Illinois Hard to Reach
Families Project Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Six agencies in Illinois received ARRA funds in 2012 to develop effective and innovative strategies to recruit young children from families considered "hard to reach" and enroll them in quality early care and education (ECE) programs. Over the 16 months of funding, these agencies each participated in three evaluation interviews scheduled at the beginning, middle, and end of the funding as well as an optional monthly call to problem solve and share information. The interviews and calls form the basis for evaluating the six programs in nine priority areas identified by the funding agency. These priority areas were aimed at identifying recruitment strategies that worked.

Critical to success was the ability to provide families with some form of services shortly after recruitment and to be able to track child and family participation. Nearly all agencies reported that they had wait lists and could not provide newly recruited families with immediate access to Head Start, PFA, or another community ECE program. Agencies that provided "interim services" such as "drop in" activities once a week or monthly home visits reported serving the largest number of families. As enrollment opportunities occurred, they offered enrollment to families on their wait lists or assured families of enrollment in the next academic year.

Pilot funds were used to support staff and volunteers to reach out to families and create materials to advertise the importance of early education. Once new families were identified, it was critical for agencies that did not have available slots to be innovative in their approaches and activities for these families. To retain these newly identified families, agencies said it was essential to "go to" them to assist with paperwork and maintain contact until they could be enrolled in services. Another important factor, agencies said, was collaborating with other agencies that provide services to families living at or near the poverty level.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background and priorities

Publicly funded early childhood education (ECE) programs in Illinois provide services to young children and their families who live near, at, or below the poverty level and are considered at risk for school failure. Even with recent declines in state and federal funding, providers are striving to identify and recruit families of young children who qualify for services. Yet, providers recognize that underserved or "hard to reach" pockets of families who have never accessed early learning programs, whether Head Start, Preschool for All, or other high-quality early learning programs, still exist. To address these pockets of underserved families, the state of Illinois funded six pilot programs in 2012 to develop and implement strategies to reduce the barriers and challenges that these families face. This report evaluates the project and summarizes the need for this type of intervention and the efforts taken by participants.

Consensus has been reached on the importance of high-quality early learning programs to bridge the social and preacademic gaps between children living in poverty and children whose families can afford to pay for preschool services. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stressed that "high-quality early learning is the best education investment we can make in our children, our communities, and our country" (Duncan, 2013). His statements in part are based on economic data regarding the return on investment for ECE services. Temple and Reynolds (2007) demonstrated that investments in high-quality early childhood programs provide an average return of $7 for every dollar invested. Economist James Heckman (n.d.) has concluded "early childhood development directly influences economic, health and social outcomes for individuals and society" (p. 1). Burchinal et al. (2009) found that "the quality of children's early care and education … is related to children's academic, cognitive, language, and social skills" (p. 3).

While not every child experiences the *same* benefits of a high-quality early childhood setting, all children will reap *some* benefits. This is based upon their abilities and skills upon entry or enrollment in the program. In an interview with the Hartford Foundation (2012), Sharon Lynn Kagan, a leading scholar in the area of ECE, argues that the benefits of high-quality early childhood involvement are sustained throughout the life of a child. Many studies throughout the last 50 years have demonstrated that high-quality early childhood programs can help to develop social skills; increase test scores, high school graduation rates, and lifetime earnings; and decrease crime, teen pregnancy, and smoking rates as well as grade repetition and special education (Barnett & Masse, 2007).

These same benefits have been demonstrated in the city of Chicago in a longitudinal study that followed nearly 1,000 children from enrollment in high-quality ECE programs into young adulthood (mid-20s), The lead researcher, Arthur J. Reynolds, summarizes the findings by describing that "a chain of positive influences initiated by large advantages in school readiness and parent involvement leads to better school performance and enrollment in higher quality schools, and ultimately to higher educational attainment and socioeconomic status" (University of Minnesota, 2011; see also Reynolds et al., 2011). The positive impact of high-quality early childhood services on children from disadvantaged backgrounds in fact is magnified.

So why are some families who are living in poverty not accessing these public programs for their preschool aged children? Some identified barriers include affordability, lack of transportation, stringent enrollment requirements, need for nontraditional child care hours, distrust of public programs, and a desire for family members to care for their children (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). In addition, parents report that they do not know what constitutes high-quality early care and do not understand the benefits of this care. Program policies regarding enrollment (e.g.,

required forms, immunizations and documentation of income) can be difficult to understand and navigate. Enrollment opportunities vary across communities depending on program funding and resource allocation from state and federal governments. Kagan (2009) states that "children's access to preschool programs varies dramatically by their race, socioeconomic status, parents' education, mothers' employment, English proficiency, and geographic locale" (p. 7). These factors, whether alone or in combination, widen the gap of school readiness/preparedness. This sustained gap in services has and will continue to affect children and families for generations unless it is addressed now.

In response to the concern that eligible families were not accessing the state-funded program, *Preschool for All*, the Illinois Early Learning Council commissioned *The Hard to Reach Toolkit* in 2009 to guide PFA providers in identifying, recruiting and enrolling the hardest to reach in their service area. As a result of the council's work, in September 2011 the Bureau of Child Care at the Illinois Department of Human Services announced available funding for six programs to present bold, creative, and innovative ideas by testing their strategies to enroll and retain the hardest-to-reach children in high-quality care. The programs were charged with addressing priority areas.

1. Specific activities and strategies employed to engage hard-to-reach children and families.

2. Number of children from the target group enrolled and served, and the consistency of attendance days for children.

3. Success and methods used for finding and collecting information on hard-to reach families.

4. Average length of families' stay in the program.

5. Reasons as identified by families for leaving programs.

6. Cost effectiveness of chosen activities.

7. Collaborative relationships created among local agencies that improved services for hard-to-reach families.

8. Sustainability of the project beyond the funding phase.

9. Lessons learned and modifications required for continued success.

Characteristics of the six programs

Six applications were chosen based on the quality of their proposals. Of these six, three were located in urban areas, two in large suburban areas and one in a rural area. Most of the pilot sites offered a combination of publicly funded preschool, Head Start, and or home-visiting programs; one offered only child care and another only offered PFA services (see Appendix B).
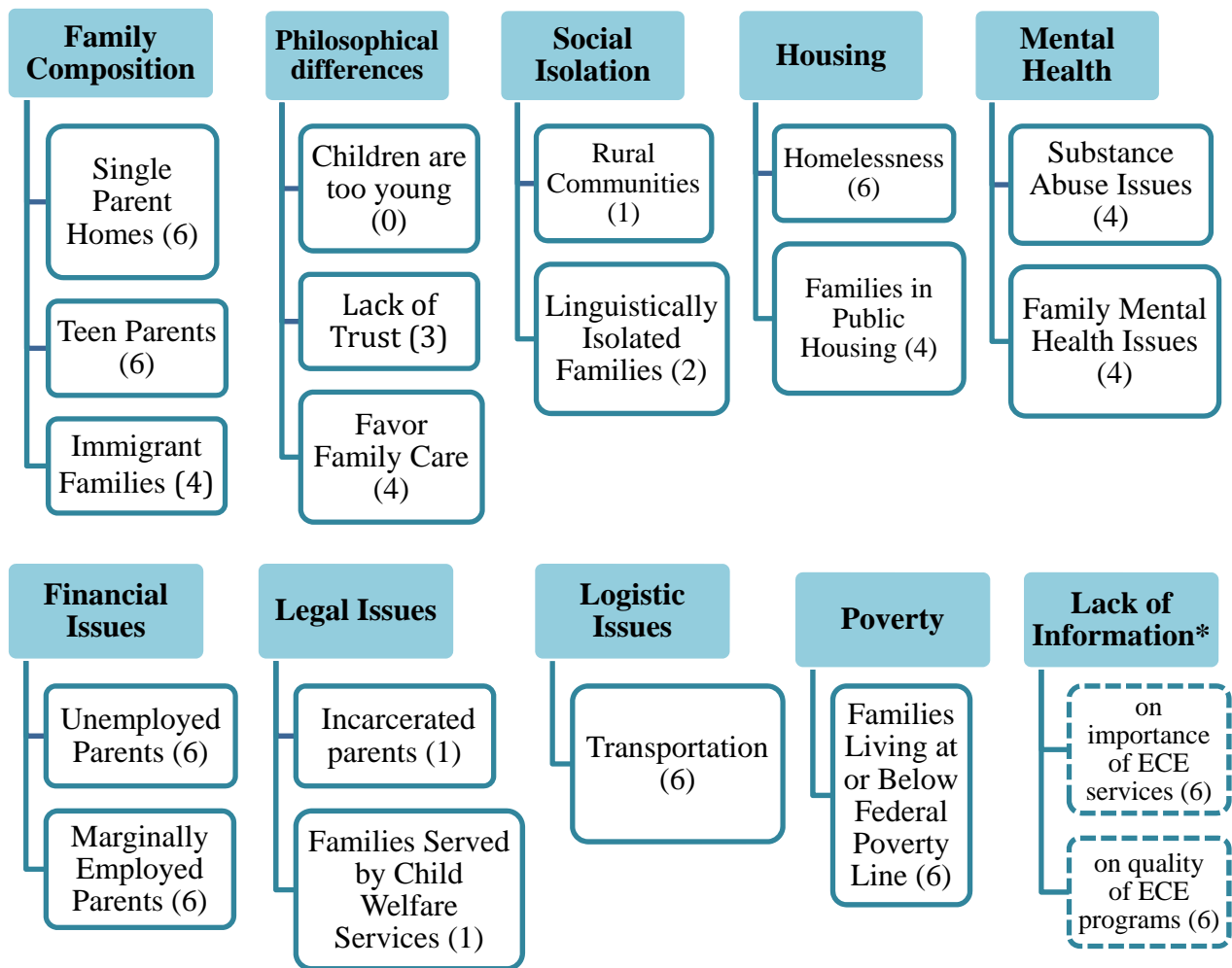
Defining "Hard to Reach"

The *Illinois Hard to Reach Toolkit* (2009) defined hard-to-reach families as those who are unaware of or unable to access Preschool for All services. Other factors may include parents' language and literacy skills, perceptions of need, and personal/family attitudes and beliefs about services (Spielberger & Gouvêa, 2012). The six programs varied somewhat in their own definitions, highlighting whom they considered to be the most vulnerable children and families in their service areas. Figure 1 presents elements of the definition of hard to reach and the extent to which programs highlighted certain elements.

In Figure 1 you will find the characteristics of "hard to reach" families identified in both the literature (blue boxes) and by the pilot programs (white boxes). In their funding proposals, all programs identified single parent/teen parent homes, homelessness, unemployed/marginally employed parents, lack of transportation, and poverty as characteristics of "hard to reach" families.

No program cited the philosophical difference of children being too young for services as the reason families were considered hard to reach. Interestingly, by the completion of the project, all programs included lack of information by community members and eligible families as contributing the families being unserved.

Figure 1: Characteristic of families that are considered "hard to reach"

Family Composition	Philosophical differences	Social Isolation	Housing	Mental Health
Single Parent Homes (6)	Children are too young (0)	Rural Communities (1)	Homelessness (6)	Substance Abuse Issues (4)
Teen Parents (6)	Lack of Trust (3)	Linguistically Isolated Families (2)	Families in Public Housing (4)	Family Mental Health Issues (4)
Immigrant Families (4)	Favor Family Care (4)			

Financial Issues	Legal Issues	Logistic Issues	Poverty	Lack of Information*
Unemployed Parents (6)	Incarcerated parents (1)	Transportation (6)	Families Living at or Below Federal Poverty Line (6)	on importance of ECE services (6)
Marginally Employed Parents (6)	Families Served by Child Welfare Services (1)			on quality of ECE programs (6)

Programs added these characteristics after participating in the pilot program.

EVAULATION PLAN

There were three stages to the evaluation: development of work plans with the programs that were awarded grants, monthly teleconference calls with the programs, and three individual interviews with the programs at various stages of the project.

Developing a work plan: A team from the University of Illinois served as evaluators for the project. The team leaders (Fowler and Thomas) initially reviewed all applications. Once the funder identified the pilot programs, the evaluation team contacted each program to discuss ways to measure their proposed strategies for reaching traditionally underserved families. The team helped programs complete a logic model to organize their work plans. These work plans, based upon information from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004), asked each program to identify available resources, planned activities, measurable outputs, intended outcomes, and long-term impacts expected from their efforts. (See Appendix C for an example of a work plan.)

Monthly networking calls: The team provided opportunities for the six programs to share information through 12 scheduled monthly teleconference calls. All pilots participated in at least half the calls; the average attendance for each call was 70%. Each pilot program was invited to share milestones during the calls. The networking calls also proved an opportunity for clarification of policy related to child care assistance funds (CCAP) and "mini-trainings" on two topics: current literature on the importance of family involvement and using the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) Web site for program planning. Call topics were determined through discussions on previous calls and by reviewing the evaluation interviews. (See Appendix D for a list of topics for the teleconference calls.) Notes from each call were completed and made available to the participants.

Interviews: A team leader (Fowler) conducted phone interviews with each funded program at the beginning, middle, and end of the project. The first interviews occurred early in the project (May and June 2012). The second interviews were conducted midway through the project (October and November 2012), and the third interviews were completed at the end of the project (April and May 2013). Interviewees consented to recording the interviews, which lasted 30 to 45 minutes, so other members of the evaluation team could listen and summarize the main points and identify issues related to the nine priority areas. Barriers to implementing their work plans also were highlighted. Summaries of the second and third interviews were e-mailed to the programs, who were asked to make corrections or additions to ensure the summaries reflected their intent. Most approved them without changes. Additions typically included providing specific numbers related to caseloads, individuals contacted, children served, or participants at events.

FINDINGS

Identifying, recruiting, and enrolling children of families considered hard to reach is a complex process. The evaluation interviews of the six programs revealed the need for consistent contact with recruited families that expose them to the benefits of early education services, whether through a voluntary drop-in preschool, child parent socialization groups, or home visits. These opportunities increased parent awareness of the importance of ECE services and their availability. Once families were identified, agencies reported that immediate follow-up calls or visits were critical for maintaining communication with the family. Families often needed support in completing enrollment forms, scheduling health and dental visits, and applying for child care assistance. Programs that did not have immediate openings for the families reported losing them unless they could provide some interim service or maintain frequent contact with them. Once

children were enrolled, they noted that tracking child attendance was important to intervene quickly when children were absent. Program staff reported that they worked with families to address family challenges that were preventing attendance, whether related to transportation, a shift in work schedules, or loss of wrap-around services. All programs reported that collaborations within their agency and within the community were vital to their recruitment, enrollment, and provision of services. Most concluded that to reach pockets of underserved families, they needed to bring support and services to the neighborhoods where families lived. Recruitment was described as an ongoing effort that required staff and volunteer time, knowledge of the community and its residents, and strategies for supporting the enrollment and attendance of the children.

Identifying and recruiting families

Designating a staff member to oversee recruitment and enrollment. Each agency assigned a staff member to coordinate recruitment, help families enroll in services, and collaborate with community agencies. In some cases this required hiring a new staff member; in others it involved rearranging current staff responsibilities. For example, Centers for New Horizons hired a parent from the community to fill this role. Her child had attended the ECE program, and she was able to connect with other parents through her story and knowledge of the local community.

Using video and print. All programs used some of their funding to advertise their services or create recruitment fliers, information packets, and, in one case, a community resource book. The most innovative approach used to highlight the importance of early care and education was the production of professional quality videos. Casa Central created a video about the agency (in Spanish with English subtitles) to take to all community activities and add to its Web site. It also produced a video (in English) to share with the local business community. The premier showing at

the agency's annual dinner raised $16,000, which was used to sustain child enrollments when families temporarily lost child care assistance funds because of employment issues or other family challenges. Another program advertised about the importance of ECE services on Chicago Transit Authority buses. All reported printing enough fliers or brochures to use beyond the funding period.

Using parents from the community as recruiters. Three agencies recruited and trained volunteers, usually parents who had received services and could serve as ambassadors for the program. Parent ambassadors attended community events and went door to door to talk with families about high-quality early care and education services and the importance of helping their children become ready for kindergarten. COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) was an important ally and resource for training parents and volunteers at two Chicago-area agencies. In addition, COFI provided training opportunities that representatives from five agencies attended.

Using a tracking system to support continued contact with families, as required by the funder. All agencies were required to use a data system to track and stay connected with families identified as hard to reach. As a result of using tracking systems, several pilot programs had one or more staff members maintain regular contact, such as weekly calls with families, until they could provide services or enroll their child in an ECE program. One agency's policy was to contact families within 72 hours of identification, which was monitored through the tracking system.

Using tracking systems to follow families through new services. The tracking system allowed staff from the programs to follow families through the recruitment to enrollment process. The tracking systems used by the six pilot projects varied greatly, from a complex Microsoft Access database to a simple "pen and paper" system created specifically for one program. Aunt Martha's modified its existing database by adding a field to identify children who were brought into the program through this project. This allowed the agency to identify those children recruited

through the pilot program and track services received by those families. Aunt Martha's identified 110 children reached through the pilot program and reported that 89 children were still enrolled as of April 30, 2013.

Several agencies counted the families that received interim services. Elgin U-46, which provided the Preschool Here interim program, planned to continue it during the next school year as a way to recruit more children. It recognized it did not have enough slots to enroll all eligible 3- and 4-year-olds as soon as they were identified. However, by using Preschool Here, Elgin U-46 could identify, recruit and serve until enrollment slots were available in the PFA program as well as maintain contact with the families through the weekly sessions. In fact, by April 30, 2013, the program reported that 57 of the children (35%) who attended Preschool Here were enrolled in PFA classes.

The agencies that were able to enroll the largest number of children into PFA, Head Start or other high-quality ECE programs reported analyzing attendance patterns and contacting families if attendance was inconsistent. If children left their program, however, they were not always able to identify the reasons. The programs predicted that some of the families moved or encountered transportation problems or changes in work schedules.

Providing support from identification through enrollment

Bridging recruitment to enrollment: The programs identified specific barriers that could prevent parents from coming to their agency or the ECE program to complete paperwork. These included: lack of transportation, need for childcare during the enrollment process, nontraditional work hours, and fear of the unknown. Agencies that expected parents to come on site to enroll their child reported losing parents between the point of recruitment and the point of enrollment. The

agencies that sent staff *to the families* to help them complete paperwork typically reported successful enrollments. They observed that families often were overwhelmed by the amount and regiment of paperwork required for completing it, as well as the need for health records and, in some cases, employment records. These families often needed the support of a staff member to guide them through the forms and to help make medical appointments so families could meet the health requirements.

Aunt Martha's, a multiservice agency, coordinated with its medical and dental clinic. The medical clinic set aside two days for families enrolling in its ECE program to see a health care provider. For families identified later in the year, the clinic agreed to provide "VIP" appointments so new families did not have to wait to get their child's required health exam and records. The same program provided transportation for 50-60 newly identified children to visit a dental clinic over a four-day period.

Providing interim services to bridge the gap in ECE services: A challenge for five agencies was providing immediate placements for eligible children. Although funded in spring 2012, they were not ready to start their recruitment efforts until late summer or fall 2012, when their ECE programs were already fully enrolled. Families were placed on a wait list until new slots opened. For programs with mobile families and frequent turnover, the wait was less than three months. For other programs, the wait could last the entire school year.

To bridge the gap between recruitment and enrollment, three agencies used pilot funds to create interim services. They set up a weekly literacy, child socialization, or a drop-in-preschool hour within the local housing development or at community centers. These introduced both parents and children to high-quality ECE activities (book reading, coloring, singing, and learning rhymes) that supported school readiness.

During the funding period, Elgin U-46 served 164 children through the drop-in program and planned to transition all children who were 3 or 4 by fall 2013 into the PFA program or another ECE program. The district used the hard-to-reach grant funds to pay for the two staff members (a teacher and a parent educator) who conducted the small drop-in groups. It initially proposed to take its drop-in program (Preschool Here) to five community sites. By the end of the grant, however, Elgin U-46 was offering the program at 12 locations. The weekly program provided families an opportunity to learn more about and get comfortable with the agency's services and the concept of preschool itself. It also helped the staff to identify families who were hardest to reach and ensure they had the opportunity to enroll their child in the PFA program for the 2013–2014 school year. To encourage regular attendance, the agency provided healthy snacks for children and parents and during winter offered free hats or mittens during some sessions.

Another agency offered newly identified families weekly socialization activities with their child and monthly home visits. Again, this provided a sampling of what the program could offer. As enrollment slots opened, these families could either enroll their child in a center-based early childhood program or a home-based option (a weekly home visit and a monthly socialization group). A third agency provided a literacy hour for five months until children could be enrolled in an ECE program or families ceased participating.

Sustaining new enrollments through child care assistance or other accommodations: Many agencies provided half-day programs through Head Start or PFA. However, families often needed eight to nine hours of child care while they worked or attended school. Programs that were savvy about funding options, such as the child care assistance program (CCAP), were in a better position to keep children enrolled. Understanding the eligibility requirements for families to receive CCAP funds and proactively assisting families to complete the paperwork required to

determine eligibility was essential to sustaining enrollment in the high-quality ECE program. Misinterpretation of CCAP policy led to the loss of some families and their children. For instance, one program misinterpreted CCAP regulations for parents enrolled in school and the allowance of grace periods, therefore experiencing high turnover at semester breaks. After the evaluation team received clarification from IDHS, this misunderstanding was addressed during a monthly teleconference call.

Several agencies reported that they closely monitored child attendance through their tracking system. If a child missed several days of school, they called the home and worked with the family to keep the child in the program. This might require a wake-up morning call to homes where parents worked nontraditional hours. In some cases, it involved helping the family to apply for a bus pass so that the child had consistent and reliable transportation. One program that provided services in multiple locations said that if a family moved within its school district, it could transfer their children to another school.

Collaborating to improve services

All of the pilot programs engaged in collaborative relationships as part of the funding stipulations of the hard to reach project. However, the degree to which programs created and sustained meaningful and productive collaborations varied. Pilot programs used both internal and external collaborations to better serve hard to reach families. Internal partnerships included collaborative work across programs housed within the same agency or program; external partnerships included collaborative work among agencies and/or community organizations.

Internal collaborations. Aunt Martha's made its Workforce Development Program more aware of its ECE services and was able to increase parent referrals for job training or employment assistance while also placing the family's young children in ECE services.

External collaborations: The most common collaborations were disseminating information throughout community venues (stores, bus stops, medical clinics), providing information at community events (fairs, open houses) sponsored by other agencies, or requesting training for staff and parents by an advocacy organization. Two collaborations that were the most innovative and worth replicating are described below.

Collaboration with the business community: One program focused on collaborating with the business community to raise money for scholarships for families who often had fluctuating eligibility for CCAP funds. It created and premiered a video describing its ECE program at its annual fund-raising dinner attended by community leaders and business owners. The financial contributions received were used as scholarships to support several children whose enrollment was threatened when family member temporarily lost CCAP funds. Ultimately, this program used its external collaborations to both the needs of its larger agency as well as the needs of its hard-to-reach population.

Collaborations with housing authorities and developments: Another collaborative partnership was formed between Elgin U-46 and its local housing authority. The program recruited families in local neighborhoods by providing a weekly drop-in preschool hour, using public spaces such as parks and sidewalks. Representatives of the housing authority were impressed with the benefits provided by the program and sought out a formal agreement to provide future space for a PFA classroom. Centers for New Horizons worked with several housing developments to gain access to gated housing complexes for their door-to-door recruitment efforts.

Many of the programs indicated their collaborations were essential to continuing their recruitment and enrollment efforts beyond the funding period. Collaborations such as these help ensure funding, space, training, and opportunities for ongoing recruitment of families.

Sustaining hard-to-reach efforts

Several programs planned to continue their efforts for recruiting hard-to-reach families and maintain either a part-time or a full-time staff member for outreach work. Three programs planned to reassign the outreach, recruitment, and enrollment efforts to existing staff. One program did not plan to continue efforts beyond distributing remaining fliers. Because they had developed recruitment materials (fliers, posters, videos) with pilot funds, all planned to continue to use these materials in the future, reprinting them as needed. All sites recognized they needed to start recruiting earlier than most had with the grant funds. As noted earlier, five programs began their outreach to hard-to-reach families after the 2012–2013 school year had begun and PFA and Head Start classes were already fully enrolled. Most noted that April and May was the time to begin recruitment efforts for the fall.

One urban program that was underenrolled for several years plans to serve 63 children from hard-to-reach families in fall 2013 in space provided by a city college. It identified a number of eligible families whose parents were enrolled in the college and were interested in taking their child with them to school. College administrators have been supportive about providing the required space. The pilot funding helped this program needed move from "underserving" its community (and losing Head Start funds) to more closely meeting the needs of the community. Another program, which used pilot funds to support a drop-in preschool, planned to incorporate this approach into its next PFA application. Children who attended the drop-in preschool during

the 2012–2013 school year were being enrolled in the PFA program for fall 2013.Program staff attributed their strategy of "going to the families" as responsible for identifying traditionally underserved families. The staff noted that their dream was to purchase a bus and remodel the interior like a preschool to go from neighborhood to neighborhood and deliver services.

Changing the mindset

The pilot programs reported that they had difficulty determining the cost effectiveness of their services. Most agencies said the biggest benefit of the project was that it helped them change their mindset and transform their approach to recruiting and enrolling families who are considered hard to reach. In some cases they re-evaluated ineffective approaches to recruitment. In other cases, they identified new actions necessary to enroll hard-to-reach families, especially the importance of intra- and interagency collaborations. The immediate cost or savings of these long-term changes could not be easily identified. For instance, the program that created the professional videos reported that while the cost was high and the effort intense, the product was well worth the investment, potentially reaching many more families. It could use the videos in many places and times to both increase awareness of its services and recruit families and program supporters.

At times, the new focus on reaching traditionally underserve families revealed the ineffectiveness of common practices. For example, a staff member from one program acknowledged that community fairs and activities were not very effective in finding families who had never been served. She noted that "only the families who know about our services already come to our community events; the hard-to-reach families either don't know about these events or don't see the value in them." She indicated that funds were best spent when program staff knew the makeup of their community and could focus their recruitment effort by using volunteers who

spoke the same language, came from the community, and had access to the housing where some of the hard-to-reach families lived. She noted that the volunteers not only recruited new families but became advocates for high-quality ECE as well.

SIX LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Transportation

Reliable transportation to and from preschool is a basic component of serving young children who are at risk or are traditionally underserved. Lack of transportation often prevents families from either enrolling their child in preschool or sustaining their attendance once enrolled. To increase and support sustained enrollment, the state should either:

1. Require half-day programs (PFA is typically 2.5 hours) to include transportation to and from school as part of their application for funding or
2. Provide enough funding to extend half-day programs to full day.

Going to the Families for Enrollment

The expectation that families travel to the program for the enrollment process provides additional hardships to those families with limited transportation options. The most successful pilot programs shifted their recruitment efforts and some service provision from program-centric to family-centric, taking the recruitment, enrollment, and some services to where the families live and spend their time. These programs recognized that enrollment is a complex process for many families, requiring multiple meetings, appointments, and forms. Additionally, these programs collaborated with medical and dental service providers to ensure priority access for families considered hard to reach. In fact, one program also provided transportation to and from these appointments.

Completion of all required forms can be confusing as well as require personal information that families may regard as an intrusion on their privacy. Vulnerable families needed to trust the agency representative, requiring the development of a relationship over time. For full-day enrollment, families needed to provide personal information that made them vulnerable. For example, access to the child care assistance program (CCAP) requires families to provide evidence of employment or school attendance and personal financial information. This is in addition to providing birth certificates, evidence of vaccinations, and TB testing as well as completing health and dental screenings for the ECE program. Some families needed to be guided through this complicated process.

Early care and education programs should:

1. Allocate funding for the additional staff time that is often required to assist families through the enrollment process.
2. Provide this support either in the families' neighborhoods or provide transportation to the agency.
3. Include a plan in PFA funding applications for facilitating the enrollment process for vulnerable families.

Flexibility Regarding Enrollment Slots

The pressure to be fully enrolled by a certain date is a disincentive for recruiting families throughout the year. Many families considered hard to reach are not likely to enroll their child during the typical recruitment period. Some families move into the neighborhood mid-year. Some may believe their 3- or 4-year-old child is too young, while others are isolated and unaware of available services. Programs should ensure that slots are available when very vulnerable families are identified and recruited. This can be accomplished by one or more of the following recommendations:

1. Requiring programs to prioritize enrollment for those families who meet multiple risk factors.

2. Allowing programs to hold enrollment slots open so the hardest-to-reach families can enter services whenever identified, without risking reduced funding because they are not fully enrolled.

3. Increasing funding for additional enrollment slots.

4. Permitting funds to be used for the provision of interim services until enrollment slots become available.

Most of the pilot programs relied on turnover of enrolled children to enroll those children from hard-to-reach families who were identified later in the school year. This approach left many children without services. To sustain relationships with these families, three programs used pilot funds to offer interim services. These once-a-week activities helped to build relationships and increased family willingness to enroll a child when slots became available. These families then had priority for vacated slots during the current year and were guaranteed enrollment for the next school year. Programs without interim services reported losing permanent contact with families who were placed on a waiting list. It is important to note that while the interim services maintained relationships with the families, they were not sufficient to meet the school readiness goals of PFA or Head Start.

Integration of PFA services with community childcare services

For many families, part-day programs do not meet their need for full-day care. Families enrolled in PFA and Head Start are, most likely, either low income (with incomes at or below 185% FPL) or live in poverty (with incomes at or below 100% FPL) and are eligible for CCAP if working or attending school. Agencies that fund half-day programs for these families must consider the need for wraparound child care. This will require either an extended school day or collaboration with child care providers. We recommend that:

1. Agencies providing partial-day services be required to collaborate with their local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) to help families find child care.
2. As a requirement for receiving PFA funds, programs must develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or an interagency agreement with their local CCR&R.

The collaboration will provide needed support to families whose child requires full-day care. The MOU may diminish perceived competition between community ECE programs and PFA and/or Head Start. The MOU will help to clarify policy questions or misunderstandings, especially around eligibility for CCAP. This can be facilitated by trainings from the local CCR&R.

Flexibility of Enrollment Age

The age of 3 is used as an administrative convenience for demarcating programs for very young children from preschool programs. As a result, children who turn 3 years of age after September 1 often are not able to access PFA or (preschool) Head Start. Likewise, children enrolled in the Prevention Initiative (PI) program are allowed only a 30-day grace period after turning 3. This is a disadvantage for many children with late summer/early fall birthdays, who are left without services once they turn 3. The enrollment model provided by early childhood special education (ECSE) allows children who turn 3 to enroll throughout the school year and may serve as an example for PFA and Head Start to enroll the hardest-to-reach children as they turn 3. Families with multiple risk factors should have priority for enrollment in PFA or Head Start or continue to receive services through the Prevention Initiative program. A child's third birthday is an arbitrary date for transitioning children from infant-toddler programs into preschool programs. Inconvenient birthdates jeopardize continuity of services for these high-risk families. State funding agencies should:

1. Grant flexibility to PI and PFA programs to move children from one program to another based on the child's developmental readiness to ensure uninterrupted enrollment in services. This may include keeping children longer in PI, moving children sooner to PFA, or ensuring that PFA slots are available throughout the year for children already enrolled in PI.

2. Monitor whether PI programs are collaborating with PFA and Head Start programs to support families in the transition from PI to preschool services.

3. Require PI programs, which have established relationships with families, to help families initiate contact at least 90 days before their child's third birthday to provide adequate planning time for the family. As noted in a previous recommendation (Flexibility Regarding Enrollment Slots), families who are traditionally underserved are more likely to lose contact with the next provider unless they are supported throughout the transition process. The transition requirements of the Early Intervention (EI) system provide a model for assisting families in transitioning at age 3 from the EI system to ECSE system.

Strategies Worthy of Replication

The Hard-to-Reach Pilot Program provided the state and the Early Learning Council with information on how pilot programs spent their fiscal resources (e.g., recruitment materials, dedicated staff, interim services). Programs recognized the short-term nature of the funding and developed short-term goals. Some programs planned to sustain one or more of their strategies. This required reassigning responsibilities to other staff or finding funds to support a designated staff member. Recruiting and enrolling hard-to-reach families is hard work and requires supportive policies that make these efforts an expectation—not an exception—in early care and education in Illinois.

The programs presented different strategies for identifying, recruiting, and enrolling traditionally underserved families. The three most successful and potentially sustainable include: (a) increased collaboration within larger agencies, (b) increased collaboration with other stakeholders within the community, and (c) the use of the drop-in preschool in local neighborhoods.

Aunt Martha's ECE program made stronger connections with its Workforce Development Department and with its medical and dental services. This internal collaboration facilitated meeting multiple needs of hard-to-reach families and expedited enrollment into available slots.

Casa Central used strong interagency collaboration with the business community to raise funds to temporarily support families whose eligibility for CCAP funds was interrupted because of employment issues. Centers for New Horizons increased its outreach by collaborating with COFI to train parent "ambassadors" to advocate for ECE services with other families in their neighborhood. Centers for New Horizons had closed a classroom because of under-enrollment. The parent ambassadors identified a sufficient number of families to justify reopening Head Start classrooms at a city college.

Elgin U-46 and Gads Hill Center were successful in bridging the gap between identification and recruitment and eventual enrollment. Elgin's provision of a weekly one-hour program at 12 sites enabled it to identify 164 families who were not previously familiar with ECE services and who had multiple risk factors. Eventually, 57 of the children served in Preschool Here were enrolled in PFA classes as slots opened. The remaining 3- or 4-year-olds will be provided the opportunity to enroll in the district's PFA classes in the next school year. Gads Hill provided weekly socialization sessions to familiarize new families with the benefits of ECE services. As families became comfortable, they were provided with the choice of home visiting or center-based services if slots were available. All programs stressed the importance of continued contact with newly identified families. Elgin's Preschool Here and Gads Hill's socialization groups ensured contact with both family and child.

These three models—intra-agency collaboration, interagency collaboration, and interim services—are well worth replicating in other communities.

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Elgin U-46

> *"Go to where the kids are. If you go there, you become part of the neighborhood. … You have to be passionate and be willing to do some cold-calling."*

This suburban school district provided only Preschool for All services and emphasized the importance of purposeful collaboration with the local community. Barriers to recruiting and sustaining the enrollment of hard-to-reach families included long wait lists for preschool slots and limited transportation to or from preschool programs. To address these barriers, this agency developed an interim service, Preschool Here, which was designed to provide one hour of preschool programming weekly for families living within the school district. This service was instrumental in introducing families to high-quality preschool activities while also building trust among providers, families, and children. In fact the district began with five sites and rapidly expanded to 12 sites during funding. It maintained consistent contact with newly identified families whose children would be eligible for PFA when new slots opened or during the 2013–2014 school year. Of the 164 children served, 35% were able to enroll in PFA by April 2013, 24% were either too old or too young to enroll, and 5% could not enroll because of transportation issues. By providing interim services to families, Preschool Here closed the gaps between recruiting, enrolling, and participating in preschool programming.

What will be sustained? The local housing authority approached Elgin U-46 to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) allowing the school district to plan long-term services in a proposed housing authority facility. The agency also experienced

a shift in perspective about providing high-quality ECE services. This shift—from expecting families to come to the program to taking the services to families—will allow the agency to sustain community-based services.

Casa Central

> *"The high quality of our new recruitment materials help reflect how professional our services are for children and families"*

The agency emphasized the importance of really "knowing your community" and its families to overcome barriers in recruiting and sustaining enrollment of families considered hard to reach. This included creating two professional videos: one in Spanish aimed at families to create awareness and interest in high-quality ECE programs and the other in English geared toward the business community and how it would benefit by supporting Casa Central and quality ECE services. The agency used the introductory video for families at many different events and locations within the community; it also added the video to its Web site. The business video was premiered at the annual dinner in support of Casa Central, and it raised $16,000 specifically to continue services to families who had temporarily lost eligibility for CCAP funds. The agency also identified community resources, such as the COFI training sessions, to prepare volunteers (usually parents) to recruit for the program. It offered small gift cards to thank volunteer parents for their recruitment efforts. Once families were identified, it was able to place at least 20 children into PFA or Head Start when turnover created new openings during the 2012–2013 school year. Children remained on a waitlist for no more than a month.

What will be sustained? After evaluating its recruitment strategy, Casa Central created new professionally designed recruitment materials to raise awareness and inform

parents. It also made sure resources were available in both English and Spanish. The agency will reassign the role of the designated staff member hired with grant funds to existing staff who will assume responsibility for following up with families.

Gads Hill

> *"The biggest outcome was to reach families and have them become comfortable with ECE programs and then transition them to a program that the family chose."*

The staff at Gads Hill recognized that families in their community might not understand the potential benefits of ECE services or might even be suspicious of local services. They focused on introducing families and children to a "sample" of ECE services by inviting families to a weekly socialization group with the opportunity for a monthly home visit. They considered this a "transitional" service that allowed three to four families at a time to become familiar and comfortable with the staff and agency before enrolling in a program. Families who agreed to enroll then had the choice of entering the home visiting program or a center-based program, such as Head Start or PFA.

A major challenge the agency faced was finding enough enrollment slots: enrollment in Head Start and PFA services often were not available to children who turned 3 after Sept. 1 because all slots were filled with older children. This policy of enrolling only children who were 3 by Sept. 1 left many children unserved until the next school year. Private ECE programs were scarce in some service areas, and to attend a private program, families needed to qualify for CCAP funds. This was difficult because of high unemployment rates among parents. As a result, families seeking center-based

care remained on wait lists until their child met the Chicago Public Schools age requirement and a space opened in the PFA or Head Start.

What will be sustained? Gads Hill served 12 to 15 hard to reach families with either home-based or center-based programs. Without the grant funding, Gads Hill will not be able to support a dedicated family visitor, but it will continue to recruit and develop a system using existing staff to recruit and maintain a relationship with families through follow-up phone calls.

Harrisburg-Eldorado Early Learning Center

"One-on-one [contact] is worth more than hanging up a flier."

Harrisburg/Eldorado Early Learning Center (ELC) proposed using projectfunds to provide a community outreach program for the hardest-to-reach children and families living in Saline County. This single-purpose child care organization planned to collaborate with publicly funded ECE programs in the county. Collaborative efforts were stymied because several local organizations did not share information with Harrisburg/Eldorado ELC. The project director did some door-to-door recruiting and completed surveys with families to determine some of the barriers encountered. She invited families to a recruitment fair/BBQ event and provided incentives for families who completed the surveys. She developed a resource booklet to share with families and other community members and organized two community literacy days as part of the hard-to-reach efforts.

As a result of its efforts, Harrisburg/Eldorado ELC acknowledged that it is critical to reach and establish a relationship with the parents to have an impact on their children.

The project director emphasized the importance of one-on-one communication with families. Harrisburg/Eldorado ELC recognized that organizations really need to know the communities in which they are working and the strategies best suited for the community. To best serve hard-to-reach families, strong collaborative relationships with other organizations providing high-quality ECE services are essential.

A big challenge for Harrisburg/Eldorado ELC was its geography, especially the lack of transportation in the rural areas and lack of sidewalks in town. Employment issues also provided some barriers, including parents working swing shifts. The project director asserts, however, that "if there was one person you've reached, it was worth it."

What will be sustained? Harrisburg/Eldorado ELC printed a high quantity of resource booklets to last beyond the funding period. Those will be an asset to providers and families who have them.

Centers for New Horizons

> *"Recruitment efforts need to be strategic and consistent to find families."*

Centers for New Horizons staff recognized that constant communication is necessary to retain families, especially if they have been placed on a wait list. CNH staff also acknowledged the importance of building relationships with the medical community, including the WIC program and doctors' offices, to meet the needs of families.

Parent engagement also was identified as an important piece of the program, as those parents who are involved can become advocates and the most effective marketing tool for the agency. One of the most important collaborative efforts for Centers for New Horizons was the use of COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) training for

parent ambassadors. Program staff also effectively collaborated with local housing authority staff to gain access to families living in the housing developments. Parent ambassadors were able to canvass the neighborhood to make connections with the families. They provided families with brochures about the program and completed interest cards with the families. Within 72 hours, the Centers for New Horizons family liaison contacted the families and began the enrollment process. If slots were not available, the program maintained monthly contact with the families until enrollment.

Within the funding period, Centers for New Horizons encountered a few challenges. Staff changes within the housing authority affected the partnership. Also, many housing authority buildings have security in place that prevents door-to-door recruitment. Many Chicago neighborhoods are experiencing a great deal of gentrification because of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation. These mixed-income neighborhoods make it more difficult to identify eligible families. Work schedules for families also affected their need for ECE services and CCAP funding. For parents who work nights, traditional daytime child care or part-time child care do not meet their needs. Some parents also raised concerns about their child's readiness for early childhood services, stating that their child was too young to tell them if anything bad happened. Transportation provides additional challenges, both in availability and cost of the service.

What will be sustained? Centers for New Horizons has secured money from the city of Chicago for COFI to provide training for an additional 20 parent ambassadors. These parents will recruit eligible families four days a week. CNH also will work to maintain relationships with the housing authority and medical clinics. It also has

implemented a tracking system consisting of interest cards and a weekly recruitment log that allows staff to follow the families and maintain contact with them. Centers for New Horizons is opening an additional site at one of the city colleges in the fall and will have 63 new slots available.

Aunt Martha's Youth Services Center

> *"Someone to carry the torch. … The agency has buy-in! Providing VIP appointments for health services will hopefully eliminate the delay in early childhood services experienced when families don't have health records."*

Aunt Martha's is a multiagency organization including education, health, employment, and social services. The agency used hard-to-reach funds to support a part-time staff member to recruit and reach families. It hired a father from the ECE program to oversee the outreach staff and volunteers and to focus his efforts on door-to-door recruitment and home visits in the neighborhoods. Staff from Aunt Martha's organized three parent involvement activities, including a highly successful "come and tour our program" campaign. Neighborhood parents were invited to visit the site where their child likely would receive services. After the tour, parents were asked for input about the services provided and the program environment.

The greatest changes appear to have been increased coordination among divisions within the agency. The ECE program staff were able to establish strong intra-agency collaborations. Through its Women Health Center and Community Health Center, Aunt Martha's was able to provide health and dental services for about 60 children and their families in a short amount of time, expediting their enrollment into the ECE program.

ECE staff also recruited families with preschool-aged children receiving services from its Workforce Division.

Aunt Martha's printed 5,000 informational fliers to be disseminated in its service areas. It collaborated closely with local school administrators to send home these fliers with elementary-aged children who may have younger siblings. A strength of Aunt Martha's was the agency's comprehensive tracking system. Staff working on the hard-to-reach project added a database field to enable more consistent follow-up of children who were recruited using hard-to-reach funds. The agency was able to follow the services received by both child and family.

What will be sustained? The staff member who worked four days a week to oversee recruitment efforts during the grant plans to continue that recruit two days a week. Aunt Martha's staff will continue to disseminate the informational fliers and collaborate internally with its health and dental clinics.

APPENDIX B
Early childhood services offered by the six programs

Program	Community Type	Services Offered
Elgin U-46 *Elgin*	Large suburban	Pre-K
Casa Central *Chicago*	Urban	Head Start Pre-K Child care Home visiting
Aunt Martha's *Olympia Fields*	Large suburban	Head Start HIPPY (home visiting)
Harrisburg-Eldorado Early Learning Center *Harrisburg*	Rural	Child care Group family child care
Gads Hill *Chicago*	Urban	Head Start Pre-K Child care Family child care home Home visiting
Centers for New Horizons *Chicago*	Urban	Head Start Pre-K Child care Home visiting

APPENDIX C
Example of work plan for door-to-door recruitment of families

Resources	Measurable Progress	Intended Outcomes	Long-Term Impact
Who: Parent ambassadors **What:** Fliers, parent surveys, parent information cards **Where:** Neighborhoods **When:** Twice a week **Support:** COFI training, money for incentives	1. The number of contacts made 2. Number of family/child cards completed 3. Number of program flyers left	1. Increased awareness and interest in ECE 2. Build positive relationship with the families 3. Support parents' advocacy 4. Increase school enrollment and family's engagement	1. Change community culture around early childhood education so that going to school at a younger age becomes an expectation for parents and families 2. Empower new groups of parents to sustain and develop new relationships within the community

APPENDIX D
Topics of monthly teleconference calls

Pilot projects were invited to participate in monthly teleconference calls to share ideas and

resources with each other. Call topics were determined through discussions on previous calls and

by reviewing the evaluation interviews. Topics included:

- Completing monthly reports for the Governor's Office
- Use of parent ambassadors
- Recruitment strategies
- Technology
- Tracking systems
- Early childhood transitions
- Sustaining enrollment
- Parent and family involvement
- Clarifying CCAP policies
- Using the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) website for program planning