

Section I. General Information

Identification of the ECI Area

The boundaries of the ECI Lakes Region include the counties of Clay, Dickinson, O'Brien, and Osceola in northwest Iowa.

The birth-5 years population eligible for services in the ECI Lakes region area is

- Clay: 1,207
- Dickinson: 899
- O'Brien: 1,092
- Osceola: 532
- 4-County Total Birth-5 Years: 3,730

Children served by ECI Lakes Region funds meet the eligibility guidelines established by the state office of Early Childhood Iowa.

The Lakes Area works in conjunction with its neighboring ECI Areas to insure that all families receive services. For example pre-school scholarships are granted to children who desire to attend a preschool outside their area for a multitude of reasons (childcare location, parents commuting to work in another town and transportation). The Lakes Area honors those scholarships in their communities even if the child resides outside of our area, and this is reciprocated by the other ECI Areas.

Use of the Community Plan

The plan is used to move the local early care, health and education system forward. This document is the foundation of the services we provide which are based on the relevant data. The plan is shared with our local and state elected officials. For example one of the County Boards of Supervisors uses ECI Lakes Region community plan as a reference to assess the strengths and needs of services available in their community. He or she then uses this information for their decision making process.

Access to the Plan

The Community Plan can be accessed at our website (www.ecilakesregion.com), and hard copies of the plan can be obtained by contacting the local ECI office.

Vision

Our vision is that our community members will have a greater understanding of the needs of our families with young children, and that they all take part in supporting them. Our children will thrive and have the opportunity to live in a nurturing environment that is healthy, safe and stable. All community members and service providers will treat children and families with compassion and respect. Parents will be prepared to rear, teach, and love their children unconditionally, and children will be ready for life's challenges of school, relationships, and work. Quality and accessible childcare will be readily available to enable families to financially support themselves. In-home parent education services, comprehensive child care training, and in-home visitations of newborns and their parents are some of the essential services that will be provided in our community's support system to families with young children. Innovative and collaborative efforts amongst our community members and service providers will continue to insure the needs of children and families come first in an ever changing environment.

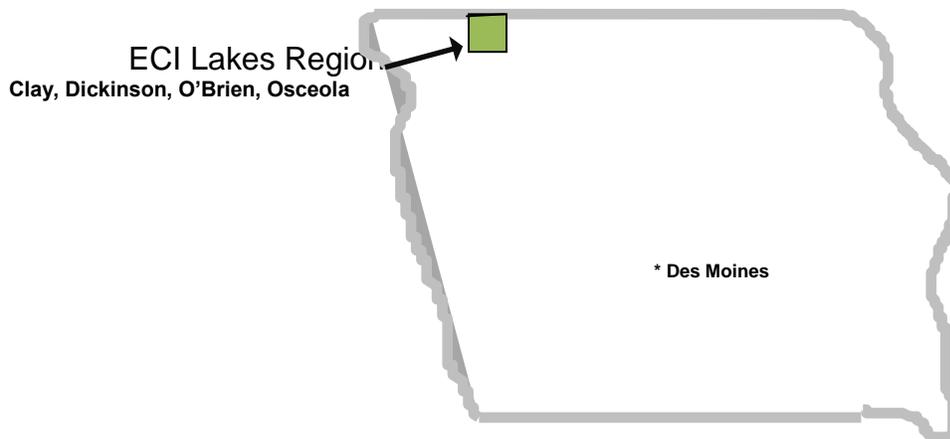
Process to Develop Vision- A community forum and subsequent board meetings were held to insure public input was solicited in formation of the vision of the Lakes ECI Area. An Advisory Committee meets on a regular basis and is the conduit to the changes in the plan.

Mission

Providing services collaboratively to families and children from birth to 18* years of age for the purpose of improving the quality of life for families with children. (*Please note that parts of this plan are also utilized for Decat and other projects.)

Geographic/Demographic Profile for the Early Childhood Area

- Over 15,000 acres of glacier carved lakes provide a backdrop for the prairies, wetlands and farmland of this northwest Iowa territory.
- The total population of the Lakes area is 54,194. The birth-5 populations range from 32% in Clay County to 14% in Osceola County.
- The four counties (Clay, Dickinson, O'Brien, and Osceola) are located adjacent to each other in northwest Iowa and cover approximately 2,700 square miles. Two of the counties, Osceola and Dickinson, border southwest Minnesota.
- There are sixteen public and private school districts within the four counties.
- Two area education agencies and two community colleges serve the four county area.
- The economic base of the region is supported largely by agriculture. Dickinson County supports a tourist population in the summer, translating to a seasonal workforce of low paying jobs.
- Hospitals serving the four county area include Sanford Sheldon, Lakes Regional Healthcare, Spencer Hospital, Osceola Community Hospital, and Baum-Harmon Mercy Hospital.
- The ECI Lakes region counties are part of the Department of Human Services' Service Area 1 which covers the western third of the state. According to Tom Bouska, Service Area Manager, the western service area is the largest geographically, third largest by population. Local DHS offices are located in Spencer, Spirit Lake, and Primghar.



POPULATION, Total and Birth through Age 5

United States Census Bureau, 2010 Census

	Clay	Dickinson	O'Brien	Osceola	4-COUNTY TOTAL
Total Population	16,667	16,667	14,398	6,462	54,194
% of 4-County Total Population	31%	31%	26%	12%	100%
Under 3 Years	635	533	559	276	2,003
% of 4-County Under 1 Year	32%	26%	28%	14%	4%
3 and 4 Years	409	255	345	141	1,150
% of 4-County 3 and 4 Years	36%	22%	30%	12%	2%
5 Years	163	111	188	115	577
% of 4-County 5 Years	28%	19%	33%	20%	1%
Total 0-5 Years	1,207	899	1,092	532	3,730

Population Trends

- **Clay County** is a small urban county and the southeast county of the ECI Lakes region four county area. The total population in the county decreased 4.1% from 2000 to 2010 while the state population increased 4.1%. Children under the age of 18 comprise 23% of Clay County's population, in comparison to the state child population of 23.9%. The child population age 5 and under decreased 5% from 2000 to 2010. The county's Hispanic/Latino population grew from 1.1% in 2000 to 2.9% in 2010.
- **Dickinson County** is a rural county and the northeast county of the ECI Lakes region four county area. The total population in the county increased 1.5% from 2000 to 2010 while the state population increased 4.1%. The population under the age of 18 in Dickinson County is 19.4%; the state child population is 23.9%. The child population age 5 and under decreased 37% from 2000 to 2010. It should be noted that Spirit Lake's low income housing was converted to condominiums in approximately 2005; this significantly impacted the county's demographics. The county's Hispanic/Latino population grew from .7% in 2000 to 1.1% in 2010.
- **O'Brien County** is a rural county and the southwest county of the ECI Lakes region four county area. Its total population decreased 4.7% percent from 2000 to 2010 while the state population increased 4.1%. The county's child population (under age 18) is 23.6% in comparison to the state child population of 23.9%. The child population age 5 and under increased 2% from 2000 to 2010. The county's Hispanic/Latino population grew from 1.8 % in 2000 to 3.8% in 2010.
- **Osceola County** is rural county and the southwest county of the ECI Lakes region four county area. Its total population decreased 7.7% percent from 2000 to 2010 while the state population increased 4.1%. The population under the age of 18 in Osceola County is 23.1%; the state child population is 23.9%. The child population age 5 and under increased 12% from 2000 to 2010. The county's Hispanic/Latino population grew from 1.8 % in 2000 to 6.7% in 2010. The state's Hispanic/Latino population is 5%.

Family Profile-Single Parent Families

The number and percentage of families with children headed by a single parent
Iowa Kids Count, 2010 / United States Census Bureau

LOCATION	2000	2010	2000-2010 Change
State	24.9%	30.6%	22.8%
Clay	23.4%	32.1%	37.1%
Dickinson	22.8%	27.0%	18.2%
O'Brien	16.5%	25.9%	56.5%
Osceola	15.5%	23.2%	49.7%
4-County Avg.	19.6%	27.1%	38%

The four county average percentages of families with children headed by a single parent increased from 19.6% percent in 2000 to 27.1% in 2010, a 38% increase, significantly higher than the state's increase.

Median Family Income for Families with Own Children under Age 18: 2006-2010 Estimate

American Community Survey / US Census Bureau, 2010

LOCATION	Married Couple Family	Male Householder, No Wife Present	Female Householder, No Husband Present
Iowa	\$75,528	\$35,946	\$23,328
Clay	\$70,550	\$34,643	\$18,039
Dickinson	\$76,284	\$32,109	\$25,459
O'Brien	\$69,254	\$26,875	\$24,853
Osceola	\$66,136	\$40,667	\$31,354
4-County Avg.	\$70,556	\$33,573	\$24,926

What the numbers do not tell us is the influx of tourists that come to our area in the summer months (in-particular Dickinson County). It is estimated that the population grows to 100, 000 plus during this time period. Work is seasonal, wages are low, and housing costs are in this resort area are some of the highest in the state. These conditions make the community vulnerable for increased substance abuse, poverty, and homelessness even though residents do not live in the community full-time (most have second homes here) and do not work in our community.

Child Poverty

The number and percentage of children 0-17 who live below the poverty level during the year.
Iowa Kids Count, 2010 / United States Census Bureau

Location	2000	2009	2000-2009 Change
State	10.8%	15.6%	44.5%
Clay	9.6%	14.8%	54.2%
Dickinson	8.6%	11.2%	30.2%
O'Brien	9.6%	11.9%	24%
Osceola	9.5%	13%	36.9%

Although the child population is declining in the Lakes ECI area, the percentage of children in poverty is increasing and at a higher percentage than other rural counties.

Employment of Parents

Families with children under age 6 who had all parents in labor force
American Fact Finder / US Census Bureau, 2010

LOCATION	2000	2010
State	71.4%	73.6%
Clay	77.1%	88.5%
Dickinson	75.7%	85.5%
O'Brien	70.9%	74.9%
Osceola	68.4%	68%
4-County Avg.	73%	79%

All counties within the ECI: Lakes Region demonstrated significant increases in the percentage of employed parents with children under the age of 6. With the exception of Osceola County, the ECI: Lakes Region percentage is higher than the state's percentage, significantly higher in Clay and Dickinson counties, and higher on average. This region also demonstrated a higher percentage increase from 2000 to 2010.

Unemployment

The number and percentage of individuals age 16 and over who are in the labor force,
but unemployed during the year.

Iowa Kids Count, 2010 / Iowa Workforce Development

LOCATION	2000	2010	2000-2010 Change
State	2.6%	6.1%	137.3%
Clay	2.4%	5.8%	140.8%
Dickinson	2.3%	6.8%	193.7%
O'Brien	2.1%	5.0%	140.0%
Osceola	2.4%	5.6%	127.8%

With the exception of Osceola County, the ECI Lakes region's increase in unemployment is higher than the state's increase and significantly higher when compared to other Iowa counties classified as rural.

2000-2010 Child Abuse Data

Rate of children (per 1,000) age 0-17 who are confirmed to have been abused or neglected during the year
Iowa Department of Human Services / Iowa Kids Count 2010

LOCATION	2000	2010	2000-2010 Change
State	12.9	17.3	33.8%
Clay	17.3	24.0	39.2%
Dickinson	11.1	18.3	64.5%
O'Brien	4.8	19.2	298.3%
Osceola	8.8	20.8	137.4%

Nationally, children from birth to three continue to be the age group most likely to be maltreated. Most of these maltreated babies are under age one, and more than 1/3 were harmed during their first week of life. In addition to the negative and sometimes lasting impact on development, health, and mental health, child abuse costs this country a conservatively estimated \$103.8 billion each year. (*Reports Highlight Impact of Maltreatment on the Youngest Children, Zero to Three*) ECI Lakes Region funded programs and community partners report increasingly complex issues facing families in O'Brien County, particularly in the area of substance abuse. The 2005-06 DHS child welfare redesign may have impacted the increased numbers with its emphasis on children birth-5.

2007-2010 Child Abuse Data

Iowa Department of Human Services / Prevent Child Abuse Iowa

Location	Number of Confirmed Abused Children	Denial Critical Care: Average Rate/1,000 Children	Physical Injury: Average Rate/1,000 Children	Sexual Abuse Average Rate/1,000 Children	Presence of Illegal Drugs: Average Rate/1,000 Children	Meth Manufacturing: Average Rate/1,000 Children
State	12,595	21.2	2.5	.98	1.2	.15
Clay	92	36.6	4.0	1.26	1.5	.42
Dickinson	59	27.8	1.8	.99	.7	.00
O'Brien	65	37.2	3.2	1.74	.5	.00
Osceola	31	25.7	2.3	.35	.5	.18

- Clay and O'Brien counties ranked 10th and 18th in rate of abused children. Osceola County ranked 31st and Dickinson 41st.
- O'Brien County ranked 7th, Clay 8th, Dickinson 23rd, and Osceola 32nd in the rate of denial of critical care.
- Clay County ranked 6th in the rate of physical injury. O'Brien, Osceola, and Dickinson counties ranked 21st, 47th, and 76th respectively.
- Clay County ranked 18th in the presence of illegal drugs and 21st in meth manufacturing.
- Please refer to the Indicator Trend Data Matrix of the community plan for children's age data.

Live Births by County

Iowa Department of Public Health Vital Statistics, 2010

Location	2000	2010
State	38,250	38,514
Clay	204	203
Dickinson	159	145
O'Brien	187	176
Osceola	73	59

Prenatal Care

The number and percentage of live births where the mother began prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy

Iowa Department of Public Health / Iowa Kids Count, 2010

Location	2007	2010	2007-2010 Change
State	71.2%	75.5%	6%
Clay	73.8%	75.4%	2.1%
Dickinson	76.5%	80.7%	5.4%
O'Brien	72.7%	75%	3.1%
Osceola	53%	50.8%	-4.1%

Women who start prenatal care late are more likely to deliver a low birth weight infant compared to women who obtain prenatal care in the first trimester. Our Best Care for Better Babies program includes prenatal care, and all ECI Lakes region programs continue to link pregnant women with prenatal care providers. Changing demographics may be impacting the numbers in the ECI Lakes Region.

Live Births by County to Mothers under Age 20

Iowa Department of Public Health / Iowa Kids Count, 2010

Location	2000	2010	2000-2010 Change
State	3.4%	2.9%	-16.3%
Clay	3.4%	2.3%	-31.9%
Dickinson	3.1%	3.3%	6.9%
O'Brien	4.0%	5.7%	42.8%
Osceola	1.6%	3.1%	93.6%

Women aged 17 years and younger and women aged 30 years and older are more likely to have a low birth weight infant than women in other age groups. Please refer to the Indicator Trend Data Matrix of the community plan for additional Lakes Region trend data.

Low Birth Weights

The number and percentage of live births weighing at less than 5.5 pounds at the time of birth

Iowa Department of Public Health / Iowa Kids Count, 2010

Location	2000	2010	2000-2010 Change
State	6.1%	7.0%	13.8%
Clay	5.4%	6.4%	18.8%
Dickinson	6.3%	4.1%	-34.2%
O'Brien	3.7%	8.0%	112.5%
Osceola	6.8%	NA (confidentiality)	NA

Low birth weight infants are at increased risk for infant mortality, illness and postnatal complications such as feeding problems, poor weight gain, and future learning problems.

Number of Licensed/Registered Total Slots

Iowa Department of Human Services, Child Care Unit / Early Childhood Iowa

Location	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
State				137,061	139,684
ECl: Lakes Region	2,648	2,758	2,645	2,048	2,704

Preschool

The percentage of children ages 3 and 4 enrolled in preschool

US Census Bureau / Iowa Kids Count, 2010

Location	2000	2005-2009	2000-2005/09 Change
State	44.5%	46.8%	5.1%
Clay	59.4%	51.9%	-12.8%
Dickinson	41.0%	30.4%	-33.2%
O'Brien	40.5%	54.0%	33.2%
Osceola	23.2%	41.9%	80.2%

County Health Outcomes

Measures county's rank in state in health outcome areas

University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2011 / Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Location	Health Outcomes: Mortality/Morbidity (premature death, poor or fair health, poor physical health days, poor mental health days, low birth weight)	Health Factors: Social and Economic Factors (high school graduation, college degrees, unemployment, children in poverty, inadequate social support, children in single parent households, homicide rate)	Health Factors: Health Behaviors (adult smoking, adult obesity, excessive drinking, motor vehicle crash death rate, STD rate, teen birth rate)	Health Factors: Clinical Care (uninsured adults, primary care physicians, preventable hospital stays, diabetic screening, mammography screening)	Overall Rank
Clay	56	49	60	44	56
Dickinson	24	20	35	36	24
O'Brien	28	21	48	71	28
Osceola	53	17	15	53	53

Provide a Summary of the Area's Strengths and Challenges

Through a thorough review of hard data, as well as that from funded programs, collaborative partners, anecdotal information, and consumer surveys, we believe the ECI Lakes Region possesses many strengths, but also faces challenges. Please refer to trend information noted under the preceding data tables.

A summary of the area's strengths include:

- This area is composed of numerous small towns which provide the foundation for a good work ethic, strong family values, and communities which have pride and a desire to take care of their residents.
- The ECI Lakes Region board is committed to strengthening and supporting the well-being of children and their families.
- We have a history of successful collaborations, and ECI Lakes Region programs and community partners collaborate across system and agency boundaries to efficiently and effectively serve families and to provide quality professional development.
- The funded family support programs serve a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino families than the general population percentage. We have a Hispanic/Latino family support worker.
- We are seeing increases in data relating to healthy children. Generally, the percentage of mothers who began prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy increased from 2007 to 2010. The percentage of children immunized by age 2 consistently exceeds the state average.
- There is a shared early childhood healthy mental development prevention and promotion approach and commitment across the ECI Lakes Region funded programs. This led to ECI Lakes Region's coordination of SEED, a group whose focus is early childhood healthy social and emotional development. Details are provided in Section IV.
- Eight mental health providers (Master's or Doctorate) in the four county ECI Lakes Region completed the 40 hour training in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy from July 2007 – August 2011. (Source: Developing a Blueprint for Training Iowa Providers in Early Childhood Mental Health white paper, Beth Troutman, et al, October 18, 2011)

Some of the challenges this area confronts include:

- The area is very rural, and transportation issues are increasingly difficult with little or no resolution on how to solve the problem.
- Our area's families face economic challenges. In the past 10 years, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of working parents with children under age 6. Single parent families have increased at a considerably higher percentage than the state. Although the child population is declining in the Lakes ECI Region, the percentage of children in poverty is increasing and at a higher percentage than other rural counties.
- The child abuse confirmation rate is significantly higher in this area than in the state; this may have been impacted by the 2005-06 DHS child welfare redesign with its emphasis on children birth-5. ECI Lakes Region funded programs and community partners report increasingly complex

issues facing families in the counties served, but particularly noticeable in O'Brien County, specifically in the area of substance abuse.

- Early childhood providers, regardless of the setting, report increasingly complex and challenging behaviors exhibited by children under age 5.
- Families are very transient because of seasonal jobs and housing costs.

How is the Data Used in Planning?

With the justified mandates for accountability and responsibility, the data that is collected and compiled by ECI Lakes Region funded programs, staff, and Board is examined and utilized for the purpose of continuous quality improvement. Some of the ways data is used include:

- Increased family support services in O'Brien County because of the critical issues facing families and demand for services.
- Hiring of a Hispanic/Latino family support worker.
- Meeting the professional development needs of area staff (family support staff, child care providers, early childhood educators, etc.) who work with families with young children by partnering with community agencies to provide vital training.
- Informing services with ongoing data and research.
- Modifying services to meet the area's changing needs.
- Implementation of focus groups to address specific issues or needs.
- The data trends noted earlier, the input of ECI Lakes Region and area providers regarding critical issues facing families with young children, particularly in O'Brien County, and the community needs assessment results, ECI Lakes Region continues to support the SEED (healthy mental development) initiative.
- Planned collaborative activities include piloting 1st Five, organizing a regional parent summit, and initial work toward coordinated intake all of which will be coordinated by ECI Lakes Region SEED.

Section II. Community Needs Assessment

Development of the Community Needs Assessment

The ECI Lakes Region utilizes a variety of tools to assess the needs of the children and families in the area served. These include data, community planning tools, statewide needs assessments (i.e., for the Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation grant), local ECI programs' and other organizations' and needs assessments, consumer satisfaction surveys, and stories from the families themselves.

One tool that the Lakes Region utilizes to assess needs is a grass roots approach to gathering information. Several times during the year we meet with a variety of stakeholders to include the following:

- Clay Local Planning Group
- Dickinson Local Planning Group
- O'Brien Local Planning Group
- Osceola Local Planning Group

A planning grid is utilized and provides a snapshot of what has been identified as a concern/need in each community and by each stakeholder. This information is useful in determining assets, as well as identifying gaps, both in services and locations, where needs are not being met. This information is not only used for ECI but for also Decat and other initiatives. It is part of our seamless planning efforts.

Data and numbers help quantify what is happening in our area. Accessibility to agency and organization websites has made access to data easier, current information more readily available, and the amount obtainable extensive. Careful review of ECI Lakes Region's funded programs' data (from inputs/outputs to outcomes) provides valuable information which is used in thoughtful, intentional planning.

Due to the extensive amount of information available we have provided a sampling of the data that is used to support our planning and implementation efforts. We maintain a massive notebook which

contains reports, assessments, etc. that were utilized to develop the community plan. The notebook is available for review.

We are excited to report that we are working on a needs assessment tool that has been distributed to numerous service and government organizations, parents, schools, and the community at large via email and through our website. It will be launched in January 2012. It will provide more detailed local information such as targeted populations, number of surveys, more descriptive needs, etc. This is part of our “working” document which assists us to address the changing needs and trends of our area.

Because of our history of successful collaboration and partnerships with other community agencies and services, we are able to access and utilize their data and needs assessments as part of our needs assessment process, in addition to other “standard” data sources. The most recent data is used along with trend data from the past three to five years when available. Sources utilized include:

- ❖ Department of Human Services – State and Service Area information regarding service and financial assistance provided to families. Information is provided at local networking meetings, ECI Lakes Region board meetings, discussions with staff and supervisors, and through the DHS website.
- ❖ Upper Des Moines Opportunity / Head Start and Early Head Start Community Assessment – This comprehensive assessment aligns well with the assessment process and service population of the ECI Lakes Region.
- ❖ Community Partnerships for Protecting Children / Decision Making Group –
- ❖ Dr. Michele Devlin, Professor and Director, Iowa Center on Health Disparities, University of Northern Iowa and Dr. Mark Grey, Professor and Director, Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa – Dr. Devlin and Dr. Grey conducted interviews with Head Start management, staff, and parents and SEED (our local early healthy mental development committee coordinated by ECI Lakes Region) and reviewed data to explore “top of the pyramid” challenges, analyze contextual issues contributing to the situation, and present options for providing increased mental health support to families and staff.
- ❖ Iowa Department of Health and local County Public Health – Data includes prenatal care, live births, low birth weights, births to teen mothers, immunization rates, etc. Public health nurses participate in our community needs assessment and local meetings/planning groups.
- ❖ Iowa Kids Count, 2010 – Because this document focuses on children and families, its data is utilized to help the Board determine priorities.
- ❖ Prevent Child Abuse Iowa – Data provided includes demographics as well as county specific child abuse and neglect data, with comparison to state rates and over time.
- ❖ Iowa State University Extension – Information and publications summarize state data and present local data/trends for each county in the Lakes Region. Local ISU Extension staff participate in our community needs assessment and local meetings.
- ❖ Iowa Department of Education – Some of the information utilized includes free and reduced lunch rates, Kindergarten Literacy Assessment, Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency, and preschool data.
- ❖ State Data Center – County Census 2010 Profiles provide state and local trend summaries of United States census information. Information is accessed via the website and email with Gary Krob.
- ❖ United States Census Bureau – Population, demographic, social, and economic information (current and trend data) for state and Lakes Region counties was utilized, and issues explored further on the local level.
- ❖ Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development – The Iowa Youth Survey respondents answer questions about their attitudes and experiences regarding alcohol and other drug use and violence, and their perceptions of their peer, family, school, and neighborhood/community environments.
- ❖ Regional Capacity Analysis Program – RECAP provides data and research on local economic, demographic, and social trends that was used in the Community Plan.

Analysis of the Needs Assessment Data Collected

The ECI five result areas and current ECI Lakes Region priorities are the foundation for data analysis. The process includes reviews of statistical, trend, and program data, surveys, and local networking/planning groups. Information is presented to the ECI Lakes Region board, and board members are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the process.

Communities are involved through each county's local planning group, focus groups such as the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and Parent Education Programs Committee, the SEED Committee (an early childhood healthy mental development collaborative), and participation in the community need assessment survey. ECI Lakes Region board meetings, agendas, and minutes are posted on the website which also provides outreach to the community at large.

All of these groups provided input and information which is utilized throughout the community plan (such as the geographic/demographic profile, priorities, and indicator areas). Issues include transportation (lack of public transit and high cost of gas), early childhood mental health needs, extremely limited pediatric and obstetrical services in the four county area, and accessibility of resources and supports. Interest areas on which work has already begun include healthy mental development, piloting of 1st Five, and conversations regarding coordinated intake.

Priorities of the Early Childhood Iowa Area Board

Analysis of the Information Collected to Identify Priorities

The ECI Lakes Region board and the programs it funds promote protective factors as strategies in their goal to enhance the well being of children and families and support evidence-informed and evidence-based practices and programming.

Priority	Rationale for Identification or Deletion of Priority
Strengthen the relationship between parents and their children through the provision of quality family support programs	This priority remains the same with the addition of "through the provision of quality family support programs." The ECI Lakes Region board recognizes the importance of ensuring quality and consistent services across the four county area. Data collected and analyzed (including child abuse, child poverty, economic, and program participant demographics) documents the continuing need for family support, child development, and parent education services to achieve positive outcomes for families and children. The Board is committed to its family support programs participating in the Iowa Family Support Credential process. The KIDS program was awarded the credential in 2008. Because of program administration changes, the Best Care for Better Babies program withdrew from the process, but will reapply in FY13. Activities of the ECI Lakes Region's coordination of SEED also support this priority.
Improve health and wellness of infants	This priority continues. Data (such as low birth weights, births to teen mothers, child abuse, child poverty, and prenatal care) demonstrates the continuing need for these services to this very vulnerable population.
Improve the quality of early care and learning environments	Because of the FY12 CCR&R redesign, subsequent award of the contract to Mid Sioux, and reduced funding available to the ECI Lakes Region, this priority has been modified. Based on review of data collected and needs of providers, the Board chose to emphasize quality improvement with emphasis on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training, coaching, and follow up for child care homes and centers in the Lakes Region. SEED activities, as coordinated by ECI Lakes Region, also address this priority.

Identified Priorities

The priorities adopted by the ECI Lakes Region Board include:

- Strengthen the relationship between parents and their children through the provision of quality family support programs
- Improve health and wellness of infants
- Improve the quality of early care and learning environments

Community-Wide Indicators of the Early Childhood Area Board

Indicator	Rationale for Selection of Indicator
Low birth weight	This indicator is added to provide a more complete picture of the health and wellness of infants. We are also diligently working toward piloting 1 st Five and feel this would be an important indicator. Data implementation will begin in FY12.
Immunized children	This indicator will continue to be tracked. It provides data on one aspect of the ongoing health care of children under age 2.

Incidence of child abuse	This indicator will continue to be tracked. This data, along with the experience of our programs, allows us to identify trends, needs, impact and modify/add programming as we are able.
Teen births	This indicator will continue to be tracked. It correlates to the health and wellness of infants and relationships between parents and their children.
Child abuse in a child care setting	Based on data and child care provider needs, the ECI Lakes Region Board approved changing its services to child care providers to assist them to implement proactive behavior support strategies that will improve the social – emotional outcomes and overall mental health of children in care. This indicator replaces the prior indicator of “availability of child care” and will begin implementation in FY12.

Please see the Early Childhood Iowa Area Indicators matrix (attached to the end of the Community Plan).

Strategies of the Early Childhood Iowa Area Board

Board’s actions over the past three years that moved the early care, health and education system forward: To assist in *improving the health and wellness of infants* the board supports a bi-annual event called Kids Fest which is held in three sites across the ECI Lakes Region. Kids Fest is a free event for families with children 0-5 years that provides dental, hearing, developmental, and vision screenings. In addition there are staffed informational booths on preschool, child care, obesity, car seat safety, literacy, nutrition, baby signs, outdoor/nature activities, and shaken baby syndrome. Numerous children that were screened at the event were referred for further evaluation; for example, serious sight and hearing issues were identified and treated. If it had not been for Kids Fest, these children’s health and wellness concerns would likely have gone unidentified and in some cases would have resulted in hearing loss and a reduction in eyesight.

Another example of the board’s support/action is the ECI Lakes Region’s coordination of SEED (Social, Emotional, and Educational Development), a collaborative of early childhood programs and partnerships whose goal is to promote and enhance children’s healthy social and emotional development. Activities have ranged from the “top of the pyramid” children to broader prevention and promotion to reach more young children and families and the providers who serve them. More recent initiatives the SEED Coordinator is working with the group on include implementation of a 1st Five pilot program, professional development/staff training needs, and pursuing coordinated intake. Please refer to Section IV for more details.

The board’s progress towards supporting quality programs for the children and families in the ECIA: ECI Lakes Region believes in and concentrates its programming efforts toward quality services for children 0-5 and their families. This philosophy was the impetus behind supporting the KIDS program in its application for the Iowa Family Support (IFS) Credential. The KIDS program was the first in the state to receive the IFS Credential and continues to provide quality services as it prepares for the five year recredential site visit. The board continued its support of promoting quality as it supported its other family support program, Best Care for Better Babies, as it applied for the IFS credentialing process. During FY12 there was a change in the administration of the program which necessitated withdrawal from the credentialing process; the program will reapply in FY13. There are no concerns about the ECI Lakes Region programs’ output measures, but the board has made an intentional shift from quantity to increased quality across all programs.

Because of the FY12 CCR&R redesign, subsequent award of the contract to Mid Sioux, and reduced funding available to the ECI Lakes Region, the Hand in Hand program, which had previously been funded to provide enriched services to child care providers (home and center based), was redesigned for FY12. Based on review of data collected and needs of providers, the Board chose to emphasize quality improvement with emphasis on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training, coaching, and individualized follow up for child care homes and centers in the Lakes Region.

Other initiatives over the past three years that the board has supported to enhance services and address the community plan priorities include the Car Seat Safety Program, acquiring free books which were distributed to children and their parents, and incorporating nature-based learning into child care centers, preschools, Head Start/Early Head Start, and other early childhood learning environments.

Ongoing board training and staff development for program administrators, as well as staff who work directly with children and families, has been a priority to enhance skill sets which leads to system movement. Supporting staff professional development is an integral component to supporting the movement of systems. Well trained staff translates into the provision of quality services.

The current capacity within the ECI Lakes Region to address the priorities of the plan: This will continue to require the partnerships and collaborations that have been formed over the years. As state and federal funding streams continually decrease, the need for partners will be essential to the ECI Lakes Region's priorities of strengthening the relationship between parents and their children through the provision of quality family support programs, improving the health and wellness of infants, and improving the quality of child care. The KIDS program utilizes other grants to help sustain its services, and Best Care for Better Babies also uses other financial resources (Title XIX, insurance) to provide additional services. The agencies delivering ECI Lakes Region services provide significant amounts of in-kind support. With the assistance of Parent Partners (a federally funded grant), Head Start/Early Head Start, and Nature Connections (a regional initiative), ECI Lakes Region programs and staff have been able to participate in local, regional, and national training opportunities funded by our partners. These opportunities have enhanced our ability and to address the priorities of our plan. ECI Lakes Region will continue to pursue grants and collaborate with our partners to do so.

What is missing? Area data documents an increase in poverty, yet a decrease in childhood population, yet an increase in child abuse - which makes it difficult to summarize what the future holds for some of our communities. Things seem to be changing more rapidly than the statisticians can document. We know that our Hispanic/Latino population is increasing and need to determine what types of services are needed, how to effectively reach out to families, how to better develop relationships and services *with* this population with our limited funding. Collaborations with other initiatives such as the SEED group, Parent Ed Partners, and Parent Partners is essential in assessing and navigating the complexity of issues and will be an ongoing learning experience.

Moving the ECI Lakes Region plan forward in the next 3 years: This correlates to our community plan priorities. Externally the board will use the feedback from the Levels of Excellence process as a blueprint for improvement. Internally the Best Care for Better Babies program reorganization to include a team approach involving three public health organizations and a hospital will provide a more cohesive family support program that will actively engage and increase the agencies' investment. The program will reapply to participate in the Iowa family Support Credential process. The partners are excited about this new relationship and inspired to articulate the program's policies and procedures with a focus on addressing the priorities of strengthening the relationship between parents and their children through the provision of quality family support programs and improving the health and wellness of infants.

Technology is at the forefront of change and moving our initiatives forward. One could not have dreamed how the internet, webinars, websites, and email would transform how we do business in the past 3 years. The board and its funded programs have aspirations of piloting the use of computer "Notebooks" in home visits to streamline data collection and have information about clients and resources at the click of a mouse. It will change how we gather and report information within the framework of developing relationships as the foundation for providing services. How technology will provide new opportunities will be territory that we will continue to explore and embrace.

The Parent Ed Project and Regional Parent Summit will involve and engage parents into the design and development of programming to meet their needs. This grass roots approach will ensure that the needs of children and families are a priority. Professionals will be the students and will learn from families.

Additional opportunities will be provided to engage board members as the Early Childhood Iowa initiative moves forward with increased accountability, expectations for positive outcomes, and increased use of technology. Relationships with Child Abuse Prevention Councils, Domestic Violence organizations, and Child Protection Services will be reinforced and enhanced as the board focuses on prevention and intervention when providing services to children and families.

Specific strategies for moving forward in FY13 include:

- A. Assist the Best Care for Better Babies Program in reapplication for the Iowa Family Support Credential by January 1, 2013.

- B. Implement 1st Five with one or more of the Best Care for Babies Program Contractors/ Hospitals/ Physicians.
- C. Expand the Community Resource Directory to include Clay, O'Brien, and Osceola counties and provide a link to it on the ECI Lakes Region website. Ensure that the Resource Directory is consumer friendly and made available in a printable format. Solicit volunteers to gather and format directory information.
- D. Educate professionals and the community about the availability of mental health resources in our area to include a link/directory of mental health resources on the ECI Lakes Region website.
- E. Implement a Parent Summit. The purpose of the summit is to determine what issues parents believe need to be addressed to improve services for children and families. The summit will provide an opportunity for parents to meet with other parents to discuss and share what works and what does not work about the services they use to support their family and children. The goal of ECI Lakes Region will be to support improved, more efficient, and more effective services. It will help shape a larger plan for higher quality programs and services at the local level.
- F. Provide training opportunities to meet the needs of contracted providers, board members, partners, and community members. Topic examples include trauma informed care, home visiting best practices, web based data collection such as REDCap (University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice), children's healthy social and emotional development, indirect costs, quality childcare/family support programming, and so on.
- G. Work collaboratively with other agencies, organizations, and community members to determine and develop strategies to meet the needs of the increasing Hispanic population in our area.
- H. Legislative Advocacy
 1. Invite local elected officials to board and committee meetings to educate them on local needs, such as flexible funding.
 2. ECI Lake Region board will propose a waiver request for flexible funding to the State ECI Board targeting preschool dollars to be used family support. The goal is to allow local boards to decide on the amount of funds to be used for services most needed in their areas versus state mandated allocations.
 3. Connect with the Child and Family Policy Center (Every Child Counts Child Policy Director) to navigate the legislative process, focusing on flexible funding policies/laws.
- F. Technology
 1. Train ECI Lakes Region administrative staff on posting and updating website information.
 2. Pilot I-Pads with one of the family support programs (Best Care for Better Babies or KIDS) to prepare for future web based data collection.
 3. Research other technology programs/equipment/applications that will assist the ECI Lakes Region board and program staff to be more efficient and effective.

The ECIA Board's Process for Awarding Funds

The ECI: Lakes Region complies with all fiscal accountability rules and regulations set forth by the Iowa Legislature and Early Childhood Iowa Board. Funding Parameters and Limitations as outlined in Tool Kit tools found on the Early Childhood Iowa website are utilized as a guide in preparing the annual budget. (www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/local_system/Tools/tool_kit_tools.html)

Iowa Code Chapter 256I.8 gives ECI Area Boards the authority to administer ECI grant moneys. The amount of the grant to each area board is made available through an annual state appropriation. Upon notification of the state allocations for School Ready and Early Childhood funds, the local ECI Executive Director prepares the annual budget based on the local community plan. The budget is based on the current allocation(s) and an estimated carryover amount that shall not exceed 20% of the previous year's School Ready allocation.

The purpose of ECI: Lakes Region Request for Proposals (RFP) process is to solicit proposals for programs/services to assist families with children ages 0-5, within the area of Clay, Dickinson, O'Brien and Osceola counties, to address the ECI state result areas of Healthy Children, Children Ready to Succeed in School, Safe and Supportive Communities, Secure and Nurturing Families, and Secure and Nurturing Child Care Environments. The RFP can be found on the ECI: Lakes Region website (www.ecilakesregion.com).

Proposals must demonstrate how programs/services will connect with and positively impact the ECI: Lakes Region community plan and priorities which are to strengthen relationships between parents and

their children, improve the health and wellness of infants, and improve the quality of child care. Programs/services eligible for funding consideration include family support (prenatal through age 5), child care quality improvement, professional development, and preschool support.

Applicants must clearly define the services to be provided to families, children, and/or child care and early learning environments. Proposals must describe what the program hopes to accomplish, including program goals, strategies, and indicators. Funded programs must comply with state ECI performance measure reporting requirements and document program/service performance through input, output, quality/efficiency, and outcome data. Required performance measures are necessary for each program/service and must be itemized on annual reports

All proposals are evaluated numerically. However, the highest evaluation score does not necessarily constitute an award. The ECI: Lakes Region Board evaluates the proposals based on the needs of the ECI area, the funding amount and requirements for each funding line item, and the priority of the project or proposal as determined by the Board.

Bidders may request review of the award decision by filing a written appeal to: Board Chair, Early Childhood Iowa: Lakes Region, PO Box 15, Okoboji, IA 51355.

The appeal must be filed within five (5) working days after the Notice of Intent to Award is issued. The request to review the award decision must be in writing and must clearly and fully identify all issues being contested by reference to the page and section number of the RFP. The Board Chair shall review the award decision based on the same information that was before the Evaluation Committee. An evidentiary hearing will not be conducted. The Board Chair shall issue a written decision within ten (10) working days of receipt of the review request. The decision of the Board Chair shall be final. A request to review the award decision shall not stay negotiations with the apparent successful bidder.

Section III: Fiscal Assessment (Matrix)

Early Childhood Iowa: Lakes Region Fiscal Assessment

The ECI: Lakes Region board identified all federal, state, local, and private funding sources available in Clay, Dickinson, Osceola, and O'Brien counties that provide services to children prenatal through five years of age that they were aware of. Additional sources were identified via local planning group meetings, trainings, websites and other community collaboration meetings. Emails, phone calls and personal contacts were collectively used to gather and tabulate the information. Many organizations do not collect data specific to the 0-5 age group and/or families and they were unable to provide the feedback as requested. Note to "Plan" readers, ECI Lakes Region is a rural isolated area bordering Minnesota in the northwest most part of the state and services for children 0-5 are not abundant as you might see in other parts of the state.

The information collected for the Fiscal Assessment Matrix provides a base of what programs and services are available in the communities that we serve and assists decision makers in identifying gaps and programs that need expansion and enhancement. For example "Parent Development" is currently being funded in Osceola and O'Brien counties only. The first thing we identified is that there is approximately \$1,500 awarded to fund "Parent Development" and does not meet the current need and our ECI funded program, K.I.D.S. expands and enhances the "Parent Development" by allowing many children and families to be served versus just a handful. Also one can note that there is a gap in "Parent Development" services in Clay and Dickinson counties (no services are being offered there via local child abuse prevention councils) and there is no provision for non-English speaking family services which we have identified in our needs assessment in O'Brien and Osceola counties. The fiscal assessment assisted the board in prioritizing parent education/development services and supporting the K .I.D.S. program in the four counties that we serve.

The Fiscal Assessment Matrix is attached at the end of the Community Plan.

Section IV: Community Collaboration

Collaborative and Networking Opportunities

Collaborations and partnerships are the foundation for the sustainability and success of the ECI: Lakes Region early childhood programming. The merging of the Decat and Early Childhood Iowa initiatives strengthened supports and services and have positioned our community as a leader in quality early childhood programming. We firmly believe our success is directly related to the relationships and partnerships that we have built. Those are described later in this section.

The ECI: Lakes Region Board of Directors, Executive Director, service providers/staff, and the community are continually looking for ways to provide the best services possible to children and families in our area. We take pride in our “action” style of doing things. As seasoned navigators around cumbersome systems, change agents, and forward thinkers we consider obstacles as gifts of opportunity.

The Lakes Region is known for “firsts.” We are always willing and excited about venturing into unknown territory. Early on the board believed that when the train comes into the station we should get on, partake in the ride, and consider it an opportunity. That philosophy is still in practice today.

Collaborative Committees

- Nature Connections is a collaborative of educators, nature enthusiasts, and early childhood leaders have sponsored the four annual Outdoors: Let’s Explore environmental education conferences for early childhood teachers and providers. The conferences have been held at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory on the shores of West Okoboji, Pearson Lakes Art Center in the heart of the Iowa Great Lakes, and Lutheran Lakeside Camp on East Okoboji. Workshops focus on integrating nature into early childhood environments and have covered an array of topics: a nationally renowned preschool specializing in infusing environmental education into early childhood development, hands-on workshops integrating nature, science, art and music, balancing safety and risk in outdoor play, bringing nature inside, catching teachable moments outdoors, and poetry and movement in the great outdoors. Outdoors: Let’s Explore continues to grow. Current partners and financial sponsors include the Dickinson County Conservation Board, Dickinson County Conservation Foundation, Friends of Lakeside Lab, Iowa Lakes Community College Early Childhood programs, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and Regents Resource Center, ISU Dickinson County Extension, Prairie Lakes AEA 8, UDMO-Childcare Services and Referral, UDMO-Head Start and Early Head Start, and the Patrice Leary Foundation.

Jane Shuttleworth, Executive Director of the Friends of Lakeside Lab and charter member of Nature Connections, notes, “The Iowa Great Lakes is an ideal location to open up the natural world to educators with our diversity of habitats and opportunities...Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses, and we want our local early childhood teachers and providers to be educators and nurturers of the environment.”

- SEED (Social, Emotional, and Educational Development), coordinated by ECI Lakes Region, is a collaborative of early childhood programs and partnerships whose goal is to promote and enhance children’s healthy social and emotional development. It includes representatives from Head Start/Early Head Start, Prairie Lakes AEA KIDS (family support home visitation) program, Early ACCESS, Child Health Specialty Clinic, Seasons Center for Community Well-Being, and Hand in Hand (a program providing PBIS training and coaching to family and center based child care providers).

SEED is an outgrowth of early childhood partnerships dating back to 2005 which focused on how to address the needs of young children exhibiting challenging behavior, the children at the “top of the pyramid.” ECI Lakes Region and its programs, Head Start/Early Head Start, and Childcare Resource and Referral shared concerns about the growing number of young children displaying challenging behavior such as aggression or self-injury in early childhood settings. Initially the group focused on children in preschool classrooms and child care centers.

A team attended the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation training in Des Moines in June 2009. After hearing the presentation by Orchard Place, the team met with Orchard Place staff to learn about their early childhood mental health model. SEED was formed as a result and

because of members' commitment to children's healthy mental development. More extensive background information about SEED is contained in the 2009 Community Plan

The SEED group's activities and actions have expanded beyond the "top of the pyramid" children to include prevention and promotion with a goal of reaching more young children and families and the providers who serve them. Through the group's collaborative efforts and shared dollars, some of the actions accomplished include:

1. Across program implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): In FY12 PBIS training, coaching, and follow up is provided to child care homes and centers. Several SEED partner agency staff will complete PBIS home visitation training of trainers. PBIS classes have been provided with great parent turnout and participation.
 2. Moms Groups: These have been facilitated by the Head Start/Early Head Start psychologist and offered in conjunction with the KIDS family support program. Data has demonstrated significant increases in moms' self esteem, involvement in other activities, and independence.
 3. 1st Five program pilot: Our goal is to accomplish this in FY13.
 4. Professional development: Through combined efforts of the SEED group, professional development opportunities have been offered/provided to area early childhood staff. Topics have included "A Day with Dr. Charles Fay" (Love and Logic), Developmental Consultation, Facilitating Attachment between Parents and Children, Nurturing Parenting, and PBIS training.
 5. National conference attendance: Some staff of the partnership have been able to attend the Addressing Challenging Behavior National Training Institutes and Zero to Three national conferences, opportunities that would not otherwise have been available. These conferences have provided cutting-edge information on challenging behavior in an in-depth, intensive learning experience. Participants had many opportunities to practice new strategies, interact with experts, and engage in lively discussions with colleagues.
 6. Local/state initiatives: SEED members have met with state officials who are also involved in initiatives and efforts directed toward addressing early childhood healthy mental development. Locally the partners are researching practices and are beginning to develop strategies which include researching funding to support the plan
 7. Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Association: The SEED Coordinator participates in this group.
- A Training Group of individuals who have completed required "training of trainers" are available to provide training on Period of Purple Crying, Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Screening, PBIS/preschool and home visiting modules, and Touchpoints.

Decategorization/Prevent Child Abuse Councils/Community Partnerships for Protecting Children

As noted in the prior community plan, our rural communities, where parents are often geographically and social isolated, had been struggling to locate and/or financially support much needed parent education programming. Lakes Area Decat/ECI took the lead in forming a partnership with several initiatives and organizations that had similar parent education needs, including Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, Department of Human Services, local churches, and area schools.

The consensus was that Love and Logic classes would be a good fit for the partnership, as we were looking for practical solutions to some of the most common challenges facing parents, teachers, and anyone who cares for children.

A combination of funding streams supported the project, including a grant from Prevent Child Abuse Iowa's Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program, funds from Sibley-Ocheyedan and Harris Lake-Park community school districts, numerous local churches, and in-kind from ECI Lakes Region (such as advertising and grant writing/management). Classes were offered throughout our four county area with a variety of days and times available. Attendees were referred to the classes by ECI Lakes Region's family support programs and other partners. In many instances the classes were full and waiting lists were developed.

Community Foundations

Due to the overwhelming response Love and Logic classes were expanded, requiring funds in addition to the sources noted above. Other entities providing funds included the Dickinson County Foundation and Cherish House.

The collaborative resulted in meeting the needs of parent education in the community. By blending funding and other resources we were able to avoid duplication. With comprehensive planning we have expanded and enhanced our efforts with more classes.

Other Community Partnerships

- Early Childhood Advisory Committee – This group was formed in August of 2010 as a way to keep the ECI Lakes Region board informed of early childhood specific issues and concerns. Previously three funded early care and education providers served on the ECI Lakes Region board and provided valuable information on the community needs, trends, and issues facing children in our area. With the required change in board make-up providers were no longer allowed to serve on the board. This left a large gap in early childhood knowledge that was available during and after a board meeting.

In response to this gap the Early Childhood Advisory was formed with providers that formally served on the board and other early childhood providers such as Head Start/Early Head Start, AEA, public health, and local school districts. This advisory collaborative has become a great sounding board for discussing early childhood issues, and they have played an integral role in educating and informing the board about the changes that are occurring in the early childhood arena in our area.

- Parent Ed Partners – This group formed in 2012 as a conduit to learn more about parent education in our area with a focus on various organizations' philosophy, curriculum, frequency of service, time of day available, in-home/groups/classes, location, eligibility, etc. ECI Lakes Region has taken the lead in the collaboration which includes the following partners: Prairie Lakes AEA, Child Health Specialty Clinic, Department of Human Services, Cherish House/Cherish Center, Boys Town, Eckerd, Parent Partners, Best Care for Better Babies, Love and Logic, ISU Extension/Family Life, Atlas, Community Cares, BHIS Providers (Seasons, Hope Haven, Spencer Municipal Hospital, Lutheran Services in Iowa), and Head Start/EHS.

The collaboration has begun to implement strategies to strengthen communication and partner more effectively and efficiently. The first tasks that they have been charged with are to review the community needs assessment and identify gaps specific to parent education, develop a format for Parent Ed info, such as costs, ages, location, etc. that can be accessed on the ECI Lakes Region website (which will be the hub for parent education in northwest Iowa). The group also will be linked with other partners such as Decat, Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, and Parent Partners (federally funded grant program) to host a regional parent summit.

Other activities included are shared training opportunities (webinars, regional, and local). The group has prioritized best practices on "how to best reach populations" such as ethnic, trauma, lower learning levels, and cultural/social Issues.

- Iowa Family Support Credential: The ECI Lakes Region was the sponsor for the Prairie Lakes AEA KIDS program's application for the Iowa Family Support Credential. The application involved the collaboration of three ECI areas, active participation by their board members and community partners, Prairie Lakes AEA which serves (at the time) three ECI areas/five counties and Northwest AEA which serves one of the Empowerment Areas/two counties. The ECI Lakes Region has a joint contract with Prairie Lakes AEA that covers the counties of Clay and Dickinson and Northwest Iowa AEA which covers the counties of O'Brien and Osceola counties to provide Family Support Service Program in all four counties. The staff is employed by Prairie Lakes AEA, and NW AEA provides in-kind for the program. This joint venture is the only one of its kind in Iowa as traditionally AEAs do not provide services outside of their respective geographic boundaries. This credentialing partnership has resulted in the best possible investment with our limited financial resources and avoids duplication of services. The KIDS program earned the honored distinction of being the first Iowa Family Support Credentialed program. By providing this high quality family support service we have been able to enhance our efforts with a multitude of partners through comprehensive planning and foresight.

Early Care Environments

Lakes Area ECI, UDMO/Hand in Hand, Child Care Resource and Referral, and Matura (Child Care Nurse Consultant) has formed a collaboration to insure that the spread of infectious diseases and child injuries

are prevented, health emergency protocols are developed, and assistance with medication and the care for children with special health needs are provided. The services of the Child Care Consultant are not funded by ECI Lakes Region, but the partnership is one of the strongest that we have. The partners meet on a regular basis to share information on protocol, needs, services, etc. The partners developed a joint brochure that lists the services each provide and how they work together.

Section V: Review and Evaluation

The Board's Process to Evaluate, on a Regular Basis, the Effectiveness of the Plan in Addressing the Needs of the Community

Local Planning Groups in each county are composed of persons and professionals who are interested in early childhood issues and meet throughout the year to discuss the current programming available and the needs and gaps in services. Other partners who provide input include the Early Childhood Advisory Committee, ECI Lakes Region Project Directors, and Community Partners for Protecting Children (CPPC) Shared Decision Making Group. This information is used to assess if our plan addresses the applicable needs in the community. An on-line community needs assessment was put into action in FY12.

An additional and new process to be implemented in FY13 will involve organizing focus groups to include people that receive services from ECI Lakes Region. Information about the services we provide will be reported back to the ECI Lakes Region Board as another conduit to analyzing if the plan has addressed the needs of the community.

The Board's Process to Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Programs Funded (Include a statement referring the reader to the annual report for the required program performance measures data.)

In compliance with the State of Iowa Accountable Government Act, the ECI Lakes Region monitors the performance of the contractors who provide the funded programs to ensure that the contractor is meeting the deliverables of the contract and achieving the specified results. The contractor is required throughout the duration of the contract to satisfactorily provide the services described in the Scope of Work Section in order to meet the desired outcomes.

Annually the Executive Director accompanies program staff from each of the funded programs to observe how the program operates from the perspective of the line staff and the consumers. The Executive Director reviews data on a quarterly basis and conducts additional oversight visits as needed. The Executive Director and Project Directors of the funded programs meet quarterly to review the program's progress towards outcomes, discuss needs such as training, partnerships, legislative issues/changes, budgetary issues, data collection, etc.

A monitoring tool is utilized to assess if services are being provided as contracted and the proper documentation is being retained. Review of staff time sheets is compared to services provided to family; dates and billings/expenditures are compared to insure that they concur; monthly billing is reviewed; submitted expenses are analyzed for appropriateness and correct amounts are reported; bills are reviewed to ensure they are submitted in a timely manner; program budgets are reviewed to determine if they are under/over projected amounts. The monitoring tool results are shared with the Board of Directors.

ECI Lakes Region funded programs present verbally on an annual basis to the Board of Directors. They share the progress towards results and provide the opportunity for questions, input, and feedback. Data addresses the numbers, so stories are shared to tell about the paths families take on their journey. The stories have a much more lasting impact than a table of numbers and percentages; they put a face to change and hope.

The reporting mechanisms provide an overall, as well as a microscopic look at what is working, what is not working, and recommended changes as needed. To support evaluation efforts an extensive amount of documentation is available upon request that includes data, pre/post evaluations, testimonials, and surveys for the ECI Lakes Region Area.

Please refer to the ECI Lakes Region annual reports on the website (www.ecilakesregion.com) which include narrative, required program performance measures data, financial report, and executive summary. Copies are also available on request from the ECI local office.

The programs are also evaluated in other ways to include:

- Outside evaluations are conducted with our collaborative partners. For example the University of Northern Iowa is enlisted to evaluate the federally funded Parent Partner project which is linked to many of our Early Childhood funded program families that are served by both programs.
- The KIDS, Best Care for Better Babies, and Hand in Hand programs conduct satisfaction surveys for their programs and share the results with the board and community.
- Digital stories have been developed for each of the programs to “Tell the Story” of how programs benefit children and families. These stories are available for viewing by the public and legislators.

The Board’s Process to Evaluate their Roles and Responsibilities and Operational Activities.

As part of the ECI Lakes Region Policy and Procedures the board evaluates their roles and responsibilities by completing the recommended tools available from the Early Childhood Iowa Tool Kit Tools. They complete Tool AA, Board of Directors Self Evaluation and/or Tool F, Internal Collaborative Functioning Scales on an annual basis. Community members complete Tool Z, 10 Characteristics of High-Functioning Boards, on an annual basis also. If deemed necessary, other community forums may be used to gather additional information on the functioning aspects of the board.

A committee is appointed to review the results of the tools utilized. A summary of the results and recommendations is compiled and shared with the board and community via the Board Professional Development Plan that can be reviewed upon request.

Operational activities are evaluated by an ad hoc committee of the board called Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual. They review the operational policies and make recommendations, formation, revision and review of by-laws and policies and procedures, following the established guidelines/rules and shall be reviewed at a minimum annually.

Policy and Procedure Manual – Proposed additions, deletions, and amendments to the PPM must be submitted to the Executive Director at least three (3) days prior to the next board meeting to be considered on that meeting’s agenda. The policy and procedure manual changes must be approved by a majority of the board membership (50% plus 1) of those present at any regular or special meeting.

By-Laws – Proposed amendments must be submitted to the Secretary/Treasurer at least two (2) weeks prior to the next meeting in order to be considered on that meeting’s agenda. These by-laws may be amended or altered after two consecutive readings by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present at any regular meeting or special meeting.