

## **NYS Infancy Leadership Circles 2011-2014: Building on Success**

### **OUR STORY**

Over the last four years, the NYS Infancy Leadership Circles (ILC) have gathered local leaders from a wide variety of service systems to meet together, talk about shared challenges, and make plans to work on specific programs and local issues. In this way, we build community linkages and relationships across systems to promote a comprehensive system of services for early childhood.

### **OUR MISSION**

Begun in 2007, our mission is to raise awareness of the importance of the early years across and beyond disciplines that interact with young children at the community level, promoting local investment and coordination of services. The Circles act as a catalyst to create partnerships across the areas of Strong Families, Healthy Children and Positive Learning Experiences. As professionals from these systems work together, they are creatively identifying strengths, issues and solutions for their own community.

Additionally, we serve as a communication pipeline for the Infancy Movement in New York State by moving local issues to the state level and taking state issues and initiatives directly to communities to advance comprehensive services for babies and their families.

### **OUR STRATEGY**

The Infancy Leadership Circle initiative is co-directed by state leaders who have extensive experience in the 0-3 field. A diverse steering committee guides the project. The co-directors oversee the overall development of Circles, and help bring professionals from across the many systems that serve infants, toddlers, and their families together to:

1. Discuss common issues and solutions
2. Identify strengths and issues regarding their specific community
3. Participate in active discussions across the areas of healthy children, strong families, and early learning
4. Set goals specific to each Circle based on consensus from the discussions
5. Develop a plan of action for achieving goals
6. Nurture natural existing leadership within the participating Circle to lead the Circle in the future

### **OUR PROGRESS**

We have grown to over a dozen Infancy Leadership Circles covering 14 counties (See map on last page). Communities that have ILC are diverse—upstate, downstate, urban, suburban, and rural. Most Circles were initiated by the co-directors in cooperation with local infant-toddler specialists or other local leaders. Two of the Circles began as subsections of existing groups that were already meeting but lacked a focus on infants and toddlers or met irregularly. Circles typically meet in person from September to June.

**OUR  
GOALS  
FOR 2011-  
2014**

1. Develop cross-system partnerships between local leaders
2. Develop new leaders to carry on the work of each Circle
3. Implement the strategic plan developed by each Circle
4. Create a handbook and resources to help communities develop ILC
5. Connect to other systems-building initiatives
6. Link with statewide coalitions and other regional and state initiatives concerned about early childhood development and comprehensive services
7. Connect efforts to strengthen and promote services for infants and toddlers across the state and communicate the shared challenges, opportunities, and resources

## *Accomplishments Around New York State*

### **1. Developed cross-system partnerships between local leaders**

- ⇒ Co-directors facilitated shared leadership within each Infancy Leadership Circle.
  - Some Circles rotated facilitators at each meeting.
  - Others chose one facilitator for the funding period.
- ⇒ Circles have developed a stronger relationship between systems in each community and have been given the opportunity to learn how to work together to promote active cross-system collaboration.
  - Home visiting programs have increased participation in the Niagara Circle.
  - The Niagara Circle wrote a letter of support for the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center Community Health Worker Program application for Component A: Maternal and Infant Community Health Collaborative (MICHC) of the New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Maternal and Child Health.
  - An ILC Co-director was invited to become a member of the Niagara University Quality Improvement Program Advisory Committee chaired by former NYS Regents' Chancellor Robert M. Bennett to improve quality of child care centers in preparation for implementation of QUALITYstarsNY.
  - In the DOCS Counties Circle, professionals from various service systems serving Delaware, Otsego, Chenango, and Schoharie formed a planning committee for a statewide conference on infant and toddler development and have been coordinating a multi-location event to promote child-parent play.
  - In Westchester County, the overall group formed a committee representing a variety of systems to investigate better transition planning from Early Intervention to Pre-Kindergarten special education and to integrate the delivery of Early Intervention services into child care settings.
  - In Westchester, the presence of the county coordinator for Community Mental Health, the director of the Child Care Council of Westchester, and the associate director of the Westchester Children's Association have brought added resources and innovation possibilities for coordination across systems and ongoing leadership.
  - The Westchester Children's Association has convened a Home Visiting Work Group attended by many ILC participants. The Group is laying the foundation for cross-system collaboration.
  - At each ILC meeting, participants have taken turns presenting information about their organization. They often bring fliers to distribute about community events.

## 2. Developed new leaders to carry on the work of each Circle

- ⇒ In most of the Circles, the local Infant-Toddler Specialist based at the regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCRR) is an integral part of the group and often takes a leadership role to develop a permanent connection between the group and the CCRR.
- ⇒ Co-directors partnered with the New York City regional office of Reach Out and Read, a national group that works with medical offices to distribute free books to young children during doctor visits. Through this partnership, the co-directors are working to expand participation in and develop new Circles in the greater New York City area.
- ⇒ The Co-directors made connections to groups that could potentially form new ILCs and had conversations and held in-person meetings to describe the nature of our work and vision.
- ⇒ Many of the potential areas cultivated have led to formation of Infancy Leadership Circles. As part of this effort, Co-directors distribute ILC achievement reports, brochures, and *How-to-Guide* to encourage the development of new Circles.

## 3. Implemented strategic plans for each Circle

### DOCS ILC (Delaware, Otsego, Chenango, Schoharie counties)

- Created *Recipes for Play* booklet aimed at parents and family child care workers containing developmental milestones and relationship-building activities.
- Inspired the SUNY Cobleskill Early Child Department to plan a statewide conference on infant and toddler development.
- Became the planning committee and host for an infant-toddler conference at SUNY Cobleskill that attracted 190 participants

### EAST HARLEM 0-5 NETWORK

- This is an affiliated group that began meeting quarterly to share information about programs in the East Harlem section of Manhattan, a community in New York City with a high poverty rate and diverse population.
- The group has shifted to bimonthly meetings and undertaken active projects such as surveying the community for mental health providers for young children.
- Because the survey showed that more providers are needed in the community, the group has worked with local schools of social work to place more bilingual interns to provide psychotherapy in East Harlem.
- The need for an Infancy Leadership Circle serving Central and North Harlem was identified in fall 2014 and the first meeting was held in December 2014 .

### ERIE COUNTY CIRCLE

- Completed a community services assessment and chose family engagement, including cultural sensitivity, as a topic to explore with guest speakers.
- Identified core messages for key audiences—families, child care providers, agencies working with families.
- Created 12 core messages around the theme of “parents as their child’s first teacher.”
- A public service announcement (PSA) was developed and distributed to community marketing specialists: *Parents, educators and the community working together to support the needs of babies create a pathway for their success in school and in life.*

## NIAGARA COUNTY CIRCLE

- Following a community services assessment, the Circle designed a county resource directory for new and expectant parents by expanding the 211 telephone referral system information headings and creating a matrix of organizations and the services they provide.
- Participants volunteered for various monthly assignments to add to the information base and shared the responsibility of developing an introduction, acknowledgement segment, and table of contents.
- Two Niagara University graduate students participated by inputting data, and editing and revising the directory as it was being developed.

## WESTCHESTER COUNTY CIRCLE

- This group is part of a long-established Integrated Systems Planning (ISP) 0-5 Networking Meeting.
- Participants originally established a Circle as a subgroup that met before the larger group discussion.
- In fall 2011, the ILC focus on infant and toddler issues was integrated as a permanent part of the ISP's agenda
- Through its relationship to the larger ISP, the ILC is contributing to a number of system improvement initiatives, including:
  - Testing a trauma screening tool in local early childhood programs
  - Project LAUNCH work to include mental health services into various child and family serving systems
  - Integrating mental health consultation in early care and learning programs;
  - Improving transition procedures from Early Intervention to Preschool Special Education programs
  - Ensuring the adequate delivery of special education services in full-day child care needs
  - Connecting young families in the county's homeless shelter with Head Start and Early Head Start services in a more timely fashion

## 4. Created a handbook and resources for communities to aid in establishing new Circles

- ⇒ In April 2012, Co-directors drafted the booklet, *Starting an Infancy Leadership Circle in Your Community: A How-to Guide*. This booklet was distributed to groups who have been identified as potential Circles.
- ⇒ Co-directors revised the ILC brochure to reflect current programs and accomplishments.
- ⇒ Through New York Zero-to-Three Network, Co-directors established a Linked-In discussion group on Infant and Toddler Issues.
- ⇒ Co-directors maintain a web page about the ILC on the New York Zero-to-Three Network that contains resources for ILC participants and potential participants, including powerpoint presentations made at Infant-Toddler Forums at the annual NYS AEYC Conference, PDF printable versions of the ILC brochure, and reports prepared by the Co-directors, and various issue documents compiled from ILC meetings.
- ⇒ With NYZTT, Co-directors publish a monthly enewsletter highlighting work of the Infancy Leadership Circles and related activities.

## 5. Connected to other systems-building initiatives

- ⇒ At each ILC meeting the Co-director provided information about key systems development, quality improvement projects, and statewide networking events in New York State, including:
  - ◇ Updates on the work of the Early Childhood Advisory Council
  - ◇ The WinningBeginningNY legislative agenda and information about Advocacy Day in Albany
  - ◇ The revision of child care regulations at Office of Children & Family Services
  - ◇ Changes within Early Intervention Program and public comment periods
  - ◇ Updates on the implementation of QUALITYstarsNY
  - ◇ Submission of support letters for the state's application to the Early Learning Challenge Grant
  - ◇ Planning for the Infant-Toddler Forum at the NYS AEYC Conference
  - ◇ The development of the Core Body of Knowledge and the Early Learning Guidelines documents
- ⇒ Circle participants had opportunities to connect with state and federally funded projects to improve outcomes for young children operating in their localities:
  - ◇ Co-director made connections to Project LAUNCH grantees in three communities with ILCs: Westchester, Hunts Point (in formation), East Harlem.
  - ◇ In Community Cafés sponsored by Project LAUNCH in Hunts Point and East Harlem, Co-director met residents as well as service providers and heard firsthand about the needs of the communities.

## 6. Linked with statewide coalitions and other regional and state initiatives concerned about early childhood development and comprehensive services

- ⇒ Created linkages to broader statewide groups through co-director participation:
  - Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC)
  - NYS Home Visiting Coalition
  - NYS Infant and Toddler Resource Network
  - NYS Parenting Education Partnership
  - Stronger Families NYS Coalition
  - United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Federation Taskforce on People with Disabilities
  - WinningBeginningNY
- ⇒ Built relationships with regional organizations that focus on young children:
  - Discussions with New York State Greater Capital Region Infant Mental Health Association (IMHA) resulted in renewed activism by the Association in training and awareness of infant mental health needs. Invited to participate in IMHA annual luncheon and workshops.
  - Presented work of the ILC to several Reach Out and Read regional meetings in downstate New York. Resulted in discussions to start new ILC groups, including in Suffolk County, and Brooklyn and Bronx boroughs of NYC. Existing groups saw increased attendance by health-related professionals.
  - Reached out to Putnam-Dutchess Early Childhood Coalition, which provides training seminars each year. Invited to discuss expanding to ILC in the future.

## 7. Connected efforts to strengthen and promote services for infants and toddlers across the state and communicate challenges, opportunities, and resources

- ⇒ Established a monthly electronic newsletter, which is distributed through the New York Zero-to-Three Network using Constant Contact
  - ◇ Newsletter has open and click-through rates above the nonprofit average.
  - ◇ Members of NYZTT see the newsletter as an important resource.
- ⇒ Established statewide calendar of events, webinars, and meetings of interest to Circle members and others in the field that is featured in the newsletter
  - ◇ The calendar is one of the most accessed resources in the newsletter
- ⇒ Helped plan, sponsor and facilitate NYSAEYC annual Infant-Toddler
  - ◇ Topics were Continuity of Care in April 2012; Family Engagement in April 2013; Partnerships for Promoting Healthy Development in April 2014.

## 8. Secured continued funding

- ⇒ The ILC project was successful in securing funding in 2011-2015 from the Council on Children and Families with additional administrative and financial support from New York Zero-to-Three Network and in-kind support from the agencies of many ILC participants.

## Conclusion

The Co-directors would like to thank the New York Zero-to-Three Network, the Executive Committee of NYZTT, the NYS Council on Children and Families, and especially the communities themselves for their enthusiasm and continued support of this project.

As we continue to stress in our progress reports: Alignment of our efforts across systems is critical to continued progress being made for our infants, toddlers, and their families. 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 ILC conversations and the ideas that are brought forth will frame our work for the future and strengthen the “voices for babies.”

