



Community Learning Report: Fremont County

January 2021



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

earlymilestones.org/launch-together

About the Initiative

LAUNCH Together is a unique partnership between Early Milestones, eight Colorado-based foundations, the Butler Institute for Families, and communities throughout the state. The initiative is designed to improve social-emotional and developmental outcomes for Colorado's young children and families, support system-level collaboration, and reduce mental health disparities among vulnerable populations.

For more information about the history and implementation of LAUNCH Together in Colorado, visit earlymilestones.org/launch-together.



About the Community

Fremont County's (the Community) two population centers, Cañon City and Florence, are located on the Arkansas River. Smaller communities in this mostly rural area are located along the river's narrow canyon to the west. The largest employers are schools, nursing homes, and prisons. The Colorado Children's Campaign estimates that 23% of school-aged children live in poverty compared to 12% in the state. Fifteen state and federal prisons bring economic stability to the Community. Prison employees and families of incarcerated individuals living in the Community have unique and complex stressors. Tourism is a major industry for the area, which is known for rafting, rock climbing, fishing, and other outdoor activities. Cañon City is known as "The Gateway to the Royal Gorge Region."

The ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council (the Council) partnered with the neighboring Chaffee Early Childhood Council to implement core LAUNCH Together strategies in rural settings and address regional equity challenges.

To learn more about LAUNCH Together Fremont County, please contact The ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council (719.276.6175) or visit echofamilycenter.org.

LAUNCH Together Fremont Partners

ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council
Cañon City, Fremont RE-2 and Cotopaxi Schools
Fremont County Department of Public Health and Environment
Starpoint for the Fremont County Family Center, Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Parents as Teachers
Fremont County Head Start

St. Thomas More Hospital
Centura Health Primary Care
Valley Wide Health Systems Primary Care & Nurse Family Partnership
Solvista Health
Fremont County Department of Human Services
Children First Resource and Referral

Community in Action

Behavioral Health in Primary Care

LAUNCH Together Fremont successfully recruited and supported six practices, across the St. Thomas More/Centura and Valley Wide Health systems, to engage in early childhood behavioral health integration (BHI) for the first time. St. Thomas More/Centura implemented significant practice transformation to deepen integration of behavioral health supports for pregnant people and families with young children. Changes include the addition of a BHI social worker to the health care team who works with the medical providers to screen for development and pregnancy related depression, identify child and family needs, provide counseling, and/or make appropriate service referrals. The result is significant increases in screening and successful referrals to child/family services. After learning about these successes, Valley Wide joined the initiative, identified a social worker champion, and is now implementing practice changes. To ensure the highest quality care, social workers at all sites receive specialized training related to early childhood development and mental health, and are connected directly with the Council to facilitate smooth referrals for multiple community-based services.

Screening & Assessment

The Council partners with the department of human services to ensure all families with young children in child protection have access to needed supports and services. The Universal Referral Form streamlines referrals from child welfare to screening, assessment, and access to services (i.e., developmental evaluation, special education, and home visiting).

Enhanced Home Visiting

Home visitors are essential for addressing the needs of young children and families. The Council offers reflective supervision and professional development to home visitors to support the inclusion of mental health and special education services in their programs.

Cañon City Schools will continue to offer reflective supervision and case consultation to home visitors after the LAUNCH Together grant concludes.

Mental Health Consultation in Early Care & Education

Three Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Specialists provide consultation for children in a variety of settings, such as the home, preschool, child care, and foster care. Fremont child abuse and neglect cases for children birth to five nearly doubled in the first six months of 2020, compared to 2019. Through this initiative, providers have received extensive training so they can deliver enhanced support and protections to young children and caregivers.

STORY OF IMPACT

The ECMH social worker at the pediatric office convinced a “difficult to reach” family to bring their two children to screening after 6 months of trying. It was apparent that these little ones were loved and had good care, but the family had very limited resources and was afraid. During the evaluation, the children were entranced with the toys but did not know how to play with some of them. Both children demonstrated significant delays in development and received individual education plans. The oldest child was kindergarten age, but the team felt he would be lost in that academic world. Working with ECMH social worker, the special education team, the Head Start program and Regional Head Start, the staff at Head Start obtained a waiver for the kindergarten-aged child to attend Head Start for one year before going off to school. The children are doing well, and the older child will be more prepared for kindergarten next year. The mother and grandmother “wanted to quit” but with the physician and social worker’s support, the family was willing to take the first step.

Local Lessons



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS ARE VEHICLES FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

When early childhood councils have the opportunity, funding, and time to engage in complex work, they are best equipped to identify and imbed sustainable solutions.



RETAINING A SKILLED WORKFORCE IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE.

Over the last four years, a single pediatric practice has seen an 80% reduction in staff. Similar turnover has occurred in home visitation and early childhood education. Rural communities have difficulty attracting and keeping professionals due to lower wages and greater distance to various amenities.



A REGIONAL APPROACH IMPROVES RELATIONSHIPS AND RESULTS.

A history of collaboration between early childhood councils in Fremont and Chaffee counties led to an efficient and effective start to LAUNCH Together work.



BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EXISTING WORKFORCE IS ESSENTIAL.

Professional development for existing early childhood and medical professionals has resulted in greater understanding of the importance of early social-emotional development for later school readiness and success. Service providers now assess and refer earlier and more often.

Next Steps

- The Council intends to continue refining behavioral health integration at St. Thomas Moore/Centura Health and Valley Wide Health Services. These connections are critical to ensuring practitioners can identify children's social and emotional needs and obtain services for them.
- The Council's Referral Hub is a single entry process to ECMH services. The Council expanded to include mental and behavioral health specialists from St. Thomas More/Centura Health, Head Start, Early Head Start, Cañon City Schools, and Solvista Health. Additional funding is essential to developing and promoting the Hub.
- The Council will continue to build knowledge about the effects of early trauma on a child's future success. Further work will support families, care providers, and agencies in developing skills to identify and remedy early trauma.

Initiative Funders



The Colorado Health Foundation™

