



# Alliance for Kids | FY20-21 Annual Report

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

## Welcome

***We invite you to view the FY20-21 Annual Report of Joint Initiatives for Youth & Families' early childhood program, Alliance for Kids (AFK), El Paso County's Early Childhood Council.*** The report outlines the successes in meeting AFK's Strategic Plan for 2020-21, developed by the AFK Council membership. Colorado legislation defines "Early Childhood Council" as a council established locally in communities throughout the state . . . that represents public and private stakeholders for the purpose of developing and ultimately implementing a comprehensive system of early childhood services for children in the community to ensure school readiness. "Early Childhood Council membership" are the members of a voting body of an Early Childhood Council with governing authority over all of the council's duties enumerated (7.717.1). Attached is AFK's report of the progress based on the Strategic Plan aligned to its accountability metrics (7.717.5).

## MISSION, VISION, AND SCOPE OF ALLIANCE FOR KIDS

### ***Bylaws Section 2.1: Vision***

The Alliance for Kids is dedicated to making El Paso County the best place to raise a child.

### ***Bylaws Section 2.2: Mission***

The Alliance for Kids serves as a vehicle, bringing together agencies and individuals to work collaboratively on a high quality early childhood system for young children and their families in El Paso County.

In partnership with families, this early childhood system encompasses children prenatal to eight years and includes the domains as outlined in the Early Childhood Colorado Framework.

### ***Bylaws Section 2.3: Scope***

The scope and role of the Alliance is to serve as the Early Childhood Council in El Paso County and includes, at a minimum community-wide strategic planning and financing of the early childhood system; implementation of new and review of ongoing programs/projects; and soliciting and overseeing funding.



# THRIVING FAMILIES

**OBJECTIVE 1:** El Paso County families experience ease and equity when navigating/accessing resources for their family's health and well-being.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Families and parents will be equipped with the knowledge and tools to be their children's first and best teachers and advocate on their behalf.

## GOAL 1

All families and children have access to the resources and supports to thrive.

15

**Additional calls** from families seeking classes, CCCAP, and rent assistance

9

**NEW Partnerships:** Southern Rock Development Group, Prince Financial Literacy, Mary's House, the YMCA, Pikes Peak Community College, Diversus Health, the Pikes Peak Community Foundation, the Talent Equity Agenda, and the EPC Chamber & EDC

1

**NEW Youth & Family Inclusion Manager** hired by Joint Initiatives

7

**Professional development offerings** scheduled to provide information on effectively partnering with families, with the Anti-Bias training including sensitivity to diversity focus.

2

**Kindergarten transition events** at two CCCAP ECE Programs



### ADDITIONAL SUCCESSES

- **Family Night Toolkits** (aligned with Early Learning and Development Guidelines)
- El Paso County **P-3 Committee** (Preschool - 3rd Grade)
- **Individual Service and Support Team** (ISST) for families



### ACTIVITIES

- Engaging in **Emergency Child Care Collaborative**
- Staffing a **Family Support Line** during business hours to assist families in navigating the resources necessary to meet their needs
- **Collaborating with key family service providers** through the Family Support & Education committee to ensure that services provided effectively pivoted from in-person to virtual supports and that parenting classes for families remained available and coordinated

7%  
LOSS

### Child Care

Approximate loss of ECE programs in El Paso County - much less than the state-wide estimates of 40-40%.

# THRIVING CHILDREN

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Children live in safe communities with comprehensive supports embedded and accessible to families in the neighborhoods in which they live.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Children are healthy and have opportunities for positive holistic development, nutrition, and wellness.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** All children are learning and developing and equipped with school readiness skills.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Children are engaged in quality interactions.

## GOAL 2

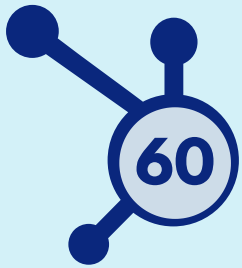
All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.



A total of 5241 hours of direct Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) consultation were provided in El Paso, Teller, and Park Counties combined.

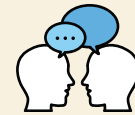


Family Support Line calls - 60% for parenting classes, rent assistance, CCCAP, and behavioral health needs.



### Community-hub building through the RISE Coalition and Fountain Valley Communities that Care

Jl/AFK staff attended over **60 meetings quarterly** with the focus of embedding early childhood education, the importance of family voice, and racial equity into these conversations. Work on developing these community hubs will continue into next year as the concepts being created for these communities become a reality.



### Increased our reach

into the Spanish-speaking Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregiver population by contracting with native Spanish speaker to provide support.

**IDENTIFIED NEEDS:** 1) Access to child care; 2) Supporting families of color who were more likely to have jobs that required work outside the home but were less likely to have found the child care needed; and 3) families whose primary language was a language other than English did not have the needed child care.

# TRAINING for CAREGIVERS on Healthy Social/Emotional Development

6

Trainings

556

Participants

Pyramid Plus Approach

The Growing Brain

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Early Childhood Mental Health Learning Series

138

## Workforce Wellness Survey Takeaways

Responses

There is a great **need for stress management and stress reduction** techniques for those in the early childhood field.

97%

**Professionals found ACEs to be an essential part of their professional development and understanding of addressing child behavior.** (Of all respondents, 50% had taken ACEs training.)

Gaining information on **why people are deciding to leave the field is missing from this data set** and, therefore, should be a consideration for future workforce discussions.

## CHILDREN GOAL 2

All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.



**40** Relationships w/  
Family, Friend, and  
Neighbor Caregivers

This network of providers receives monthly communication from JI/AFK and is also gaining health and well-being coaching through the Fostering Resilience in Early Education (FREE) program. Future FFN work will look to expand connections through community outreach in the Latinx and Black communities.



## Supports, Successes, Challenges for Early Childhood Programs

- JI/AFK served at a total of **50 programs** through the CSQI grant this year, providing **608 coaching hours** to these engaged programs
- JI/AFK provided programs with donated **supplies**, FEMA supplies, and over **\$327,000 in Workforce grants**
- **11 EPC programs** started their quality journey
- El Paso County **lost 25** ECE programs
- **20.6%** of programs hold a high-quality rating
- increase in **65 infant/toddler spots for CCCAP children** in our community
- **45** early childhood programs (center-based and family child care homes combined) received early language and literacy coaching
- **Updated developmental screening flyers** were distributed to all ECE programs with CCCAP fiscal agreements to ensure that information was presented to those who needed it most.

# THRIVING COMMUNITY

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Alliance for Kids builds on current capacity to organize, convene, and facilitate community early childhood services, systems, and organizations for effective and efficient delivery of services and resources to meet the individualized and collective needs of children and families in El Paso County.

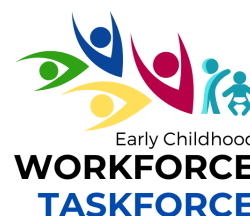
**OBJECTIVE 2:** The Alliance for Kids Council membership and its network of community partners build an awareness and understanding of policies and legislation impacting outcomes for families with young children for the purpose of advocacy towards policies and legislative measures impacting young children and families.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** The community is knowledgeable and well-informed of the importance of the early years, healthy families, and healthy children as it relates to a thriving community and building quality early childhood opportunities in the community.

## GOAL 3

El Paso County is a community where children are valued and supported to thrive.

## Building Community Awareness & Valuing Early Childhood



The Colorado Chamber of Colorado & EDC, the Women's Chamber, and the business sector are beginning to engage in conversations. We have a thriving Workforce Taskforce of more than partners committed to building a system of support for the early childhood workforce.

**Partnerships** have expanded, collaborative **grant opportunities** presented themselves, and the **community need for, and interest in, access to quality early childhood has increased.** The AFK Council has utilized the Early Childhood Council **graphic for communicating the role of the Council** and has developed an elevator speech for Council members to utilize within community conversations.





## Early Childhood Legislative WINS!

This year was an intense year for early childhood legislative advocacy – one in which much effort was put into creating a network of advocates and one in which early childhood saw unprecedented bipartisan support.

### JI/AFK supports:

- **Proposition EE** to allow for Universal Pre-K in Colorado
- **HB21-1222** to best support Family Child Care Providers in our community
- **HB21-1304** to allow for the creation of the Department of Early Childhood.

### Advocacy Training

Provided advocacy training for our community through Save the Children Action Network, in which 12 participants learned how to advocate with local legislators.

### JI/AFK Engagement:

- It's About Kids Network
- Infant/Toddler Coalition
- Early Childhood Workforce Development Subcommittee
- EC Governance and UPK Advocacy Group

## COMMUNITY

### GOAL 3

El Paso County is a community where children are valued and supported to thrive.

## Social Media | Websites | E-Newsletters



**EC** NEWS  
**PD** UPDATE

Social media posts included the importance of the early years, COVID-19 related information, emergency child care resources, partner resources, legislative information, and surveys – just to name a few. We provided monthly email communications (PD Update and EC News) to summarize information necessary for the sector to stay informed of all of the important information circulating this year.

The **Alliance for Kids website** had **12,985 users** (87.5% New, 12.5% returning). This represents 34,535 pageviews. The **FamilySPEAK website** had **2,976 users** (91% new and 9% returning). This represents 6,339 pageviews.

# THRIVING WORKFORCE

**OBJECTIVE 1:** The ECE workforce has access to community programs, services, and resources aimed at addressing the health and well-being needs of the ECE workforce, essential to effectively supporting children and families.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** The early care and education workforce has the skills, knowledge, and disposition to positively enhance the comprehensive development of children.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** The ECE workforce will be led by skilled and supported administrators who embody key elements of professionalism and will work in programs that are built upon a positive workplace culture.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** The early care and education workforce has the skills, knowledge, and disposition to partner with families to support the comprehensive growth of their children.

**OBJECTIVE 5:** Early childhood education workforce supports will be explored to address needs, including, but not limited to, COVID-19, local substitutes, enhanced skills, regional pre-service training, and resources for professionals.

## GOAL 4

All members of the El Paso County early care and education workforce have access to the resources and supports needed to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, health, and wellness to thrive.

### Health & Well-Being Resources for the Workforce

- A **health resource panel** was developed to allow early childhood providers access to information regarding the health care they may qualify to receive and local behavioral health resources.
- The Learning & Development Committee developed and distributed a **list of wellness resources** for early childhood professionals.

**77 RESPONSES  
TO PD SURVEY**

**49 PD TRAINING  
OPPORTUNITIES**



#### NEEDS IDENTIFIED:

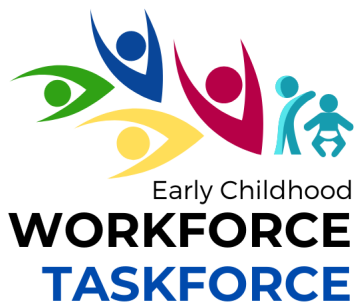
1. infant/toddler specific training
2. training for family child care providers
3. training supporting family partnership.

A total of seven professional development scheduled on effectively partnering with families. The Anti-Bias classroom training includes a sensitivity to diversity focus.



**\$14,585 IN  
SCHOLARSHIPS**

For early childhood professionals to support qualifications, maintenance, and higher education



## Local action was needed to address the early childhood workforce crisis in order to have high-functioning administrators.

- In December 2020, the **El Paso County Early Childhood Workforce Taskforce was convened with over 30 local partners** willing to collaborate to address the issue. A total of **\$145,000 was secured** through local philanthropy and stakeholders, as well as an **Early Milestones Workforce Innovations grant** to address this issue. Significant milestones of the project this far, beyond funding, include the development of an early childhood education recruitment campaign and landing page, the discussion about local earn and learn models of qualification and professional experience stacking, as well as the **hiring of an Early Childhood Career Navigator** to help guide new professionals seeking to become Early Childhood Teacher qualified.
- The El Paso County Early Childhood Workforce Taskforce and the related Leadership and Workplace Environments Working Group are developing a **pilot project that will target the skill development of leaders aligned with the Early Childhood Competencies 2.0**. This leadership development series will be based upon a self-assessment that will allow administrators to engage in skill development within competencies they have defined as lacking.
- Additionally, a **Professional Learning Community will be established for administrators** of the pilot project to engage in reflective conversations and skill-building efforts as they work to develop workplaces where new and current employees retain and thrive.
- **JI/AFK increased partnership with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center and provided over \$327,000 in workforce grants** to keep early childhood programs open. Additionally, JI/AFK is working with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center, through the Workforce Taskforce, to build systems that support qualification attainment and increase access to apprenticeship funding.

## WORKFORCE

# GOAL 4

All members of the El Paso County early care and education workforce have access to the resources and supports needed to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, health, and wellness to thrive.



# ANNUAL REPORT NARRATIVE

**Goal 1: Thriving Families – All families and children have access to the resources and supports to thrive.**

**Objective 1: El Paso County families experience ease and equity when navigating/accessing resources for their family's health and well-being.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will increase access to information on family resources, two-generation activities, and projects available, which support the holistic growth of children and families.

AFK engaged in three key activities that allowed for increased access to information vital to meeting the needs of families in El Paso County, including 1) engaging in the Emergency Child Care Collaborative; 2) staffing a Family Support Line during business hours to assist families in navigating the resources necessary to meet their needs; and 3) collaborating with key family service providers through the Family Support & Education committee to ensure that services provided effectively pivoted from in-person to virtual supports and that parenting classes for families remained available and coordinated. AFK supported 76 families in finding emergency care through the COVID-19 pandemic and worked tirelessly to ensure that early childhood programs had access to the emergency supplies they needed to stay open and operable, resulting in a loss of approximately 7% of early childhood programs in El Paso County which is much less than the state-wide estimates of 40-40%. Our Family Support Line took 15 additional calls from families. JI/AFK supported these families in finding resources, including information on parenting classes, Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), and rental assistance. The FamilySPEAK website was visited a total of 611 times, with 596 of these being new users. The Family Support & Education Committee met quarterly to discuss best practices in supporting families in virtual settings, developed a vision for collaborative parenting training, and provided a panel of experts to guide service providers in navigating back to in-person supports in a family-centered manner.

**Outcome 2:** FamilySPEAK will increase partnerships throughout the community in order for families to have equitable access to information on community-based, two-generation resources.

This year Joint Initiatives/Alliance for Kids (JI/AFK) expanded partnerships to ensure families had equitable access to early childhood programming and resources needed to weather the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, nine partnerships have been developed with the following new organizations: Southern Rock Development Group, Prince Financial Literacy, Mary's House, the YMCA, Pikes Peak Community College, Diversus Health, the Pikes Peak Community Foundation, the Talent Equity Agenda, and the El Paso County Chamber & EDC. The reorganization of Joint Initiatives positively benefitted families by opening up funding streams designed to specifically support families in obtaining resources not otherwise available to the community, such as paying for child care while waiting on CCCAP approval and covering the cost of food. Additionally, JI/AFK developed a Racial Equity Plan (see additional document) aimed at eliminating racial inequities and improving outcomes for all children and in El Paso County and hired a Youth and Family Inclusion Manager to see this work through and ensure family voice in community decision making, both internal and external to our organization. Through the JI restructure, it has been determined that, for the time being, the organization needs to work to bring the successful ISST (Individual Service and Support

## Goal 1: Thriving Families

Team) process to early childhood families. This process allows families access to service providers, thus meeting this need. JI has hired a Partner Coordinator to build this concept into the younger years and will aim to link this concept with Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) practices to support families in crisis in our community.

**Objective 2: Families/parents will be equipped with the knowledge and tools to be their children's first and best teachers and advocate on their behalf.**

**Outcome 1:** Increase knowledge level of families to build skills aligned with promoting and providing positive, holistic development for their children.

Family Night Toolkits have been developed that are aligned with the ELDG areas of development. Toolkits & materials were made available for check out to all CSQI programs. Additionally, a total of 7 professional development offerings have been scheduled that provide information on effectively partnering with families. The Anti-Bias Classroom training includes a sensitivity to diversity focus.

**Outcome 2:** Develop and promote opportunities for families on transitions to schools from both home and early care and education environments.

Although COVID-19 created barriers to direct work between elementary and preschool programs, JI partnered with two CCCAP programs to provide a kindergarten transition event for families. Additionally, ELDG information was developed for school districts to utilize for school transitions, and an El Paso County P-3 (Preschool to 3rd Grade) Committee has been developed, which is working toward collective impact in this area.

## Goal 2: Thriving Children – All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.

**Objective 1: Children live in safe communities with comprehensive supports embedded and accessible to families in the neighborhoods in which they live.**

**Outcome 1:** Family and child need assessments, including, but not limited to, child care, will outline comprehensive needs for children in order to be safe in the neighborhoods in which they reside.

As JI/AFK sought local data to review, partners, including the El Paso County Department of Human Services, noted that due to COVID-19, the data we are seeking to assess is absent. Data for child abuse and neglect trends are difficult to report at this time due to the following:

- Not One More Child hasn't met formally since the beginning of the pandemic.
- There are new County Commissioners, a new District Attorney on the Board, and our local DHS CEO is resigning.
- There are maps and statistics detailing child abuse and prevention, but no formal reports.
- There are news reports and articles about the changing numbers of abuse/neglect reports during the pandemic, but it is difficult to draw conclusions at this time.

## **Goal 2: Thriving Children – All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.**

AFK's Family Support Phone Line took a total of 45 phone calls this year and supported families in finding the resources they needed to make it through a year as we have never seen before. A total of 60% of the calls we received were seeking parenting classes, followed by rental assistance, CCCAP assistance, and behavioral health needs. All of these needs were addressed and referrals made to ensure that children were safe and families had access to the resources they needed.

Additional data sets, including "Impact of COVID-19 on Colorado Families," released by Early Milestones Colorado, were also utilized to drive decision-making and efforts to best support families. Research leads to three main areas of need including, 1) Access to child care; 2) Supporting families of color who were more likely to have jobs that required work outside the home but were less likely to have found the child care needed; and 3) families whose primary language was a language other than English did not have the needed child care. To respond to these outlined needs, JI/AFK 1) provided grants, resources, and coaching support to keep child care programs open and reduce additional loss of access; 2) ensure that community partners who worked with families of color knew about the resources accessible to all families; and 3) increased our reach into the Spanish-speaking FFN population by contracting with a native Spanish speaker to provide supports in the care settings most utilized by those speaking languages other than English.

### **Outcome 2: Community hubs will be utilized as the access points for community services deemed necessary through family needs assessment data.**

JI/AFK remains engaged in the community-hub building that is taking place through the RISE Coalition and Fountain Valley Communities that Care. JI/AFK staff attended over 60 meetings quarterly with the focus of embedding early childhood education, the importance of family voice, and racial equity into these conversations. Work on developing these community hubs will continue into next year as the concepts being created for these communities become a reality. JI/AFK will continue to provide the Familyspeak.org website as a virtual resource hub for families who have children under the age of eight years old, driven by the expertise of the Family Support & Education Committee. Additionally, JI/AFK increased its reach in the Spanish-speaking FFN population by contracting with a native Spanish speaker to support and build an FFN network in the care settings most utilized by those speaking languages other than English.

### **Objective 2: Children are healthy and have opportunities for positive holistic development, nutrition, and wellness.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will sustain and increase available activities and projects that support healthy social/emotional development of young children and the inclusion of children with special needs.

A total of six community trainings were provided that focused on healthy social/emotional development for caregivers, including Pyramid Plus Approach, The Growing Brain, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and an Early Childhood Mental Health Series for professionals. A total of 556 professionals were provided training in this area, ensuring direct access to professional guidance to support professionals in meeting the needs of children and families.

## Goal 2: Thriving Children – All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.

Jl/AFK provided a total of 5241 hours of ECMH consultation this year. A total of 48 calls were answered through our ECMH warmline, and directors, teachers, and families were connected with the resources needed to support children exhibiting challenging behavior. Throughout the year, partners continued to state the need for increased ECMH services as a strategy for supporting child well-being, healthy family functioning, and teacher retention in our community. Jl/AFK responded to the community's need for increased ECMH consultation and was awarded CDHS funding to provide an embedded-ECMH pilot in El Paso County in FY 2021-2022. We built a vision for a system of ECMH supports for our community, which includes direct ECMH consultation, embedded ECMH consultation, and intensive ECMH consultation through home visiting. As the local systems-building entity, Jl/AFK will convene all ECMH service providers to ensure systems are integrated and supportive of children and families as we expand the offerings in our community.

**Outcome 2:** AFK will increase healthy holistic development, nutrition, and wellness resources for targeted populations as defined by resource mapping and data, including, but not limited to, DentaQuest, Peak Vista, Colorado Health Access Survey, The Resource Exchange (TRE), El Paso County Public Health.

This year, the Heath & Well-Being Committee developed a workforce wellness survey that was distributed to all licensed providers in El Paso County, designed to determine the highest needs of the workforce and to drive future workforce wellness supports and resource development. A total of 138 individuals completed the survey, and the overarching takeaways included 1) Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and/or trauma-informed care was found to be very valuable professional development for providers; 2) there is a great need for stress management and stress reduction techniques for those in the field; and 3) gaining information on why people are deciding to leave the field is missing from this data set and therefore should be a consideration for future workforce discussions.

Additionally, a health resource panel was developed to allow early childhood providers access to information regarding health care they may qualify to receive and behavioral health resources available in El Paso County. The lack of health benefits and paid time away from work to engage in health care visits is an ongoing issue impacting retention in the field. Jl/AFK is engaging in conversations with Denver Early Childhood Council and Early Learning Ventures to determine if any of the federal funding available may be utilized for health care benefits and/or health navigators to assist the workforce in obtainments of these resources. The Learning & Development Committee developed and distributed a list of wellness resources for early childhood professionals this fiscal year.

**Outcome 3:** An increase in both public awareness and "public resolve" regarding the importance of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), resiliency, and community connections.

To increase both public awareness and "public resolve" regarding the importance of ACEs, resiliency, and community connections, Jl/AFK offered four ACEs Professional Learning Communities. Additionally, AFK conducted the Early Childhood Workforce Well-Being Survey, which provided data showing that while only 50% of respondents had taken ACEs, of those who completed it, 97.6% of professionals found it to be an essential part of their professional development and understanding of addressing child behavior.

## **Goal 2: Thriving Children – All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.**

### **Objective 3: All children are learning and developing and equipped with school readiness skills.**

**Outcome 1:** An increase in the number of high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs in our community, with a special focus on affordability and accessibility of high-quality ECE programs for our youngest at-risk children as defined by children/families utilizing CCCAP supports, infant and toddler programming, or children on behavioral plans or on IFSP/IEP.

JJ/AFK served at a total of 50 programs through the CSQI grant this year, providing 608 coaching hours to these engaged programs. Additionally, our Marketing & Communications team promoted Colorado Shines QRIS monthly through various communications this year, ensuring that quality early childhood is known and promoted within El Paso County. Additionally, AFK posted over 200 total posts across all social media platforms on all early childhood topics throughout the fiscal year. Supports successfully pivoted from providing coaching and technical assistance focused on quality improvement to providing services necessary to keep early childhood education programs open, staffed, and operable for the large majority of this fiscal year. Our Child Care Resource & Referral data show us that El Paso County lost approximately 7% of our child care capacity due to COVID-19 impacts, which is a favorable number in comparison to the 40%-50% loss estimates that were feared at the state-level at the beginning of the pandemic. JJ/AFK provided supplies donated through a community supply drive, FEMA supplies, and over \$327,000 in Workforce grants to keep early childhood programs open. Our coaching shifted from quality improvement focused to supporting programs in meeting the Public Health Order, maintaining staffing and supporting the well-being of professionals. In March and April, we started to see a shift in a number of the programs that we support, noting a readiness to dive back into quality improvement work. As such we shifted back to support those programs in rating readiness and are happy to report that even given the huge challenges of running high-quality early childhood programs this year, El Paso County saw 11 programs start their quality journey, completing the steps necessary to move from a Level 1 to a Level 2 rating. Through a very trying year in which programs fought to keep their programs staffed and their doors open, El Paso County lost 25 ECE programs, approximately 6% of our total. The quality ratings of the programs in our community, however, stayed fairly consistent, with 20.6% holding high-quality ratings. Additionally, the percentage of programs with a CCCAP fiscal agreement went from 22.9% to 23.7%. JJ/AFK supported all programs that took Pre-Licensing classes programs in obtaining fiscal agreements this year, two of which obtained the agreements, and meets monthly with the El Paso County Department of Human Services CCCAP team to build systems that allow access to high-quality early childhood programming for all families who desire this care. Infant toddler capacity has fluctuated this year, and through targeted outreach with CSQI participating programs, we have seen an increase in 65 infant/toddler spots for CCCAP children in our community. We are amazed at the growth in our community in the face of extreme adversity. We will continue to build a community where all families have access to high-quality early childhood services.

**Outcome 2:** Improve the flow of communications to, and supportive resources for the Family, Friends, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers.

JJ/AFK has developed 40 relationships with FFN providers this year and seeks further connections with individuals qualifying as informal care providers. This network of providers receives monthly



## **Goal 2: Thriving Children – All children have the resources, supports, and interactions early in life to thrive in school and life.**

communication from JI/AFK and is also gaining health and well-being coaching through the Fostering Resilience in Early Education (FREE) program. Future FFN work will look to expand connections through community outreach in the Latinx and Black communities.

**Outcome 3:** An increased access to and use of developmental screening through increased partnerships and funding, as well as normalizing the need for these screenings with early care and education providers and families.

JI/AFK continues to partner with TRE to ensure access to screenings and early intervention in El Paso County. TRE noted a drop in referrals through this past year as many families were pausing visits with doctors and other service providers due to the health crisis. Our developmental screening flyers were updated and distributed to all early childhood programs with CCCAP fiscal agreements to ensure that information was presented to those who needed it most. Additionally, the need for Early Intervention was considered as part of the ECMH Warmline discussions, and appropriate referrals were made based upon the information shared. Quality Improvement Coaches also share this information as specific child needs arise through the coaching relationship.

**Outcome 4:** Partnerships will be developed with school districts to ensure a seamless system of early care and education in the early years and beyond.

Although JI/AFK was not able to make the progress desired with developing formal MOU relationships with school districts due to school district capacity being impacted by COVID-19, we were able to offer three kindergarten readiness events in partnership with early childhood programs. Additionally, School Readiness Family Partnership kits, aligned by ELDG domain, have been made available for check out and support family information nights at early childhood programs.

### **Objective 4: Children are engaged in quality interactions.**

**Outcome 1:** Increase knowledge and skills of children in early language and literacy through coaching supports, training, and community partnerships at early care and education centers.

**Outcome 2:** Increase knowledge and skills of children in early language and literacy through coaching supports, training, and community partnerships for Family Child Care Providers (FCCPs).

Early language and literacy coaching opportunities were made available to those programs with aligned quality improvement goals. A total of 45 early childhood programs (center-based and family child care homes combined) received early language and literacy coaching and are being supported in implementing practices in daily transitions, circle time and center activities.

## **Goal 3: Thriving Community – El Paso County is a community where children are valued and supported to thrive.**

**Objective 1: Alliance for Kids' builds on current capacity to organize, convene and facilitate community early childhood services, systems, and organizations for effective and efficient delivery of services and resources to meet the individualized and collective needs of children/families in El Paso County.**

**Outcome 1:** Sustain and build capacity and resources within the AFK team and community partners to meet the goals/objectives/outcomes of AFK Strategic Plan. (ECC Rule) Years 2 & 3

AFK has seen tremendous growth regarding El Paso County becoming a community that values early learning. The Colorado Chamber of Colorado & EDC, the Women's Chamber, and the business sector are beginning to engage in conversations. We have a thriving Workforce Taskforce of more than partners committed to building a system of support for the early childhood workforce. Local philanthropy is engaged in early childhood conversations, and globally the value of early childhood is becoming a notion more widely held in our community.

### **Outcome 2:**

1. Recruit membership from ECE community systems to the newly formed Joint Initiatives "Community Table." **(Year 1)**

The JI Board, Pathways Oversight Group, and the AFK Council determined that rather than having representatives from each group attend a "Community Table," it would be more robust to gather the three groups on a quarterly basis and focus on collective impact. As such, the Collective Impact group will begin meeting in August 2021.

2. Support the development of a collective impact model through the Joint Initiatives "Community Table" as it relates to the ECE community systems and prevention. **(Year 2)**

3. Develop a plan for filling in the gaps within community systems as identified by Joint Initiatives "Community Table" in addition to expanding resources and capacity. **(Year 3)**

**Outcome 3:** Market and communicate AFK within the JI organization in the community to increase the awareness of JI/AFK, resources of JI/AFK, and Council's ability to serve as the "go-to" for early childhood resources in the community.

Much progress has been made with increasing awareness of AFK within JI, through the reorganization of JI, the development of the Early Childhood Council graphic, and conversations that have taken place in the development of the "Community Table." Externally, community awareness of AFK has increased this year as partnerships have expanded, collaborative grant opportunities presented themselves, and the community need for, and interest in, access to quality early childhood has increased. The AFK Council has utilized the Early Childhood Council graphic for communicating the role of the Council and has developed an elevator speech for Council members to utilize within community conversations.

### **Goal 3: Thriving Community – El Paso County is a community where children are valued and supported to thrive.**

**Objective 2: The Alliance for Kids Council members and its network of community partners build an awareness and understanding of policies and legislation impacting outcomes for families with young children for the purpose of advocacy towards policies and legislative measures impacting young children and families.**

**Outcome 1:** Increase Joint Initiatives and Council and community partner awareness of legislation, public policies as it relates to advocacy at a local and state level.

Early childhood legislation was front and center in Colorado this year, and JI/AFK engaged staff, Council members, and local partners in communication relevant to moving the sector forward to best support children and families. The JI EC Program Director engaged in the It's About Kids Network, the Infant/Toddler Coalition, the Early Childhood Workforce Development Subcommittee, and the EC Governance and UPK Advocacy group, and brought this information forward to the before-mentioned groups through staff meetings, Council meetings, and targeted communications efforts.

**Outcome 2:** Engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of our community as approved by AFK Council members and share, encourage and engage the entire Joint Initiatives agency in these advocacy efforts.

This year was an intense year for early childhood legislative advocacy – one in which much effort was put into creating a network of advocates and one in which early childhood saw unprecedented bipartisan support. JI/AFK engaged in many advocacy efforts, including signing on in support of Proposition EE to allow for Universal Pre-K in Colorado; HB21-1222 to best support Family Child Care Providers in our community; and HB21-1304 to allow for the creation of the state-level Department of Early Childhood. Additionally, we provided advocacy training for our community through Save the Children Action Network, in which 12 participants learned how to advocate with local legislators.

**Outcome 3:** AFK will engage the community in a minimum of two legislative events, a minimum of one aligned with the State Legislative session. (Years 2 & 3)

**Outcome 4:** AFK will utilize community and state leaders in policy and advocacy work for information and guidance, on legislative items aligned with young children and families, including, but not limited to Colorado Children's Campaign, advocacy "arm" of Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA), and Early Childhood Summit. (Years 2 & 3)

**Objective 3: The community is knowledgeable and well-informed of the importance of the early years, healthy families and healthy children as it relates to a thriving community and building quality early childhood opportunities in the community.**

**Outcome 1:** Through AFK & JI website, social media, and community outreach events, AFK will increase awareness and knowledge of the importance of the early years, healthy families, and healthy children as it relates to a thriving community and building quality early childhood services.

### **Goal 3: Thriving Community – El Paso County is a community where children are valued and supported to thrive.**

Jl/AFK utilized Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and posted a total of 353 times this year, with posts including the importance of the early years, COVID-19 related information, emergency child care resources, partner resources, legislative information, and surveys – just to name a few. We provided monthly email communications (PD Update and EC News) to summarize information necessary for the sector to stay informed of all of the important information circulating this year.

The Alliance for Kids website had 12,985 users (87.5% New, 12.5% returning). This represents 34,535 pageviews. The FamilySPEAK website had 2,976 users (91% new and 9% returning). This represents 6,339 pageviews.

**Outcome 2:** Community partners through the Jl agency are able to articulate the importance of the early years, healthy families, and healthy children as it relates to a thriving community & are willing to share the information outward. **(Years 2 & 3)**

### **Goal 4: Thriving Workforce – All members of the El Paso County early care and education workforce have access to the resources and supports needed to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, health and wellness to thrive.**

**Objective 1: The ECE workforce has access to community programs, services and resources aimed at addressing the health and well-being needs of the ECE workforce, essential to effectively supporting children and families.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will increase the knowledge of and access to health and well-being resources available for early childhood workforce in the community.

A health resource panel was developed to allow early childhood providers access to information regarding the health care they may qualify to receive and behavioral health resources available in El Paso County. The lack of health benefits and paid time away from work to engage in health care visits is an ongoing issue impacting retention in the field. Jl/AFK is engaging in conversations with Denver Early Childhood Council and Early Learning Ventures to determine if any of the federal funding available may be utilized for health care benefits and/or health navigators to assist the workforce in obtaining these resources. The Learning & Development Committee developed and distributed a list of wellness resources for early childhood professionals this fiscal year.

**Outcome 2:** Working with community partners, assess the mental health wellness of the ECE workforce and environment (Peaceful Households, Rocky Mountain Prevention Research Center (RMPRC) - Colorado School of Public Health).

This year, the Heath & Well-Being Committee developed a workforce wellness survey distributed to all licensed providers in El Paso County, designed to determine the workforce's highest needs and drive future workforce wellness supports and resource development. A total of 138 individuals completed the survey, and the overarching takeaways included 1) ACEs and/or trauma-informed care was found

**Goal 4: Thriving Workforce – All members of the El Paso County early care and education workforce have access to the resources and supports needed to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, health and wellness to thrive.**

to be very valuable professional development for providers; 2) there is a great need for stress management and stress reduction techniques for those in the field; and 3) gaining information on why people are deciding to leave the field is missing from this data set and therefore should be a consideration for future workforce discussions.

**Outcome 3:** Utilizing the mental health wellness data of the ECE workforce, develop a plan of action to address the needs in collaboration with community partners. **(Year 2)**

**Outcome 4:** Implement the mental health wellness plan for the ECE workforce in collaboration with community partners. **(Year 3)**

**Objective 2: The early care and education workforce has the skills, knowledge, and disposition to positively enhance the comprehensive development of children.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will offer professional development programming to meet the diverse needs of early childhood programs, educators, and administrators (equity).

A total of 77 professionals completed the JI/AFK Professional Development Needs Assessment, which drove the creation of a community-wide professional development plan and the offering of 49 professional development opportunities. AFK implemented a quarterly focus on three areas highlighted as needs from the needs assessment: 1) infant/toddler specific training, 2) training for family child care providers, and 3) training supporting family partnership. Throughout the year, it became evident that local action was needed to address the early childhood workforce crisis in order to have high-functioning administrators. In December 2020, the El Paso County Early Childhood Workforce Taskforce was convened with over 30 local partners willing to collaborate to address the issue. A total of \$145,000 was secured through local philanthropy and stakeholders, as well as an Early Milestones Workforce Innovations grant to address this issue. Significant milestones of the project this far, beyond funding, include the development of an early childhood education recruitment campaign and landing page, the discussion about local earn and learn models of qualification and professional experience stacking, as well as the hiring of an Early Childhood Career Navigator to help guide new professionals seeking to become Early Childhood Teacher qualified.

**Outcome 2:** AFK will provide access to scholarships, apprenticeship, and coaching opportunities to adequately support the implementation of developmentally appropriate practice and effective early childhood leadership.

A total of \$14,585 in scholarship dollars have been provided to professionals this fiscal year to assist with qualification attainment, maintenance, or enrollment in higher education. Earn and learn models of qualification are a central piece to the Workforce Taskforce, and discussions center around developing a competency-based apprenticeship model within the next calendar year to build a pipeline of qualified early childhood professionals. A total of 608 coaching hours was provided to early



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childhood programs this fiscal year, allowing administrators the support necessary to build high-quality programs with strong developmentally appropriate practices. While administrators tend to allocate coaching hours to classroom staff, just under 40 hours of coaching was provided directly to program leaders, focusing on program administration and the provision of resources necessary to navigate COVID-19.

**Outcome 3:** Target professional development to increase skills and knowledge of the ECE workforce to support the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices and effective early childhood leadership.

A total of four professional development opportunities were offered focused on administrative skill development, including a Licensing Refresher class; Policies and Procedures: A Roadmap for your Business; the ACEs Professional Learning Community; and the Small Business Development Center Leading Edge Course.

**Objective 3: The ECE workforce will be led by skilled and supported administrators who embody key elements of professionalism and will work in programs that are built upon a positive workplace culture.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will increase the knowledge and skills of the Early Care and Education workforce and administrators, to embody (or empower) key elements of professionalism, and ECE programs that are built upon a positive workplace culture.

The El Paso County Early Childhood Workforce Taskforce and the related Leadership and Workplace Environments Working Group are developing a pilot project that will target the skill development of leaders aligned with the Early Childhood Competencies 2.0. This leadership development series will be based upon a self-assessment that will allow administrators to engage in skill development within competencies they have defined as lacking. Additionally, a Professional Learning Community will be established for administrators of the pilot project to engage in reflective conversations and skill-building efforts as they work to develop workplaces where new and current employees retain and thrive.

**Objective 4: The early care and education workforce has the skills, knowledge, and disposition to partner with families to support the comprehensive growth of their children.**

**Outcome 1:** AFK will offer professional development supports specific to effectively partnering with families to ensure school readiness for children.

A total of seven professional development offerings have been scheduled that provide information on effectively partnering with families. The Anti-Bias classroom training includes a sensitivity to diversity focus.

**Goal 4: Thriving Workforce – All members of the El Paso County early care and education workforce have access to the resources and supports needed to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, health and wellness to thrive.**

**Outcome 2:** AFK will offer coaching supports as it relates to partnering with families per the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS).

A total of 45 programs received coaching regarding how to increase family partnerships in ways that increase points on the Colorado Shines Point Structure through the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS).

**Objective 5: Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce Supports will be explored to address needs, including, but not limited to, COVID-19, local substitutes, enhanced skills, regional pre-service training, and resources for professionals.**

**Outcome 1:** Build community supports for ECE programs and professionals in response to COVID-19 and enhancing the skill levels of ECE workforce in partnership with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center and other local and state resources. **(Year 1)**

Jl/AFK increased partnership with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center and provided over \$327,000 in workforce grants to keep early childhood programs open. Additionally, Jl/AFK is working with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center, through the Workforce Taskforce, to build systems that support qualification attainment and increase access to apprenticeship funding.

Throughout the year, it became evident that local action was needed to address the early childhood workforce crisis in order to have high-functioning administrators. In December 2020, the El Paso County Early Childhood Workforce Taskforce was convened with over 30 local partners willing to collaborate to address the issue. A total of \$145,000 was secured through local philanthropy and stakeholders, as well as an Early Milestones Workforce Innovations grant, to address this issue. Major milestones of the project this far, beyond funding, include the development of an early childhood education recruitment campaign and landing page, the discussion about local earn and learn models of qualification and professional experience stacking, as well as the hiring of a career navigator to help guide new professionals seeking to become Early Childhood Teacher qualified.

**Outcome 1:** Build a community, Council-driven team to explore the opportunity and develop a business plan for the ECE Workforce Center. **(Year 2)**

**Outcome 2:** Investigate funding and facility opportunities. **(Year 2)**

**Outcome 3:** Develop a business plan to establish an ECE Workforce Center in Colorado Springs. **(Year 3)**