**Community Plan Updates in SFY’2023**

**4 Counties For Kids (4CFK) Early Childhood Iowa Area**

**Appanoose, Davis, Lucas and Monroe Counties**

**“Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.”**

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| Iowa Code chapter 256I requires that local ECIA boards report progress toward and achievement of desired results identified in the Community Plan.  Provide a narrative of the ECIA’s progress in the last year towards the priorities and strategies identified in the most recent Community Plan. Success and/or challenges to meeting the ECIA goals may also be included. |
| Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) is a statewide initiative, housed within the Iowa Department of Management in FY 2023 and transitioning to Health and Human Services July 1, 2023, that unites public and private agencies/organizations under one common goal: providing a network to families that ensures the best possible early childhood development for Iowa’s children.  In fiscal year 2023, the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood of Iowa Board confirmed its previously identified priorities: (1) Children Ready for School, (2) Healthy, Secure and Nurturing Families, and (3) Secure and Nurturing Child Care Environments.  After carefully reviewing the 4CFK Community Plan, the Board’s plan is to continue with the same strategies and programs that were identified earlier in an effort to meet the needs of children and families in the area and help move toward goals established under the three priorities.  The Board places high priority on providing Family Support and Parent Education programs to serve the families of children prenatally to age 5. Support for quality preschool programming and assisting with children’s access to the quality preschools are very important to the successful development of children. Continuing to support the development of child care/early childhood learning environments is essential to supporting parents’ ability to be employed.  The Board will continue to attempt to support existing programs and services, that it has worked with area agencies to develop, by offering funding to the same programs and services. The Board is increasingly aware that it will soon face the necessity of prioritizing areas of programming as well as specific programs to support if the current funding levels do not improve, and increased costs to run programs continues.  The Area Director was hired to provide support and guidance to the Board. In addition to maintaining the priorities and strategies established prior, the Board has instructed the director to take an even closer look into existing programs to ensure that ECI dollars are being used appropriately and prudently. To carry out this task, the Director made several site visits with outcomes shared with the Board.  During the recent pandemic, the 4CFK board proved how vital it was for the board to have local control. Decisions were made to change how services were delivered and gave our programs more control to use their professional training to make decisions *based on the community and family needs*. We have a partnership with all of our programs based on not only evidence-based outcomes, but also trust and communication. We can’t stress how vital having local control is for the viability of our programs.  We know that the first five years will impact a child’s chances for success for the rest of their lives. Investments in early childhood are not only valuable to the individual child, but to an entire community. Proper support and investment into early childhood programs reduces future enrollment in social welfare programs, increases workforce participation, and yields a high return on investment (13% return on investment for high-quality early learning programs.)  In conclusion, the 4CFK Board is committed to providing support and funds (as available) to the current contracted programs and being open to making changes based on need and gaps. We will also commit to informing communities and families about the services available to their children to ensure their complete development. Building knowledge around who we are and what services we offer to our communities is the best way to grow our impact in Iowa and make sure that all children can thrive in the first 2,000 days of life and beyond.  **Goals and Strategies Alignment**  Describe how the board aligns their community plan with the “We are ECI” Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Goals identified in the state plan include those in ***bold italics***, and the 4CFK Board alignment is *underlined italics*:   * ***Infrastructure:*** Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system. * *The 4CFK Board* strives to be the central point of contact for early childhood programs and services. We collaborate with other early childhood organizations to maximize resources, and improve practices to increase effectiveness. * ***Communication:*** Build public will for investing in young children and their families. * *The 4CFK Board* will continue efforts to collaborate with our communities to communicate and spread awareness of not only our board supported programs, but all programs that support families with young children in our communities. * ***Workforce:*** Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, greater professionalism, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices. * *The 4CFK Board* has continued its efforts to increase the early childhood education workforce by partnering with Child Care Resource and Referral for high quality professional development services for early care and education programs. * ***Equitable Access:*** Ensure that young children and families receive the services they need when they need them. * *The 4CFK Board* understands the difficulty that our rural communities present in regard to access to services. We strive to coordinate with all services that can be provided when they need to be provided, and serve as a central point of coordination when possible. * *The 4CFK Area Director* attends local community meetings to learn about services in order to share knowledge when the need arises. * *The 4CFK Board* has made providing preschool tuition scholarships for families in need a priority. * ***Quality:*** Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services. * *The 4CFK Board* supports several programs that are evidence based, quality programs. These include credentialed home visitation programs and family support professionals, as well as NEST programs. In addition, we encourage and fund programs to support the Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K) rating system among our providers which shows the commitment to providing quality among them. |