The First Door is the Right Door: The ‘Braiding’ of Services for New Hampshire Children and Families

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The Importance of Early Childhood (0 – 8 years of age)
- Children are our most vulnerable population.
- They are the most susceptible to experiences of poverty, family, environment, education, prejudice, and discrimination. Early Childhood is when children are most susceptible to long term social, psychological, physical, and cognitive outcomes and so it encompasses the time period leading up to pregnancy to a child’s 8th birthday.
- Early Childhood often addresses the importance of families’ experiences of physical and social determinants of health.
- Determinants of health affect social, emotional, and physical outcomes from conception and into childhood and adulthood. Early Childhood ends at age 8 as 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency has been linked with high school graduation outcomes (Hernandez, 2011).
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are common experiences that present a significant risk to long-term outcomes for social, emotional, medical, and physical development of children into adulthood (CDC-Kaiser Permanente ACE Study, 1997; SAMSHA, 2018).

Reasons for Forming an Early Childhood Integration Team

- New Hampshire’s Early Childhood services are a complex system.
- There is a lack of standardization in (1.) naming, (2.) services and coverage, (3.) quality, (4.) authorization, and (5.) connection to other like-for-like services that means there is service linkage struggle across the immediate catchment area.
- Different funding streams for programs creates different points of entry for services, differing criteria for service eligibility, and differing expectation of services which creates gaps and delays for children.
- Beneficial and timely links to other services may be affected by entry point, funding stream, location, or awareness.
- Preventing service gaps and delays is especially relevant as up to 30% of New Hampshire children are born within the state’s defined at-risk category.
- Core services are routine, where services overlap is known and prepared for to prevent delay.
- DHHS has 2700 employees in 6 Divisions. The size and breadth of the Department service provision means that individual member’s may not have full comprehension of how all services interact with children and families throughout the period of Early Childhood.
- Teenage allows a multi-person focus on problems to ascertain what are problems, find and discuss solutions, create plans of implementation of solutions, and to feedback on outcomes.
- Establishing a Governance Structure through a Charter creates permanence in the integration structure respect of responsibility for service provision.

Why an Early Childhood Integration Team?
- New Hampshire’s Early Childhood services are a complex system that includes various programs spread across state departments, various non-profit agencies, and private sector providers.
- New Hampshire practices local government autonomy over many service developments which affects standardization.
- However, the lack of standardization in (1.) naming, (2.) services and coverage, (3.) quality, (4.) authorization, and (5.) connection to other like-for-like services that means there is service linkage struggle across the immediate catchment area.
- Different funding streams for programs creates different points of entry for services, differing criteria for service eligibility, and differing expectation of services which creates gaps and delays for children.
- Beneficial and timely links to other services may be affected by entry point, funding stream, location, or awareness.
- Preventing service gaps and delays is especially relevant as up to 30% of New Hampshire children are born within the state’s defined at-risk category.
- Integration occurs when standardization of quality occurs, where services overlap is known and prepared for to prevent delay.
- DHHS is using knowledge of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and determinants of health to inform Early Childhood service provision, which are child and family oriented.
- Teenage allows a multi-person focus on problems to ascertain what are problems, find and discuss solutions, create plans of implementation of solutions, and to feedback on outcomes.
- Establishing a Governance Structure through a Charter creates permanence in the integration structure respect of responsibility for service provision.

Narrative Activity: Who are you? What do you do?
- DHHS has 2700 employees in 6 Divisions. The size and breadth of the Department service provision means that individual member’s may not have full comprehension of how all services interact with children and families throughout the period of Early Childhood.
- Ten 1-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholder in the ECIT creation including their job position, role responsibilities, issues and concerns that have arisen, how they see their work fitting within the early childhood, who they have worked with within early childhood, and who do they propose being involved in the ECIT.

Visual Activity: Ecopolis
- Stage 1: How various individuals connect with others through early childhood, what programs and services and their own branch covers that involves early childhood.
- Stage 2: Understanding positions, programs, bureaus, and divisions that Stage 1.
- Ecopolis demonstrated that individuals can recall working relationships with individual people better than the positions or programs available in other divisions and bureaus. Ecopolis revealed that historical integration of services was often reliant upon established relationships between individuals in various divisions and services. This leaves a service gap when individuals leave the service and so the ECIT objective is to orient integration of service based on.

Conceptualization, Feedback, & Engagement Activities: Boundary Setting and Teaming Structures
- What are the limits to ECIT?
- What are the challenges and barriers?
- Are the stakeholders engaged with the ECIT?
- Governance Structure – How will we make it measurable?
- Do participants feel that they ‘own’ the project?

Feedback Activity: Chart
- Drawing the charter involves establishing the context of why ECIT has been formed, the purpose, strategies, responsibilities, and phased development.

Future Activity: ECIT Governance
- Using the charter to establish cross-departmental governance between the Departments of Education and Health & Human Services to sustain integration of Early Childhood programs and services through governmental change.