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### 2020 Year in Review: A Celebration of Early Childhood in the Granite State

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# 2020 Year In Review

A Celebration of Early Childhood in the Granite State



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# Welcome.

As Director of the Council for Thriving Children, I am excited to share this 2020 Year-In-Review.

We want to illustrate how New Hampshire met the challenges that affected young children and their families this year, the worst of which was COVID-19. This report shows the great work accomplished to move us towards our vision that all families are afforded comprehensive and responsive supports, so they are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future. We have much to be proud of!

On January 23, 2020, Governor Christopher T. Sununu signed an Executive Order creating a new early childhood governance structure for NH. To guide the structure, Governor Sununu established the Council for Thriving Children, positioned at the University of New Hampshire, to serve as the state's advisory council on early childhood care and education. Co-led by the state's Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, the Council includes family member advocates, early childhood experts, health care leaders, state legislators, business leaders, and Commissioners from other state agencies.

The Governor appointed Council members in May and held an inaugural meeting in June, at which time the Council released its [New Hampshire Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#). The Plan is a culmination of a year-long process led by the University of New Hampshire, the NH Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and highly inclusive of the voices of families and partners who support them. The Plan represents the values of the state and the wealth of stakeholders who participated in the planning process, illustrating the incredible ability of those who live and work in NH to collaborate effectively, efficiently, and enthusiastically.

By carrying out the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, New Hampshire will create a family-centric system that is inclusive, responsive, efficient, and evidence-informed across all functional areas: governance, policy, financing, data, workforce development, and family engagement. *(continued on next page)*



We recognize that families serve a dual role within the early childhood care and education system as both recipients and providers of services; the goals within this plan, therefore, aim to build the capacity of all families to be a part of that system:

1. Positive Learning Experiences
2. Healthy Children and Families
3. Strong Families
4. Statewide Coordination

This 2020 Year-In-Review celebrates New Hampshire's accomplishments over the past year, aligning with the Strategic Plan. The pandemic shifted the way we worked, educated our children, and lived our lives, but a lot still happened that helps families and young children thrive in NH. You will see that great work continues to be done by government agencies, statewide groups, local partnerships, and philanthropic organizations – all for the benefit of our young children and their families.

While we made every effort to capture as many programs, services, and efforts as possible, we know we have much to learn. We welcome your feedback so we can include additional programs and efforts in next year's Year in Review.

Be well,

*Christina Lachance*

Christina Lachance, Director, NH Council for Thriving Children

# Introduction

The NH Council for Thriving Children is excited to share 20 stories illustrating how the Granite State is working towards the [New Hampshire Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#) goals and objectives. We have organized this celebratory report by the four key goals within the strategic plan, which include:

**GOAL 1: POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES** – Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

**GOAL 2: HEALTHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES** – Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

**GOAL 3: STRONG FAMILIES** – Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children’s development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond.

**GOAL 4: STATEWIDE COORDINATION** – NH’s young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

These stories represent a range of initiatives, including those funded by federal and state resources and philanthropy. The 20 stories highlight efforts happening at the state, regional, and community-based levels. Some of these initiatives were launched before 2020, yet they evolved and expanded over the past year. Some are new initiatives developed as a result of funding or in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize that we could not possibly capture all of the amazing work across the Granite State in 20 stories; however, we are confident that these stories represent various perspectives, address a range of needs, and highlight programs serving a diverse group of stakeholders.

Following the presentation of the 20 stories, we have created a crosswalk to show how each story funnels up to one of the goal areas. This crosswalk also illustrates how the project was funded, and whether it was a local or state initiative. Finally, we have included an overview of the Goals and Objectives outlined in the New Hampshire Strategic Plan for Early Childhood.





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## GOAL 1

# Positive Learning Experiences

Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

# Connecting Families through the Welcome Families Website

In 2020, NH launched the [Welcome Families](#) website. Welcome Families, funded through the [NH Preschool Development Grant](#), helps families access resources related to growing, learning, living, working, and playing in the Granite State.

The website launch was the culmination of a year-long planning process, which benefited from the website design expertise of Rebel Interactive Group. Throughout Spring 2020, Early Learning NH, Rebel Interactive, and representatives from the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services, 211 NH, NH Children’s Trust, and early childhood leaders participated in the Welcome Families Leadership Team. To ensure Welcome Families was truly family-focused, the Leadership Team worked with the Parent Information Center/NH Family Voices to solicit family feedback on the look, feel, and content for the site.



Grow



Live



Learn



Play



Work



Search

In Summer 2020, the Leadership Team engaged additional stakeholders to review and provide input on the final website design, including representatives from the NH Parent Teacher Association, Head Start, behavioral health providers, and early supports and services providers. Once the Welcome Families build was complete, the Leadership Team created a marketing plan to ensure that families knew how to access the website. In the future, NH will measure how families utilize this innovative tool by monitoring website clicks, views, and engagement on the Welcome Families site.



# Expanding Social-Emotional Learning

Many educators are expanding social-emotional learning efforts to help young people develop the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills needed for school and life success. Educators rely on the Pyramid Model as a tiered approach to promoting their students' social-emotional health and have benefitted from NH's membership in the national Pyramid Model Consortium.

In 2020, [NH Preschool Development Grant](#) funding enabled the Preschool Technical Assistance Network (PTAN) to facilitate the NH State Leadership Team in implementing the Pyramid Model. The NH Department of Education's iSOCIAL (improving Social-emotional Outcomes through Complementary Infrastructure and Leadership) initiative also supported the Pyramid Model framework in early childhood settings. In 2020, NH supported a Master Cadre of coaches to train early childhood educators to use the Pyramid Model in their classrooms. To evaluate this effort's impact, NH anticipates embedding the Pyramid Model metrics into NH's data system.

In NH, educators have also been utilizing [Choose Love](#), a groundbreaking next-generation social and emotional learning program. The curriculum teaches educators and their students how to choose love in any circumstance through simple yet powerful themes and practices. Through Choose Love, NH classrooms have evolved into cultures where students feel safe, nurtured, connected, and empowered. Choose Love has been applied beyond the classroom, and in 2020 was implemented in infant/toddler programs, homes, and community organizations.



# Encouraging Play in Early Learning

Play-based learning helps children develop social, language, and numeracy skills while increasing their curiosity about the world around them and their motivation to learn. With support from legislation that promotes Kindergarten-based play-based learning, educators across the Granite State encourage child-led and open-ended play.

“The staff of CMNH are highly practiced in using Play-Based Learning within museum exhibits and classes,” says Jane Bard, CMNH President.

## PLAY-BASED LEARNING TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Use an intentional environment to support learning
- Actively engage with children, scaffold, challenge, and encourage
- Observation, reflection, and assessment are needed to gauge learning
- Responsive questions and commentary during play

“As experts in early childhood education, the Children’s Museum of NH is well-positioned to fill the gap in providing kindergarten teachers with solid instructional training in Play-Based Learning.”

JANE BARD, PRESIDENT,  
CHILDREN’S MUSEUM OF NH

In 2020, the University of NH (UNH) Department of Human Development and Family Studies, with [NH Preschool Development Grant](#) funding, hired two Play-based Learning coaches who have worked virtually with preschool teachers in 10 programs and kindergarten teachers in 18 districts. UNH collaborated with Temple University’s Dr. Hirsh-Pasek to imbed their concept of the “6Cs”. Through coaching, NH early childhood teachers and administrators learned how childhood play could encourage Collaboration, Communication, Content, Critical thinking, Creative innovation, and Confidence.

In addition to these efforts, in 2020, the Children’s Museum of NH (CMNH) received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to help kindergarten teachers and parents implement Play-Based Learning activities in children’s early education.

# Preparing for Kindergarten Through Technology

“This is an excellent opportunity for our young ELL students to enter Kindergarten with a solid educational foundation. It is wonderful to have something so beneficial to students who don’t always have access to programming that will have such a positive impact on their future education.”

ROBERT CIOPPA, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES, NASHUA SCHOOL DISTRICT

The NH Department of Education (DOE) defines kindergarten readiness as “children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. Kindergarten readiness is a shared collaboration between families, schools, and communities promoting student success.”

Parents are children’s first and most important teachers, and there are many ways families are preparing their children for Kindergarten. In 2020, NH families had access to innovative technologies to support their children’s development. For example, the [Vroom](#) app provides free, science-based tips and tools that help parents and caregivers turn everyday moments into opportunities to learn and develop life skills.

To support the transition to school, DOE launched an initiative to promote the [Waterford UPSTART](#) program to help families prepare their children to be ready to learn on day one of Kindergarten. Waterford UPSTART, an at-home early learning program, offers personalized family education and coaching, computer and Internet access, and adaptive educational software. In March 2020, NH DOE Commissioner Frank Edelblut was featured on a [video](#) promoting Waterford UPSTART’s benefits.

At the local level, the United Way Greater Nashua received [NH Preschool Development Grant](#) funds in 2020 to implement Waterford UPSTART among low-income, refugee, immigrant, and English Language Learner (ELL) families.



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## GOAL 2

# Healthy Children and Families

Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

# Strengthening Family Resource Centers

“Families have different cultures, beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. It takes all of our voices and learning from each other to build systems and supports that will meet the needs of everyone raising young children in NH.”

MOTHER OF FOUR CHILDREN, TILTON, NH

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) provide comprehensive services to parents and their children. While each FRC is unique, all have a shared commitment to promoting health, wellbeing, self-sufficiency, and positive parenting through support and education. The NH Legislature created the Wellness and Primary Prevention Council (WPPC), which serves as the designating entity for Family Resource Centers of Quality (FRC-Q).

Since 2017, the WPPC has supported and advocated for a statewide FRC system through strategic planning and diverse partner engagement. In June 2019, as a result of coordinated advocacy, the State awarded a contract to the NH Children’s Trust (NHCT) to serve in a facilitatory role for FRCs. This critical step forward and vital infrastructure investment catalyzed additional federal funds to flow to communities.

In 2020, NHCT began its new role as a facilitating organization, helping four FRCs obtain or maintain their (FRC-Q) designation, denoting a heightened confidence level in families, funders, and program staff. Next, NHCT bolstered Family Support NH – a coalition of FRCs that encourage each other, share best practices, and better provide for Granite State families. Together, NHCT and FSNH developed a marketing strategy to promote commonality across FRCs and eradicate the stigma surrounding FRCs and diversify their client base. Finally, through [NH Preschool Development Grant](#) funds, NHCT provided resources to 14 participating FRCs to enhance their infrastructure and expand their programs and services.

# Advocating for Policies that Support Young Children and Families

“I am a single mom navigating long-term recovery and a mental health diagnosis, and I know I am not the only one. I speak for the thousands of parents like me who need a roadmap to ensure a successful future for my children and their children in NH.”

State policies impact families’ health and social outcomes. In 2020, New Futures remained diligent in its mission to advocate, educate, and collaborate to improve all NH residents’ health and wellness. With support from the Endowment for Health, NH Charitable Foundation, Children’s Health Foundation, Alliance for Early Success, and Annie E. Casey Foundation, New Futures supported policies focused on increasing resources to help children thrive.

In 2020, New Futures formally adopted and included children’s behavioral health policy as one of its core issues and is now focused on strengthening a comprehensive and integrated care system for children. This year, New Future’s advocacy work resulted in the passing of legislation requiring insurance carriers to cover Early Supports and Services, family-based supports such as special education, evaluation services, speech, physical and occupational therapies, among others. Additional legislation passed in 2020 requires referral to Early Supports and Services for all babies who are born substance-exposed and all children who experience trauma at a young age.

In addition to New Futures’ advocacy work, Mom’s Rising in NH focuses on issues that matter most to families. Also receiving funding through the NH Charitable Foundation, Mom’s Rising focused its 2020 advocacy efforts on early education and care, among other critical issues. Save the Children Action Network — also funded by NH Charitable Foundation — mobilized more than 2,000 supporters in NH to ensure every child has access to high-quality early childhood education.



# Increasing Access to Oral Health Care

The NH Oral Health Coalition, a diverse group of organizations and individuals, oversees the development and implementation of the [NH Oral Health Plan: A Framework for Action](#). The Oral Health Plan includes strategies to ensure children have regular visits to the dentist and learn the importance of oral health care.

Despite the importance of oral health, in 2020, COVID-19 forced all dental practices to close temporarily. DHHS responded by encouraging its Division of Medicaid Services and Division of Public Health Oral Health Program to work collaboratively on provider and patient education efforts. The Oral Health Coalition hosted *Charting New Territory: Building our Statewide Oral Health Plan in the COVID Era*. This virtual planning event informed the 2020–2025 Oral Plan Update. Included in the state’s latest plan is the Coalition’s goal to eradicate dental disease in children. The desired outcome is that 85% of children reach age five without a cavity.

To help meet this goal, the NH Children’s Health Foundation provided grants to ensure dental health coverage continued through the pandemic. Of utmost importance to the Foundation was the assurance that coverage is not a limiting factor for children to access care. The Foundation’s 2020 grantees included the Oral Health Coalition, Women, Infants and Children Oral Health Pilot, UNH Pediatric Partnership, and UNH Institute for Health Practice.



# Addressing the Mental Health Needs of NH's Youngest Residents

In early 2020, the Endowment for Health and the NH Children's Health Foundation released, [\*Working Towards a System that Supports Early Childhood, Infant, and Family Mental Health: An Assessment of New Hampshire's Early Childhood and Family Mental Health Workforce\*](#). This report set the groundwork for enhancing current mental health programs and services that meet young children's needs.

Based on this critical assessment report, the NH DHHS Division of Behavioral Health integrated a series of recommendations targeting infants and toddlers in the 2020 release of NH's [\*10-year Mental Health Plan\*](#). Among the strategies to enhance and improve services for this young population are training the provider workforce, establishing a new billing process that allows for reimbursement of services, and focusing on screenings to drive the level of care received. Soon after the report's release, DHHS conducted provider training to build the foundation for infant and toddler mental health programming.

Essential to the success of this model was the training of pediatric practices to understand anxiety and depression in young patients. To accomplish this, NH DHHS Maternal and Child Health Section received a federal Pediatric Mental Health Care Access grant to facilitate the NH Pediatric Partnership with the University of New Hampshire Institute for Health Policy and Practice.

Aligning with these efforts, the UNH Institute on Disability released the 2020 Children's Behavioral Health Workforce Development Network's updated principles. The Institute provided training and informational sessions to ensure providers knew how to best support infants, toddlers, and families.





# Acclaiming the Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team

In 2020, NH received national attention for its groundbreaking efforts to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) through Manchester's innovative Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team (ACERT™).

Manchester established ACERT in 2015 through the work of its founding partners Amoskeag Health, YWCA NH, and the Manchester Police Department with a three-year grant from the NH Children's Health Foundation. When police officers arrive at a call where a child may have witnessed a traumatic incident, they activate the ACERT response. The ACERT assesses the situation and offers immediate crisis intervention, and obtains a signed release form. The ACERT then follows up with families and works with referral partners to link those in need with resources.

ACERT has expanded its referral partners to include more behavioral health providers, substance use treatment centers, medication-assisted treatment sites, and recovery programs. Also, ACERT engaged the Manchester Fire Department to ensure first-responders who may be onsite in cases of substance use and overdoses respond to the needs of children. Manchester's model was replicated to serve even more communities, with ACERT initiatives in Laconia, Concord, and Claremont, among others.

Senator Jeanne Shaheen and NH Congressman Chris Pappas introduced legislation to nationalize NH's ACERT model. Subsequently, Congressman Pappas invited Amoskeag Health's Lara Quiroga, Director of Strategic Initiatives for Children (and Council Member), to the 2020 State of the Union Address in February 2020. ACERT was recognized as a best-practice prevention program by California Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris.



# Creating Community Collaborations to Strengthen Families

In 2020, NH expanded its US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families-funded Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families initiative. Under the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) umbrella, the Division for Children, Youth, and Families, and the Division of Public Health Services through the Child Welfare Integration Team are working across multiple systems to strengthen internal and external community-based collaborations among all agencies that touch the lives of children.

The Community Collaborations model relies on local Community Implementation Teams to develop and implement shared strategies to support families at greatest risk for child maltreatment. Activities have included parent education on the Strengthening Families™ model, trauma-informed training of multisector professionals, and Boundary Spanning Leadership training and implementation to engage professionals working across multiple and often siloed systems.

Over the past year, NH piloted this initiative with three lead partners: Amoskeag Health in Manchester, Lakes Region Community Services in the Winnepesaukee Public Health Region, and the Coós Coalition for Young Children and Families in the North Country. Community Implementation Teams have begun to create an integrated family support system to prevent out-of-home placements of children and reduce child protective cases across the state. NH aims to develop innovations in prevention programming for children and families using community-specific data. DHHS will evaluate these efforts in partnership with the University of NH Institute on Disability.

## Strengthening Families™ Five Protective Factors

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Children's Social and Emotional Development





### GOAL 3

# Strong Families

Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children's development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond.

# Building Self-Sufficiency through the Whole Family Approach

NH participates in the [Whole Family Approach to Jobs: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive](#) initiative — a New England region public-private partnership. The Whole Family approach began as a national collaboration between the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Region 1 Office, WK Kellogg Foundation, and regional and community foundations. Working across programs, agencies, geography, and political landscapes, the six New England states help leaders improve family wellbeing by increasing their economic security.

With local support from the NH Charitable Foundation, the NH Chapter of the Whole Families Approach has prioritized solving the vexing issues of poverty by eliminating the “cliff effect.” The cliff effect occurs when increased wages do not equate to what is lost in public assistance when a parent accepts a job or a promotion.

As members of the NH Chapter, the NH Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education work collaboratively across state government, non-profit organizations, philanthropy, and business to promote families’ upward economic mobility. The Chapter hopes to strengthen the economy by expanding the labor pool for parents, focusing on employers, child care, transportation, and housing.

NH’s Whole Family Approach’s five main components — including the NH Chapter of parents and leaders, House Bill 4 Benefits Cliff Working Group, DHHS Whole Family Integration Team, Cliff Effect Economic Analysis, and Benefits Cliff Calculator — are highlighted in the report [NH’s Helping Business Thrive and Families Prosper](#).



# Bolstering Child Care Resources

Access to affordable and high-quality child care provided by quality providers is critical in any family-supporting system. In 2020, NH made headway in building career pathways for its child care workforce through TEACH Early Childhood® NH, funded by DHHS and the NH Charitable Foundation. This initiative created access to an Associates Degree or CDA credential for 25 teachers, directors, and family child care providers through scholarships and paid release time. Child Care Aware of New Hampshire (CCAoNH), powered by Southern NH Services, also partnered with the Department of Labor to create the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program, offering on-the-job training and coursework to increase the provider skill level and wages.

While the child care system took several steps forward, in March 2020, COVID-19 forced many child care programs to close temporarily, and NH organizations pivoted immediately to support families and providers. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) collaborated with the NH Charitable Foundation to establish an emergency child care collaborative to ensure coverage was available for essential workers and centers had the resources they needed.

CCAoNH, a key partner in the emergency child care collaborative, established an Emergency Child Care Phone Line, posted *COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for New Hampshire Child Care Programs*, and created a training video for learning spaces to fulfill COVID-19 social-distancing guidelines. In collaboration with DHHS, CCAoNH updated the state's consumer education website, [NH Connections](#).

In June 2020, Governor Sununu announced the NH Child Care Recovery and Stabilization Program, to be administered by DHHS, which allocated \$35 million for child care providers to address COVID-related expenses.

# Supporting Relative Caregivers

“I have taken guardianship of all 5 of my son’s children because of the opioid crisis. They are 10, 9, 7, 2, and 1...I’m 55 and disabled so the kinship program has been a godsend. I need and have a village to take care of these babies.”

Throughout NH, a growing number of children are raised by grandparents and relative caregivers due to their parents being unable to care for them. Young children may be in the care of family caregivers due to their parent’s incarceration, substance misuse, or mental/physical illness. Relative caregivers experience unique challenges as they seek information, try to find and access local resources, or look for support from others in a similar role.

To meet these challenges, in 2020, NH Children’s Trust (NHCT) strengthened and expanded its Kinship Navigation Program to connect relative caregivers to services and supports that promote independence and enhance family wellbeing. By the end of June 2020, NH Children’s Trust created 20 Kinship Navigator positions embedded within 15 Family Resource Centers. These Kinship Navigators worked closely with 172 kinship families and 400 individual family members to provide information, resources, and referrals and help families access public benefits. NHCT also partnered with Family Support New Hampshire to create a [Kinship and Relative Caregiver Guide](#) in English and Spanish.

To enhance the work of the Kinship Navigation Program, in December 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families produced an updated [Resource Guide for New Hampshire Relative Caregivers](#). The Guide provides relative caregivers with information about the cost of caring for a child, helpful resources, and guardianship.

# Elevating Family Voice Across Programs

**“I have a unique perspective as a father of two children with significant medical needs. I know how the experience of navigating early supports and services and education can be different for fathers raising young children in NH.”**

Elevating family and community voice in guiding and informing state planning is critical to the success of NH’s early childhood system. In creating the [NH Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#), NH engaged constituents at all levels of the early childhood system, including families. Throughout the strategic planning process, family members shared their input through surveys and focus groups and participated in local coalitions and community efforts, ensuring the Plan addressed family needs while simultaneously building all families’ capacity to be a part of that system of support.

Family voice was supported by New Hampshire Family Voices (NHFV) and the Parent Information Center (PIC). Both statewide organizations share a commitment to engaging and empowering families to have a voice at all levels of the early childhood system.

Over the past year, NHFV and PIC have continued to play an essential role in ensuring that family voice is captured at the state and local levels and have received funding through the NH Preschool Development Grant to support this work. NHFV and PIC have worked collaboratively with The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), which is conducting a statewide needs assessment among families and early childhood providers. NHFV and PIC provided feedback and insights to the development of a family survey instrument and outreach materials, which helped to ensure the survey was well received by families AND captured vital information about family needs throughout the state.

# Promoting the Value of Home Visiting and Developmental Screening

Home visits by a nurse, social worker, or early childhood educator during pregnancy and in the first years of a child's life have been shown to prevent child abuse and neglect, support positive parenting, improve maternal and child health, and promote child development and school readiness.

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program maintained its implementation of the evidence-based Healthy Families America model. In fact, the program increased its capacity utilization to more than 85% in 2020 by providing virtual learning opportunities for home visitors. The MIECHV team worked with community partners to create Plans of Safe Care (POSC) required for every infant born exposed to substances. The POSC identifies appropriate support services and referrals for the mother and infant. It is a useful tool to enhance care coordination and help families stay safe and connected when they leave the hospital.

Complementing home visiting efforts, DHHS's Watch Me Grow Steering Committee oversaw efforts to help families track their child's progress through developmental screening. With support from the [NH Preschool Development Grant](#), the state will develop and launch a Centralized Access Pilot, and train staff, and help families access screening and resources, moving toward designation as a "Help Me Grow" state.



# Reducing Food Insecurity among Children and Families

Food insecurity is the inability to provide enough food for a healthy and active lifestyle for all household members, often negatively affecting young children’s health and development. COVID-19 has exacerbated this already-challenging public health issue in the Granite State. According to the NH Food Bank, more than 20% of children live in food-insecure environments due to COVID-19.

In 2020, the NH Children’s Health Foundation provided grants to address food insecurity by increasing participation in federal programs, such as the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and by increasing access to local food growers who accept SNAP benefits. The Foundation also supported the SNAP Double UP incentive program that promotes healthy food at 16 participating groceries by doubling their value on the SNAP card. In response to COVID-19, NH’s WIC program providers shifted service delivery by providing remote appointments, curbside clinic services, and other innovative models to reduce in-person contact.

In 2020, the NH Department of Education ensured families knew about free school meals, now available for all children as part of the US Department of Agriculture’s COVID-19 response. To further support families who were experiencing food insecurity, local United Way agencies provided support for food distribution programs to ensure new moms and babies, among others, maintained access to the nutritional supports they needed.





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#### GOAL 4

# Statewide Coordination

New Hampshire's young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

# Distributing NH Preschool Development Grant Funds across Communities

As the Preschool Development Grant recipient for NH, the University of New Hampshire (UNH), in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Education (DOE), and the Governor's Office, committed to sharing grant resources with local early childhood workgroups to ensure alignment among state, regional, and community-based initiatives.

In June 2020, UNH hosted a competitive procurement process to fund community-based capacity building, needs assessment, strategic planning, and program initiation or expansion grants. To be eligible for grant funding, local collaboratives had to include diverse stakeholders that represented schools, Community Action Program agencies, health and mental health providers, early childhood program providers, Family Resource Centers, businesses, Head Start, and a parent representative. UNH awarded 13 community grants (*see table on next page*).

With grant funding, communities implemented various programs celebrated elsewhere in this document, such as Choose Love, home visiting, the Pyramid Model, developmental screening, and play-based learning, among others.



New Hampshire's  
Preschool  
Development Grant

# Distributing NH Preschool Development Grant Funds across Communities

GRANTEE	CAPACITY BUILDING	NEEDS ASSESSMENT	STRATEGIC PLANNING	NEW OR EXPANDED PROGRAMS
Amoskeag Health	X			X
Children Unlimited	X		X	
Claremont Learning Collaborative	X	X		X
Coös Coalition for Young Children and Families	X		X	X
Good Beginnings	X		X	X
Granite United Way	X	X	X	
Greater Tilton Area FRC	X			
Lakes Region Community Services	X			
Milford Thrives	X	X		
Monadnock United Way	X			X
United Way Greaure Nashua	X		X	X
United Way Seacoast	X	X		
Waypoint	X	X	X	X
Winnacunnet Cooperative (SAU 21)	X	X		



# Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, Governor Sununu convened leaders from across the family-serving systems to prepare for the pandemic by activating new resources to keep providers running strong. This preparation proved critical given that more than 44,000 Granite Staters tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020. Tens of thousands more were affected by the loss of jobs, program closures, and the social-emotional impact of social-distancing.

To ensure NH families had access to current information about the pandemic, available resources, and the latest statistics, the Department of Health and Human Services created a [COVID-19 Dashboard](#). Governor Sununu was concerned by the pandemic's disproportionate impact on particular populations in the state and established the COVID-19 Equity Response Team. In July 2020, the team issued a [roadmap](#) for how the state could address longstanding systemic inequities.

In April 2020, the Governor issued an Emergency Order to implement a Family Resiliency Support Line for families experiencing heightened stress, staffed by clinicians from Waypoint. Also, DCYF teamed up with parent and community partners to publish the [COVID-19 Parent Resource Guide](#), providing information on topics such as managing stress, staying connected, remote learning, and health and wellbeing.

The NH Department of Education (DOE) helped local school districts respond to the pandemic by creating multiple tools to support remote learning and guide schools as they re-opened. The DOE Commissioner met monthly with school leaders to share news on COVID-19 waivers, grants, and safety protocols. DOE also launched a [Supporting Remote Learners](#) website for educators, family members/caregivers, and students.



# Sharing Data Across Programs

Organizations rely on data for various reasons – to understand the families they are serving, measure their programs’ success, and determine trends over time. Despite the value of data to an organization, data integration and operability across organizations is complex. Recognition of the fragmented and inconsistent data systems across NH organizations prompted the Council for Thriving Children to address data silos as a critical goal in the [NH Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#).

As part of NH’s new early childhood governance structure, the Department(s) of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Education (DOE) created internal Early Childhood Integration Teams (ECIT) with staff representation across all early childhood programs and funding sources. The purpose of the ECITs is to support data-driven policy and program coordination, integration, and development while increasing performance and resource accountability across the early child care system. In November 2020, the Council hired a Business Analyst to advise and support the DOE and DHHS in their collective efforts to enhance data systems’ interoperability within and across the government agencies.

At the local level, data sharing across programs strengthened in 2020 through the QuickBase data platform at Family Resource Centers (FRCs), an effort undertaken by NH Children’s Trust (NHCT). NHCT partnered with the Behavioral Health Improvement Institute (BHII) at Keene State College to develop the database, allowing for consistent data collection across FRCs for regional and statewide analysis and quality improvement. NHCT aims to expand QuickBase to a hub-&-spoke model in future years, allowing more early childhood programs to participate in a shared data system.

# Easing Access to Services through an Online Portal

In 2020, NH families learned there is a great benefit to having a consolidated “one-stop-shop” application when seeking services for themselves and their young children. Over the past year, the Department of Health and Human Services enhanced its [NH EASY Gateway to Services](#) web portal with additional functions to meet residents’ changing needs.

In 2020, as COVID-19 restricted physical access to DHHS program staff, NH EASY provided continued access to such services as

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Medicaid
- Long Term Care
- Child Care
- Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) School Lunch Benefits
- Covid-19 testing for Uninsured Residents
- Foster/Adoptive Parenting application

NH EASY also enables clients to check benefits, access notices and letters, upload verification documents, process recertifications, and change reporting status. An added environmental benefit to the increased usage of the electronic web portal in 2020 was the significant reduction in unnecessary paper use.

While an online portal works for many users, others are more comfortable speaking with a person when sharing personal information. Some residents have questions about the often-confusing application forms and benefits. To ensure the continued safety of state employees and families served, DHHS District Office staff members were available by telephone as needed.

# 2020 Stories Crosswalk

STORY	GOAL				FUNDING		GEOGRAPHY	
	1	2	3	4	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	LOCAL	STATE
1. Connecting Families through the Welcome Families Website	X					X		X
2. Expanding Social-Emotional Learning	X					X	X	X
3. Encouraging Play in Early Learning	X				X	X	X	X
4. Preparing for Kindergarten Through Technology	X							
5. Strengthening Family Resource Centers	X		X		X	X	X	X
6: Advocating for Policies that Support Young Children and Families		X			X			X
7. Increasing Access to Oral Health Care		X			X	X		X
8. Addressing the Mental Health Needs of NH's Youngest Residents		X			X	X		X
9. Acclaiming the Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team		X			X	X	X	
10. Creating Community Collaborations to Strengthen Families			X			X	X	X
11. Building Self-Sufficiency through the Whole Family Approach			X			X		X
12. Bolstering Child Care Resources			X		X	X	X	X
13. Elevating Family Voice								
14: Supporting Relative Caregivers			X		X	X	X	X
15. Promoting the Value of Home Visiting and Developmental Screening			X		X	X	X	X
16. Reducing Food Insecurity among Children and Families		X	X		X	X	X	X
17: Distributing NH Preschool Development Grant Funds across Communities	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
18: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic		X	X			X		X
19: Sharing Data across Programs				X		X		X
20: Easing Access to Services through an Online Portal				X		X		X



# Summary of NH Early Childhood Strategic Goals and Objectives

## GOAL 1: POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

### OBJECTIVES

- 1.1. Support families as children’s primary teachers
- 1.2. Improve the overall quality of early childhood care and education supports and services
- 1.3. Expand access to and availability of early childhood care and education for young children
- 1.4. Create a stable and qualified early childhood learning and education workforce

## GOAL 2: HEALTHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

### OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. Improve access to and availability of universal (developmental, social-emotional, cognitive, academic, trauma) screening and services for children to promote optimal development
- 2.2. Support access to affordable health care for families
- 2.3. Support children’s social and emotional development through easily accessible services and supports
- 2.4. Increase the capacity of all families to advocate for themselves and their children

# Summary of NH Early Childhood Strategic Goals and Objectives

## GOAL 3: STRONG FAMILIES

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Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children’s development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond.

### OBJECTIVES

- 3.1. Support families in accessing the basic economic resources to support their children
- 3.2. Increase families’ capacity to partner in the development, design, and delivery of the services they provide and receive
- 3.3. Connect families and caregivers, starting prenatally, with the supports they need to promote their child’s optimal development

## GOAL 4: STATEWIDE COORDINATION

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NH’s young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

### OBJECTIVES

- 4.1. Strengthen coordinated early childhood governance at all levels
- 4.2. Establish an integrated, cross-agency statewide Early Childhood Data System to improve program effectiveness and child and family outcomes
- 4.3. Support families and children as they transition between services and programs
- 4.4. Strengthen public awareness of the importance of early childhood, and available resources, services, and programs



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