

Summer 2017

I have been asked several times to explain the role of a backbone organization in a Collective Impact Collaboration. The goal of a collective impact is to organize a group of diverse stakeholders into a vision of coordinated effort to impact a large, seemingly immovable social issue. In the case of ECCBC, we and our family-serving collective impact partners have the common vision that:

“All children in Boulder County are valued, healthy and thriving and arrive at school prepared to learn.”

For the past ten years, as a statutory Early Childhood Council mandated to design, find funding for and implement a comprehensive system of EC services, the ECCBC has been leading the Boulder County effort to positively impact the school readiness of the approximately 22,000 county children age 0-5, through a process referred to as *collective impact*, “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.” (J. Kania, *Collective Impact*, The Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011).

What distinguishes *collective impact initiatives* from other partnerships, networks and collaboratives and increases their impact is the involvement of a centralized infrastructure, dedicated staff and structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication and mutually reinforcing activities amongst participants. Large scale social change, such as changing the public’s perception of “daycare” to “early care and education,” comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Collective impact requires “a systematic approach to social impact that focuses on the *relationships* between organizations and the *progress toward shared objectives*.”

The five determinants of a collective impact organization have been in place for over 10 years:
(all quotations are from the Kania Stanford Innovation Review, Winter 2011)

- 1) backbone support organization: “....dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage and support the initiative through on-going facilitation, technology and communication support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to run smoothly.” The ECCBC Executive Director (Bobbie Watson) spends 100% of her time managing the Early Childhood Systems Initiative by 1) leading the 35 member (covering all 4 EC domains) Advisory Council in collaboration with the AC Co-Chairs; 2) acting as staff to the ECCBC Board and 3) attending both county as well as state level partnerships and task forces to ensure that ECCBC ‘is in step’ with both local as well as state initiatives. She is able to devote her time to the EC Initiative since all of the operational, financial and programmatic activities are delegated to the Programs Director (Danielle Butler) who acts as both COO and CFO. As a free standing 501c3, ECCBC is independent of all other partners within the collective impact.

- 2) common agenda: “Collective Impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to

solving it through agreed upon actions.” The ECCBC Framework (based upon the state’s EC Framework) was developed in July 2010 by the ECCBC Advisory Council. During a year- long process, the AC developed the principles of a comprehensive EC system as well as the goals of this system. Many hours of debate and conversation led to the development of this Early Childhood common agenda.

- 3) shared measurement: “Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured.” This is where ‘the rubber hits the road’ for any collective impact initiative. The AC chose 29 mutually agreed upon indicators, covering all 4 domains of early childhood, which is reported in the bi-ennial Indicators Report. These indicators track the success (or lack thereof) of the community’s efforts to improve school readiness in Boulder County
- 4) continuous communication: The ECCBC Board and AC meet monthly with 2 Board members appointed to the AC. In addition, the AC Co-Chairs attend the Board Annual Retreat in the fall of each year. While the Board tends to issues such as the oversight of the Executive Director, the fiscal stability of the organization, as well as policy decisions and recommendations, the AC acts as the Committee of Experts on all things related to early childhood programs/services. The Board looks to the AC for all program as well as policy recommendations. There is over an 80% retention rate on the AC, with some members (such as Boulder County Public Health, The Mental Health Partners, the CCR&R, and both Head Starts) having been ECCBC members since 1998.
- 5) mutually reinforcing activities: There must be a uniformity of effort. Stakeholders must agree upon strategies that support the work across disciplines and domains in order to serve the common agenda. In the *Framework*, all of the strategies have been developed (and agreed upon) by the entire 30 member AC. These are vetted, outcomes-based, ‘best practices’ that have a proven track record and that thirty AC members, from disparate organizations, have agreed upon.

Successes of the Collective Impact include:

Within the Early Learning Domain:

- **Advocate at the local, state, and federal level for increased universal access to high quality early childhood programs**

In November 2010, Boulder County voters took a visionary step forward to strengthen Boulder County’s community safety net. The passage of Ballot Initiative 1A, also known as the Temporary Human Services Safety Net (TSN), set aside about \$5 million a year in property taxes to help backfill funding cuts to crucial human services in Boulder County. It was a revolutionary idea.

And it couldn’t have come at a better time. The Great Recession along with two significant disasters (a fire and a flood) devastated many of our neighbors here in Boulder County. The TSN allowed Boulder County to invest in extremely important services to help make sure it was easier for people to get the help they need. Among other things TSN investments have supported huge increases in the numbers of people receiving food

assistance and Medicaid in our county. They've made it possible for hundreds of families to get help with child care so parents can work, look for a job, or go to school. They've helped get additional mental health services to so many of our neighbors who need them. TSN dollars have been used to help people pay their rent so they can avoid homelessness. And the TSN has helped strengthen partnerships that flourished in the aftermath of disaster.

The TSN was set to sunset in FY 2015 so the county commissioners approached ECCBC to see if we could chair a campaign of community wide service providers to advocate for the reauthorization of the Safety Net Tax. Called the Neighbors Helping Neighbors campaign, the voters of Boulder County voted, by an approval rating of over 63%, to continue this tax for the next 15 years. This will raise over \$75M to support family self-sufficiency programs across Boulder County.

Family Support Domain:

- **Provide CCAP subsidy payments to community providers that are: 1) at least 100% of the average market rate and 2) outlines a tiered reimbursement rate tied to quality ratings**

This strategy has appeared on both our 2009 and 2014 Framework documents. The long-term outcome of this goal was to increase provider participation in the CCAP program thereby increasing the chances that a low-income family would be able to access high quality early care and education programs for their children. A second goal was to incentivize community providers to engage in quality improvement work in order to improve their quality ratings thereby increasing their CCAP reimbursement rates.

HB 14-1317 was passed by the Colorado legislature after many years of advocacy by the early care and education community. Boulder county now ties their CCAP community rates to the market rate and has implemented a tiered CCAP reimbursement rate which is tied to a provider's quality rating.

- **Formation of the BoCo Housing and Human Services Family Services Network**

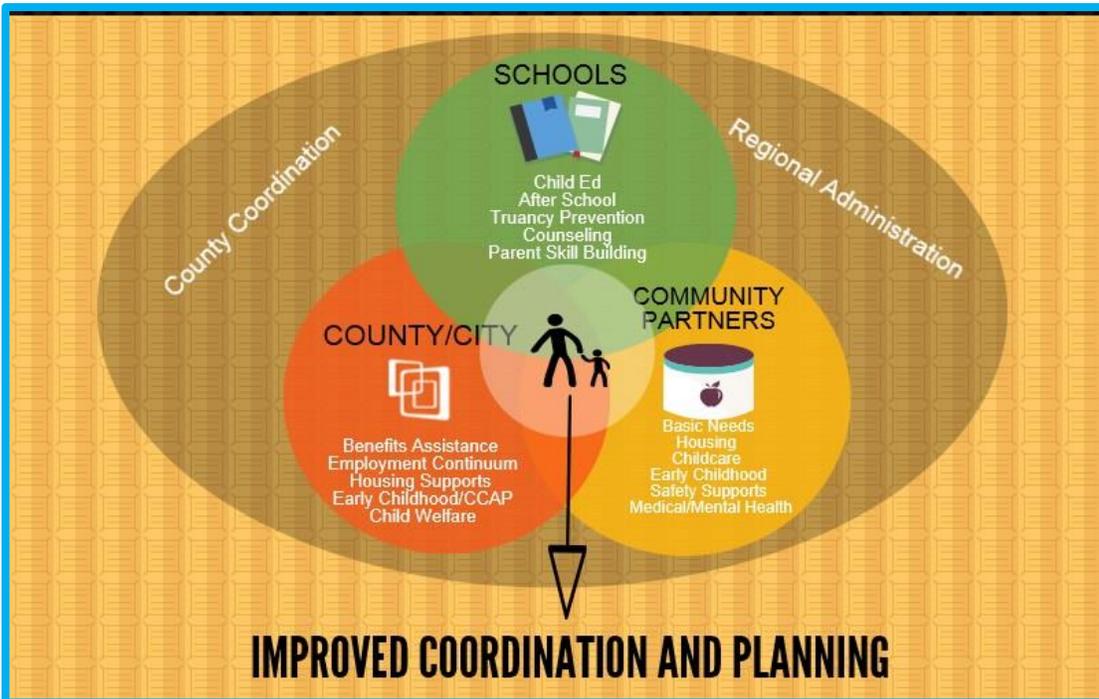
Bobbie Watson is the Chair of the BoCo Housing and Human Services Advisory Council (HHSAC). In 2016, it was decided that HHSAC would act as the organizational governing body or the Regional Council (RC) for the BoCo family services network (FSN):

Vision: Boulder County families are valued, healthy and thriving.

Mission: Based on a two generational approach, Boulder County will have a fully integrated system of service delivery, organized through a county-wide governance structure comprised of citizens, schools, community-based entities, and city/county government aimed at improving self-sufficiency outcomes of families and social, emotional, and academic outcomes of children and youth.

The goal is to create a fully integrated system is a **holistic approach** to serving each consumer, using an **interoperable data exchange** to link the people, services, and information across systems and programs for

robust **care coordination, integrated case planning, timely service delivery, and cross-system relationship management.**



The Regional Council is responsible for achieving a visionary, yet complex, large system-change process, aligning strategic direction and implementation consistent with the integration vision outlined above designed to produce the positive, long-term, sustainable outcomes for children, families, and individuals served throughout the community.

Social-Emotional and Mental Health Domain:

- **Broaden implementation of prevention-based programs promoting healthy social-emotional development**

ECCBC continues to provide:

- EQIT (Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers) training for over 100 ECE professionals each year. This program provides the tools needed to provide nurturing and supportive environments for infants and toddlers.
- Touchpoints training for both ECE professionals as well as community providers highlighting the need to support parents in the work of raising healthy and well-adjusted children
- Support for Pyramid and Pyramid Plus training for ECE providers in early childhood brain development, age appropriate expectations, and caring international skills

ECCBC also played a critical role in advocating for the continuation of the Kids Connect Program, provided through The Mental Health Partners. This program puts early childhood mental health consultants in licensed childcare centers and homes to provide 'real time' recommendations to staff and parents around the management of challenging behaviors.

- **Convene the Early Childhood Mental Health Task Force**

In partnership with BoCo Public Health, ECCBC brought together over 15 individuals working in the field of early childhood mental health. Those partners included: The Mental Health Partners, Salud Family Health Center, private practitioners and representatives of several family support organizations. Recommendations were developed to increase access to high quality early childhood mental health services for families across BoCo. This report is on the ECCBC website: <https://www.eccbouldercounty.org/for-community/our-publications/>

Health Domain:

- **Implement the Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) project**

In collaboration with Boulder County Public Health, ECCBC staff has worked to ensure that all children in Boulder County:

- receive 3 developmental screenings by the age of three
- receive appropriate referrals should a developmental concern be identified
- trainings are provided to ECE providers on the administration of the ASQ/ASQ SE tool

ECCBC, in collaboration with our family-serving agency partners, continue to refine the Framework, updated strategies, and track success.

Respectfully,

BA Watson

Executive Director
The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County