionals in the field beyond their first five years. These needs will guide our focus for the coming year as we continue to build a qualified, supported, and sustainable early childhood workforce in El Paso County.



OEDIT GRANT AWARDED

This quarter, JI was also **awarded a second Pay for Performance grant** from the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT). This new funding will enhance our ability to **connect early childhood professionals with employers and expand local workforce pipelines**, complementing the work already underway through the Advancing Educators Program.

PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY



LONG-TERM POLICY GOALS

This quarter marked an important step forward in our work to elevate the voices of early childhood providers and families in shaping the policies that impact them. As part of our Family Friendly Initiative, we **convened a meeting focused on identifying long-term policy goals, including the potential for a 2026 ballot measure to strengthen the early childhood system in El Paso County.** These conversations are laying the groundwork for future advocacy efforts and ensuring that the priorities reflected in any future initiative are shaped by those most directly impacted.



CHILDCARE INCENTIVE FOCUS GROUP + FEEDBACK

We **partnered with the Mayor's Office to host a Child Care Incentive Focus Group** designed to better understand the barriers and challenges individuals face when pursuing licensure. Insights from this conversation will guide local strategies aimed at expanding the supply of licensed childcare and informing future policy solutions.

JI **provided feedback and recommendations on key governing rules, including state licensing requirements and local health department regulations**, to ensure that policies support program quality while remaining responsive to the realities providers face. We also began conversations with city officials around **zoning challenges that create barriers** for childcare expansion, initiating dialogue that will be critical to future policy and systems change efforts.

FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHTS

LICENSING COURSE + BALLOT MEASURE

As part of the **FFI Partnerships group**, JI partnered with UCCS to develop a **non-credit, self-paced course designed to walk potential providers through the licensing process**. In parallel, JI is creating a **playbook to equip staff with tools and resources to offer direct support to those pursuing licensure**. These complementary efforts aim to **simplify the process of opening new childcare programs** and address one of the most significant barriers to expanding access in our community.

Our **FFI Advocacy and Sustainable Funding Committee** took a major step forward this quarter by presenting a comprehensive overview to the full FFI group on the **possibility of a future ballot measure to support early childhood education**. The committee has spent months gathering research, analyzing local data, and reviewing community sentiment, including results from the countywide poll conducted in summer 2025. When the presentation was shared with the full FFI membership, a vote was taken and members showed almost unanimous support for continuing to explore a potential ballot measure. Their presentation **outlined several possible funding mechanisms and tax options that could be considered, giving the larger group a clear picture of what is possible and what the community may support**. This work has laid the foundation for informed decision-making and continues to move our community closer to long-term, sustainable investments in early childhood.

GOAL 6

Empower ECE providers and families to engage in public policy advocacy.