

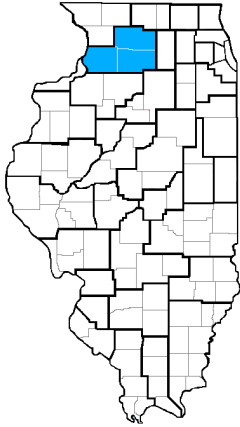
ACTION PLAN



Region 47

Lee, Ogle & Whiteside Counties

Regional Council Manager: Abby Hoskins (she/her)
Email: ahoskins@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 393-2541
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region47



Family Council

Amanda Troye
Ashley Dagg
Brittany Howard
Candace Antczak
Charis Allen

Elizabeth Reynolds
Kelley Connell
Maggie LaFever
Marie Monaco

Action Council

Alison Vrana
Andrea Cossey
Anji Garza
Beth Smaka
Daniel Swihart
Diana Merdian

Diane Lynn Ott
Jessica Higgins
Kris Noble
Krista Peterson
Laura Moreno
Linda LeBlanc-Parks

Lois Meisenheimer
Maggie Fern
Monica Wolfley
Nicole Bleuer
Rachael DeSpain
Stacie McCullough

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Letter from Family & Action Council Members

The communities throughout our Region helped lead discussions by providing information through focus groups, interviews, community meetings, and surveys, and we are grateful for their help in developing our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment and Addendum, both produced in 2023. Their voices and passion for improving the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system to make it more equitable for all children, caregivers, and families are the driving force behind our work and are evident in this Region 47 Action Plan.

Council members and others in the community had a chance to share their experiences with ECEC programs and services and add their input to the next steps, detailed in this Action Plan, to move the needle on several recommendations identified in our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment. We especially want to thank the following community members for their support in developing our Regional Action Plan:

- 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care (CCR&R), with a special acknowledgment to Tracy Carls, Child Care Financial Assistance Program, and Kim Lamz, CCR&R Director
- Holly Anderson, Tri-County Opportunities Council Head Start
- Mimi Hicks, CGH Helping Hands Daycare
- Sauk Valley STARS Early Childhood Coalition
- Teri Hendrickson, Child and Family Connections #1
- The Regional Office of Education Professional Learning Community, with a special acknowledgment to Aimee Howard, Coordinated Intake Specialist, and Grace Heimerdinger-Baake, Family Education & Engagement Specialist
- The Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce Child Care Task Force

It is our hope that the Action Plan will act as a unifying force, bringing together agencies, resources, and the community to collectively enhance awareness of ECEC services. We aspire to create a more interconnected support system that not only increases the awareness of services, but also encourages and facilitates more inclusive access for all families.

We are excited to present our Regional Action Plan to our community partners and families and look forward to working with everyone to implement the recommendations included in the plan.

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 47 Family & Action Council Members

Action Plan Development

Between fall 2022 and spring 2023, the Action Council, Family Council, and Regional Birth to Five Illinois Team reviewed quantitative and qualitative data related to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, programs, and supports and worked together to create an [Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment](#) to highlight the experiences of families and caregivers in the Region. The report includes recommendations to improve ECEC opportunities at both the local and state level to make the system more equitable for all children. Councils developed an Action Plan based on several prioritized recommendations that will be used to help communities across the State raise awareness of ECEC services, expand the reach of services and resources to families, and advocate for better access to programs.

This Action Plan is aimed primarily at caregivers, community stakeholders, policymakers, elected officials, state agencies, and potential funders. It is our hope that caregivers find opportunities to talk about their experiences and become advocates for ECEC to help drive long-term, sustainable change in their communities. We also hope that community stakeholders build off the results of the Action Plan and help lead the efforts as we reimagine the ECEC system at the local level. We hope these plans provide an easy entry point for policymakers, elected officials, state agencies that administer ECEC programs, and funders to support community-led efforts, lending their expertise and support to bringing the plans to fruition.

How this Document is Designed

Each recommendation has an Action Plan that is rooted in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI),¹ a method that involves setting SMART goals, gathering feedback, evaluating progress on a regular basis, and making data-driven decisions. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.² Council members developed SMART goals for each recommendation they chose and identified key partners who could help implement each goal. They determined how long it might take and the steps needed to achieve the goal.

Councils were asked to think about the potential risks, barriers, and solutions for each recommendation. They also considered who else needed to be engaged in the work to be successful and what funding may be needed to fully implement the Action Plan. In this document, only state agencies, elected officials, and state agency representatives in public service roles are listed by name. This list only identifies those individuals who may be instrumental in pushing the Action Plan; it does not imply their commitment or obligation to do so. Local and regional organizations and individuals were considered but are not listed, which allows Regional Teams and Councils to engage with community members in a collaborative manner.

¹ See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559239/> for more information.

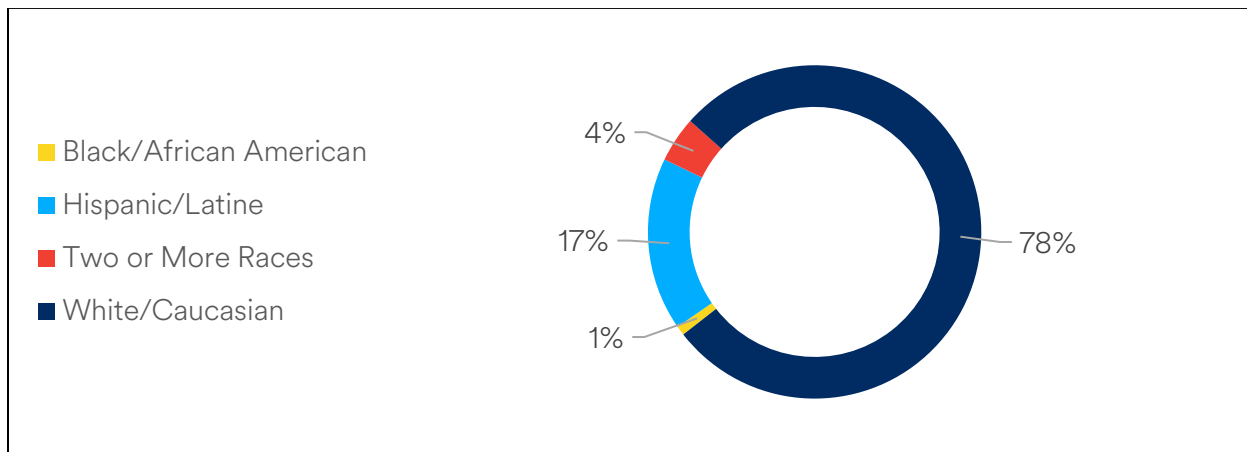
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

Action Plans will be reviewed in the summer with the community to discuss progress toward the SMART goals, potentially identify new goals and steps to meeting them, and talk about next steps for implementing the recommendations.

Region 47

Region 47 is located in northwestern Illinois and includes the counties of Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 132,307; 8,675 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, the Region has a significant number of children who are identified as Hispanic/Latine, Two or More Races, and Black/African American (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of Children Aged Four and Under by Race/Ethnicity³



Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Across the Region, there are 3,681 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 47 does not have enough spots available for families who might want to enroll their young child in an ECEC program.

³ Other races/ethnicities have too small of numbers to be represented in the chart: American Indian and Alaska Native, 1 person; Other, 5 people.

Table 1: Number and Capacity of Early Childhood Education and Care Programs

Program Type/Name	Ages Served	Number in Region	Capacity/ Funded Enrollment
Early Head Start	Ages Birth to Three	5	59
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	6	241
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	11	764
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	20	1,488
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	91	887
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	4	242

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 47's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region47/#report.

Recommendation 1



Continue existing efforts to provide Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) marketing materials to the places parents and caregivers indicated during Family Council meetings and caregiver focus groups, which includes medical offices, grocery stores, older siblings' schools, and online.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from caregivers, parents, and providers, who expressed a need for a modern, simplified Regional Resource Guide that is current and can be accessed online. Additionally, parents/caregivers discussed the need to have in-person events where they can connect directly with ECEC providers and strengthen their relationships with providers and other caregivers.

SMART Goals

SMART Goals	What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?	How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?
<p>Create an inclusive and comprehensive Early Childhood resource “hub” for parents and caregivers that is recognizable and provides a wide range of ECEC services, resources, and events by March 31, 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a name for the “hub” that families in Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside Counties resonate with and recognize. • Create a community resource folder and calendar to serve as a base for resources and community events. • Identify a process for collecting materials, how they can be submitted, and how often they will be reviewed. • Utilize Birth to Five Illinois and Sauk Valley STARS meetings and emails for agency submission reminders. • Create a social media page that will serve as the “hub.” • Identify moderators and systems for posts. • Develop and distribute marketing materials to make the community aware of the “hub.” • Identify community providers who could promote the resource “hub” and educate them on the resource and how they can be involved. • Reassess the process and build capacity for strategies to be delegated to more stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a name has been chosen and agreed upon with parent/caregiver feedback. • When a folder and calendar have been created and utilized. • Once a social media page is created and live for the community. • Once marketing materials are created and distributed to community agencies in all three counties. • When a list of providers is identified and contacted via email. • When new leaders are established to continue the work.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Agency staff may view this as additional work and may not have time to dedicate to supporting it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the process is streamlined and simplified for agencies to provide resources. • Create a system for collecting information regularly.
<p>How to ensure resources are current.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold quarterly resource check-ins with agencies to ensure information is still relevant and up-to-date.

How to ensure this is a sustainable process and that organizations will complete the steps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Along with quarterly check-ins, ensure the CQI model is utilized and evaluate what has been accomplished, what can be improved, and how this can be a long-term, sustainable process.
Establishing leaders who can moderate the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently the STARS Coalition and the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce (SVACC) support the work; that support, along with connecting with additional Chambers of Commerce, will help establish leaders for the project.
Ensuring that all community members can be reached.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and maintain data on where materials are distributed and promote the need for rotating event locations to ensure all communities in the Region are reached.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the development and distribution of marketing materials and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members noted that there is an Integrated Referral & Intake System (IRIS) set up in the Region; however, families are unable to see and access all the information housed in IRIS. Community partners who use IRIS and do other forms of outreach to caregivers shared that anyone doing this type of work must connect with families in the spaces they are already in, such as shops, social media, doctors' offices, and others.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when all action steps have been taken and key components have been created and operational (resource hub, resources, and events). Additionally, recognition and visibility will need to be assessed to ensure it has reached parents and caregivers, which could include surveys, feedback, or follower numbers.

Council members predict that by fully implementing this recommendation, families will have more understanding of the importance of ECEC experiences and resources and will find child care resources, if needed; additionally, more children will receive supports and enroll in programs.

Recommendation 2



Ensure the community is aware of, and supplied with, resources related to the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

This recommendation was made because Region 47 needs more affordable, quality child care options that allow for equitable access and parent choice for families who need and want care. Feedback from the community indicates that many providers will not accept CCAP as a form of payment, leaving families who need assistance with a greater barrier to accessing care. Local business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce are willing to help address this need, but to do so, they need information and resources to support their employees who are seeking child care.

SMART Goals

SMART Goals	What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?	How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?
Develop a Region 47 Child Care Toolkit and distribute it to at least 50 businesses/ organizations by April 30, 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with families, ECEC providers, and service agencies, create a list of features/categories that should be included in the toolkit. • Compile identified resources and construct a toolkit that can be utilized in both digital format and hard/printed copies. • Identify businesses and organizations that should receive the toolkit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a complete list. • A toolkit is assembled. • A list of businesses and organizations is created. • Resources are created. • There is a recipient list of those who received the toolkit. • New leaders are established to continue the work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a handout, webinar, and marketing resources that will educate and make the business community aware of the toolkit. • Distribute toolkits and educational resources to the identified businesses/organizations. • Make the toolkit available through the resource folder developed in the Early Childhood Awareness Action Plan. • Reassess the process and build capacity for strategies to be delegated to more stakeholders. 	
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
ECEC professionals and community partners may not have additional time to commit to supporting the SMART goals or action steps of the recommendation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the time given for the SMART goal (and action steps) is realistic to achieve within the designated time frame. • Ensure work is divided among numerous stakeholders to ensure less of a time commitment.
Families, caregivers, and providers need materials that are up to date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the process is streamlined and simplified for agencies to provide resources. • Create a system for collecting information regularly to ensure it is current.
Funds may be needed to produce and distribute marketing materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize online/digital marketing as much as possible; if funding is needed, use grants or community funds, if available.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the development and distribution of marketing materials and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members noted that 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care, the local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency, works with families and providers in applying for CCAP. Regional school districts and Head Start programs offer publicly funded ECEC programs and connect families with resource and marketing materials. However, the CCR&R covers six counties and does not offer office hours in the Region, making it difficult to connect with families and providers. Organizations that offer ECEC programming noted that they are only able to reach families and children they currently serve and shared that they need more community partners to help connect families who are not enrolled in their programs with the resources they need.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the toolkit has been created and distributed to at least 50 businesses throughout the Region, and there is a mechanism in place to collect feedback from employees who have utilized the toolkit to assist with child care needs.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, working parents will have more success with finding child care and financial aid to support their family. Additionally, increased access to affordable child care is predicted to improve the number of job-seekers for local businesses.

Next Steps



Birth to Five Illinois Regions will continue to use the CQI process and meet with stakeholders this summer to discuss the community's progress on implementation and continue bringing stakeholders together.

As pieces of the Action Plan are implemented, stakeholders will be encouraged to build on those efforts and develop new SMART goals to expand access to ECEC services, programs, and supports, and continue this important work in making Illinois the best state in the nation for families raising young children, with the nation's best Early Childhood Education and Care system.

For more information on Birth to Five Illinois, please visit: www.birthtofiveil.com.



Birth to Five Illinois is funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and is a department of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRRA).

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