

Six-Month Performance Report on Our Infancy Leadership Circles

OUR STORY

The New York State Infancy Leadership Circles is a project of the New York Zero-to-Three Network based on mounting evidence that experiences in the infant and toddler years are vitally important for so many aspects of healthy development and a productive life. The Project is the result of collaboration between three dedicated professionals – Evelyn Efinger, Jackie Jones, and Carole Oshinsky. First conceived in 2007, the past six months have seen the implementation of four new Infancy Leadership Circles across New York State.

OUR MISSION

The New York State Infancy Leadership Circles aim to be the communication pipeline for the infancy movement in New York State. The pipeline will move local issues to the state level and take state issues and initiatives directly to communities to advance comprehensive services for babies and their families.

OUR STRATEGY

The Circles nurture communities to develop comprehensive infant and toddler services and participate in statewide education. We accomplish this by:

- Establishing local community groups of professionals who serve babies and their families
- Facilitating the exploration of local issues, goals, strengths and priorities
- Developing local leadership to continue the leadership circles without the need for ongoing facilitation
- Encouraging the participation of local groups in statewide educational activities

OUR PROGRESS

In the past six months, four Infancy Leadership Circles have been initiated. Additionally, four existing groups have continued to grow and interact with other Infancy Leadership Circles across the state. On April 28, 2011, a statewide meeting was held at the annual Infant-Toddler Forum at the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC) Conference. The forum was attended by 110 participants representing all regions of the state.

This report will review the accomplishments overall of the Infancy Leadership Circle Project, development of linkages to other groups at the local, regional and state levels, and individual summaries (see pages 4-5) of the new leadership circles.

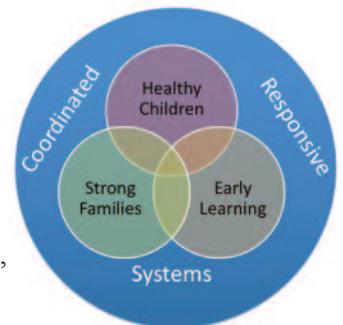
The recent activities were possible thanks to funding from the New York State Council on Children and Families. The funding supplements the dedication and volunteer effort that sustain the project. It is our goal to see continued growth in each Infancy Leadership Circle, the number of communities with leadership circles, and the collective strength of the project.

Accomplishments Around New York State

The four communities that started Infancy Leadership Circles in the past six months are diverse—upstate, downstate, urban, suburban, and rural; however, each community was able to accomplish six steps in establishing an Infancy Leadership Circle.

Each Circle:

1. Brought professionals from across many systems that serve infants, toddlers, and their families together to discuss common issues and solutions
2. Identified strengths and issues regarding their specific community
3. Participated in an active discussion across the areas of healthy children, strong families, and early learning
4. Set goals specific to their Circle based on consensus from the discussions
5. Developed a plan of action for achieving their goals
6. Nurtured natural existing leadership within the participating Circle to lead the Circle in the future



New Circles in 2011	Number of Meetings 12/2010-7/2011	Active Mailing List	Average Meeting Attendance
DOCS group*	1	35	28
Erie County	5	49	16
Niagara County	4	44	15
Westchester Cty	7	30	15

* Delaware, Otsego, Chenango and Schoharie counties

Developing Linkages Between and Across Circles

Central to the original vision of the Infancy Leadership Circle Project is the concept of cross fertilization and learning across communities in the state. This has been realized as local Circles link to other Circles, initiatives, and state resources that complement their local agendas.

Additionally, four existing local groups, the East Harlem Birth-Five Network, New York City Zero-to-Three Policy Committee, the Albany Infancy Mental Health Association, and the Westchester Integrated Services Planning (ISP) 0-6 Group have been encouraged to share their expertise and knowledge with the new groups as well as join together to learn about regional and state-level resources.

Some examples of linkages that have been formed in the last six months are:

Local Level:

- Westchester Integrated Services Planning (ISP) 0-6 leader presented at a New York City Infancy Leadership Circle meeting (formerly the New York Zero-to-Three Policy Committee), to share their experience with improving mental health supports for young children.
- East Harlem Birth-Five Group compiled a list of mental health services available in their neighborhood for young children to be shared among all providers. This idea was then shared with other Infancy Leadership Circles who are replicating the concept to meet their own community needs.

Regional Level:

- In Niagara and Erie counties links have been made to numerous regional activities and discussions for further collaboration are in the works between groups like: Healthy Moms Healthy Babies, the Early Childhood Obesity Task Force, and Help Me Grow.

State Level:

- The Infancy Leadership Circles facilitators have made a conscious effort to communicate the initiatives of the state Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). The Council's goal is to strengthen statewide coordination and collaboration across a wide range of early childhood programs and services. The six ECAC subgroups—Data Development, Quality Improvement, Promoting Healthy Development, Early Learning Workforce Development, Strong Families, and Finance—cover many of the issues talked about at the local level. For example:

--QualitystarsNY has been discussed with each Circle extensively. The benefits, the impact on families, progress of the pilot project, the final report and the statewide video conference have all been highlighted. Local Circles have been eager to learn about the details and spread the information to others in their community.

--Two circles specifically were interested to learn about the New York State New Parent Kit. Niagara and Westchester Infancy Leadership Circles have agreed to participate as focus groups for feedback on the New Parent Kit.

- Infant-Toddler Specialists of the statewide Infant-Toddler Network participated in each local circle.

Their participation was critical to creating a cross-sector environment and bringing a statewide framework to each Infancy Leadership Circle.

- The Circles were informed of the work of Winning Beginning New York—the statewide early care and education coalition—across the early childhood age range and referred to Winning Beginning as a resource for statewide issues.



Financing the Infancy Leadership Circle Project

Although the concept of Infancy Leadership Circles was born in 2007, bringing them to reality was more difficult due to a lack of funding. The true cost of the project is difficult to calculate because so much time and effort have been donated by the co-directors, the executive committee of NYZTT Network, and the communities themselves. Because of this we have been able to minimize the cost of the project on many fronts. There are three key components that are critical to allowing the circles to run efficiently:

1. New York State Council on Children and Families funding
2. New York Zero-to-Three sponsorship of the project, both fiscally and administratively
3. The enthusiasm and support of the four communities involved

New York State Council on Children and Families

The Council on Children and Families has for a long time recognized the need for local leadership and improved communication between different areas of the state to reach the goal of coordinated responsive systems. By a small investment in the Infancy Leadership Circles project, they were able to affect communication between state and localities. In a very tight financial environment, they have leveraged their funds with the donated time and services of others to have a greater impact.

New York Zero-to-Three Network

As a sponsor of this project, NYZTT Network took on the responsibility of financial management, publications, and



oversight of the project. This was done because the Network felt that the mission of the Leadership Circles was closely aligned with their mission. The Network has provided many volunteered hours work in addition to other resources; mailing lists, website, and email marketing/event planning services.

Community Support

The four participating communities made it possible to establish the Infancy Leadership Circles despite the current financial climate. Little things like getting conference rooms without charge, using a Google application for free online chats, traveling distances to participate without reimbursement, even use of the photocopier at different locations and institutions—these collectively made the difference so that the groups could grow.

Conclusion

The Infancy Leadership Circles act as a catalyst to create partnerships across the areas of Strong Families, Healthy Children and Positive Early Learning Experiences. The outcome desired by all Circles is to assist New York State babies to reach their fullest potential. We believe that comprehensive support for families with young children provides the path to a positive future, not only for the children and families but also for our state and nation. By providing a strong, quality infrastructure, our babies will thrive and we will contribute to a productive society.

Each Infancy Leadership Circle brings an individualized approach to problem-solving issues in their local community. At the same time, recurring concerns have emerged across the state. Discussions within each Circle reveal that professionals who work with infants and toddlers have overlapping issues:

- Lack of public awareness of the importance of the early years and specific issues such as breast feeding
- Need for parenting education and knowledge of resources



- Limited focus on strengthening the parent-child relationship
- Significant gaps in the continuum of services to families with infants and toddlers (within and across counties)
- Weaknesses in recruitment, retention, and promotion within the professions
- Missed opportunities for inclusion of professionals in related fields and parents
- Administrative challenges for programs and services such as travel distances between clients, decline in reimbursement rates for service, cuts in funding, and difficulty in merging resources

Alignment of our efforts across systems is critical to continued progress being made for our infants, toddlers, and their families on these issues. This is the infancy movement that has been building in New York State over the last two decades, creating advocates of professionals to change the way services are being conceived and supplied. These conversations and the ideas that are brought forth will frame our work for the future and strengthen the “voices for babies.”



Summaries of New Infancy Leadership Circles



DOCS Infancy Leadership Circle

Overview

Infant-Toddler Coordinators for the Capitol District suggested that infant-toddler professionals in four counties above Albany that are largely rural would appreciate a chance to come together. Within one month, with the help of Catholic Charities in Oneonta, a mailing list was assembled and 27 people came to the first meeting.

Community Strengths

Circle participants praised the quality of program staff, the strong interest from universities with Early Childhood Programs, the many existing programs and agencies, and increasing cross-system referrals and collaboration, especially with the rise in Autism diagnoses. They admired the families struggling to be independent and do the best for their children.

Community Issues

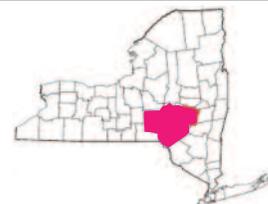
Transportation over long distances between program visits, funding cuts for programs and training, lack of service continuity and cooperation between counties, and shortages of providers and space are some of the key issues facing this group. Participants would like to give more support to parents as their children's first teachers, promote breast feeding, and increase public awareness and knowledge of the importance of the first three years.

DOCS Action Plan

--One meeting held in June 2011

Focus on issues still general but some overall goals may include updating existing resource directories and bringing them together across counties; overcoming isolation of providers and families, and access to online services.

--Fall meeting set for September 19, 2011



“DOCS” represents Delaware, Otsego, Chenango, and Schoharie counties. They sit in the heartland of New York State at the northern fringes of the Catskill Mountains and are made up of small towns (e.g., Cooperstown, home of the National Baseball Hall of Fame) and rural areas.

General Statistics:

Population: 193,485 (all 4 counties)
 Births per year: 1,860 (all 4 counties)[^]
 Median Household Income: \$43,663 (↓)

Early Childhood Statistics:

Infant Mortality Rate: 5.2/1,000 live births (↓)
 Infants in WIC Breastfed @6 mo: 21% (↓)
 Elevated Lead in Young Children: 1.45% (↑)

[^]Births per year is a 3-year average

*Arrows indicate lower or higher than New York State indicator.

Erie County Infancy Leadership Circle

Overview

The Infancy Leadership Circle/Erie was established with input from two local leaders and the Executive Director of the Child Care Resource Network in Buffalo. This Circle discussed the incredible importance of the 0-3 years and the need to move from being a voice to a “battle cry” for babies through the use of community education strategies.

Community Strengths

The Infancy Leadership Circle/Erie identified a comprehensive list of programs and resources supporting infants/toddlers and their families from pregnancy onward. Participants stated that the Office of Children and Family Services, Health Department regulations, and Federal regulations offer positive guidance and standards for their work as they strive to provide quality services.

Community Issues

Erie County concerns include childhood obesity, including breast feeding issues, as well as limited social-emotional support for the youngest children. Providers need support to more effectively know about reliable resources, and to know when to link and to be more proactive instead of reactive to current situations. A gap between what many programs say about the importance of parent involvement and their actual actions was noted.

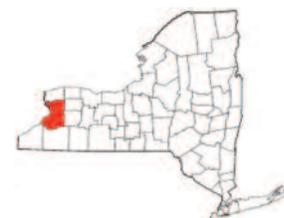
Erie County Action Plan

Goal: Create ILC/Erie web site

--Activities: Add documents, resources, membership information

Goal: Promote importance of the Early Years

--Activities: Public letter writing, opinion editorials, marketing activities



Erie is a county in Western New York made up of one large city, Buffalo, and many small towns and rural areas. Erie is not as ethnically diverse as other areas of the state. However, Buffalo does have concentrated areas of immigrant neighborhoods that are not represented in overall county statistics.

General Statistics:

Population: 919,040
 Births per year: 9,889[^]
 Mean Household Income: \$46,739 (↓)*

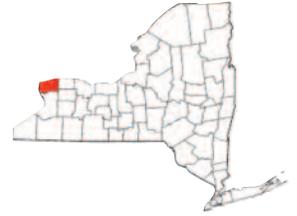
Early Childhood Statistics:

Infant Mortality Rate: 8.1/1,000 live births (↑)
 Infants in WIC Breastfed @6 mo: 12% (↓)
 Elevated Lead in Children <6yo: 2.3% (↑)

[^] Births per year is a 3-year average

*Arrows indicate lower or higher than New York State indicator

Niagara County Infancy Leadership Circle



Overview

The Infancy Leadership Circle/Niagara was established through the commitment of two local leaders from the Health Association of Niagara County, Inc. in Niagara Falls. This developing Circle, recognizing that “it takes a village to raise a child,” wants to support young families by assisting them in developing a greater knowledge of existing community services.

Community Strengths

Niagara County strengths include the ability to provide a variety of community services to benefit young families. There is also a keen interest in reviewing and creatively looking for new strategies to continue to address the quality of child care, health, social-emotional, nutritional, and prenatal/perinatal services by further pursuing supportive and best practices for families.

Community Issues

Circle participants considered poverty, limited knowledge about available community services and resources, lack of jobs, and job training as key issues in Niagara County.

Niagara County Action Plan

Goal: Contribute input into the Parent Guide to be included in the new New York State New Parent Kit.

--Activities: Establish a Niagara Circle focus group and review the Parent Guide to provide feedback to the current draft before publication.

Goal: Create a Resource Directory and website.

--Activities: Provide agency listings, add Circle-related documents and membership listings to create the base for a Resource Directory and web site; participants will provide additional programs listings.

Niagara is located in the northwest corner of New York State. It is bordered on three sides by water: Lake Ontario to the north, Tonawanda Creek to the south, and the Niagara River to the west. The county is home to small towns and rural communities in addition to the world-famous tourist city of Niagara Falls.

General Statistics:

Population: 216,469

Births per year: 2,240[^]

Median Household Income: \$42,580 (↓)*

Early Childhood Statistics:

Infant Mortality Rate: 6.3/1,000 live births (↑)

Infants in WIC Breastfed @6 mo: 14% (↓)

Elevated Lead in Young Children: 1.1% (↑)

[^]Births per year is a 3-year average

*Arrows indicate lower or higher than New York State indicator

Westchester County Infancy Leadership Circle



Overview

The Infancy Leadership Circle/Westchester was established in 2010 as a subset of a preexisting birth to 6 group (ISP 0-6) that has been meeting for several years under the guidance of the Coordinator for the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health and the Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Westchester. Numerous interagency collaborations have been developed as a result of the ISP 0-6 group, including a successful Project LAUNCH grant application.

Community Strengths

A major organization, Westchester Children’s Association, has data and resources and an increasing focus on young children. Many diverse projects and groups focus on infants and toddlers and already work in collaboration across systems and programs. Strong workforce development opportunities and innovative programs include Early Step Forward and Baby Step Forward in multiple locations. Among the groups working together to improve services and program quality are the Home Visiting Workgroup and Lower Hudson Valley Perinatal Network.

Community Issues

Not enough infants and toddlers are getting the services they need, program funding is being cut, and there are insufficient parent education programs while parental stressors are rising in Westchester. Circle participants talked about switching perspective to prevention and viewing children and their parents together for services. They want to raise knowledge of the importance of the first three years, especially in mental health services, and promote the health home as a hub of services for families.

Westchester County Action Plan

Goal: Build on work of ISP 0-6 group and other initiatives for bigger impact

--Activities in progress: Voter registration, parent education and referral, resource directory

Goal: Prepare Legislative Scorecard on Early Childhood Issues

--Activities: Gather examples from other states, check with Winning Beginning New York Coalition, develop questionnaire with ISP 0-6 group

Westchester County has large cities, towns, and villages within its borders—including some rural areas. It is often characterized as a county of great wealth, but it contains pockets of deep poverty. Major cities include Yonkers and White Plains. Many immigrant groups, from a wide variety of countries and cultures, live here .

General Statistics:

Population: 949,113

Births per year: 11,763[^]

Median Household Income: \$77,057 (↑)*

Early Childhood Statistics:

Infant Mortality Rate: 4.8/1,000 live births (↓)

Infants in WIC Breastfed @6 mo: 56%(↑)

Elevated Lead in Young Children: 0.6% (↓)

[^]Births per year is a 3-year average

*Arrows indicate lower or higher than New York State indicator

DATA SOURCES FOR COUNTIES

- Population and household income data are from US Census Bureau's Quickfacts per county (added or averaged for DOCS counties, otherwise single census 2010 year: Go to: quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36029.html)
- For DOCS counties, Birth & Early Childhood data are averaged. County level data were obtained from New York State Department of Health general statistics. Go to: www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/chac/birth/births.htm; www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/chac/general/breastfeeding.htm; www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/chac/general/lead_incidence.htm; www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/chac/birth/infmort.htm
- For Erie, Niagara, and Westchester Counties, Birth and Early Childhood data are from New York State Department of Health Community Health Data Set: Go to: www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/chip/index.htm

Our Facilitators/Co-Directors

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If you are interested in joining or starting an Infancy Leadership Circle in your community or county, or have questions regarding this report, please contact the facilitators at:
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New York Zero-to-Three Network

• fostering collaboration among those who work with babies, toddlers and their families •

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