



Early Childhood Collaboration in Western New York

Collaborative Efforts to Improve Systems and Outcomes for Young Children

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Prepared for:

Liftoff WNY Early Childhood Funders for Change

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Summary

Liftoff: WNY Early Childhood Funders for Change engaged CGR in March 2019 to study how organizations across Western New York collaborate to improve outcomes for the region's youngest residents. Specifically, Liftoff asked CGR to gather and analyze information about coalitions, councils and other collaborative groups in Western New York that align with Liftoff's vision and purpose. Liftoff's vision is to ensure that children are prepared physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively to reach their fullest potential by the time they enter kindergarten.

CGR conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with more than 45 individuals working on early childhood issues in the region, including organizational leads or managers at local foundations and funders, nonprofits, early childhood initiatives, child care resource and referral agencies, county Early Intervention offices, chambers of commerce, statewide advocacy and policy groups and other relevant organizations.

In each interview, we used a "snowball" approach, identifying additional groups or individuals to contact. This information collected through interviews is provided in detail in a spreadsheet-based, searchable inventory that accompanies this document.

CGR identified more than 30 collaborative groups or initiatives in the region that are working in Liftoff's priority areas. Most are based in Erie and Niagara counties or in Monroe County, with particular focuses on Buffalo and Rochester. There also are efforts with regional reach, as well as collaborative work taking place in the region's less populous counties – particularly in Chautauqua County – but the major cities and their surrounding counties are the main focal points. Two initiatives – Help Me Grow WNY and Infancy Leadership Circles – are now working to substantially expand their footprint in the other counties that make up this region (excluding Monroe).

While there are numerous collaboratives working on screenings and quality child care, there are a limited number engaged in work on transportation with attention to families with young children (with the notable exceptions of the Healthy Start, Healthy Future Coalition and Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council's GO Buffalo Mom program and a Mobility Management Pilot project run by United Way of Greater Rochester).

The landscape in Western New York is crowded with actors working to improve early childhood. There is good and bad news in this. The good is that so many organizations and leaders across sectors recognize the importance of early childhood as setting the stage for development and how critical it is to improve experiences and outcomes, particularly for children born into less than ideal circumstances. The bad news is that many of these efforts are working in parallel – focused on the same, or similar issues, but different mixes of them and with different priorities. It is clear that many of the same people are involved in these efforts, and know at least generally

about each other's work. It is not clear that the efforts are coordinated and aligned to be as effective as possible at reinforcing their common goals.

From our research, detailed below, we identify several opportunities for Liftoff to consider as it plans its next steps. These include, but are not limited to, the following possibilities:

- **The development of a region-wide, broad-based early childhood collaboration to coordinate efforts and promote alignment:** Interviewees said that though organizations and existing collaborative efforts earnestly work to combine/align efforts to maximize their impact, they lack an overarching framework, structure or agreed-upon approach that would allow multiple groups to do so effectively. While most organizations and collaborative groups have a clear sense of their individual missions, there is not necessarily a common agenda toward which each organization is contributing and understands its role as part of a larger whole.
- **Funding with an eye toward promoting collaboration:** As funders, Liftoff members can play a unique role in encouraging collaboration and alignment through grantmaking. This could include working with potential grantees to think through potential partnerships and to understand and address the system-level implications of grantee programs and proposals.
- **Support for collaborative infrastructure/operations:** A number of collaboratives with promising accomplishments have limited reach, due in large part to inadequate funding and the limited capacity of volunteers to dedicate time and resources to these efforts. Consider the WNY Behavior Collaboration: The group has successfully launched a website offering resources and strategies for child care providers to positively manage difficult behaviors, and it secured funding to organize and lead a sold-out training conference for child care staff on social-emotional development. The collaboration itself, however, has limited ongoing or operational funding and its facilitator volunteers a substantial portion of her time. Providers involved in other work in the region on the Pyramid Model¹ – a framework for interventions and supports that promote young children's healthy social and emotional development – also described difficulties of sending staff to trainings, given their limited funding and staff sizes. Providers face similar issues with quality improvement programs in general.
- **Child care quality:** There are child care collaboratives working to improve quality or professional development for staff in multiple counties, and some are limited in reach, scope or funding. A more regionally aligned and consistent approach might provide greater impact. In Rochester, philanthropic support has provided

¹ For more information on the Pyramid Model, please visit: www.pyramidmodel.org/about.

infrastructure and expertise for providers to pursue and maintain quality over decades.

- **Support for policy/advocacy work:** Western New York has informed experts involved in state initiatives and representatives on state-level groups. There may, however, be opportunities for funders to formalize their relationships with or even financially support key advocacy efforts to ensure that local and regional priorities are advanced at the state level, and to fund pilot programs and/or studies of efforts to address systemic issues such as low compensation for early childhood educators.

Acknowledgements

CGR is grateful to Liftoff for its support of this project and to all the collaboration leaders we spoke with who gave generously of their time and insights. The level of commitment, knowledge and energy that collaboration leaders and participants demonstrate in their pursuit of improved outcomes for Western New York children was impressive and inspiring to us.

Staff Team

Senior Associate David Riley conducted most of the interviews for this project and played a primary role in analyzing the information and drafting this report.

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Introduction

Liftoff: WNY Early Childhood Funders for Change engaged CGR in March 2019 to study how organizations across Western New York collaborate to improve outcomes for the region's youngest residents. Specifically, Liftoff asked CGR to gather and analyze information about coalitions, councils and other collaborative groups in Western New York that align with Liftoff's vision and purpose.

Liftoff's vision is to ensure that children are prepared physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively to reach their fullest potential by the time they enter kindergarten. The purpose of the alliance's early childhood work is to:

- Collectively engage in community- and system-wide work;
- Serve as a forum to identify and discuss critical aspects of early childhood work, with a focus on solutions;
- Serve as a forum for networking, sharing information, data-informed decision-making and reviewing key metrics;
- Develop and / or coordinate advocacy and public policy; and
- Identify opportunities for joint and / or aligned funding of projects and initiatives.

Liftoff was particularly interested in collaboration related to its three priority areas for improving early childhood systems: **universal screenings leading to kindergarten readiness; high-quality child care, along with the accessibility, awareness and affordability of such care; and transportation for families with young children.**

As Liftoff plans investments in these areas, it seeks to acknowledge and support existing collaborative efforts without supplanting them, avoid duplication, learn about and inform best practices, and both strengthen and leverage cross-sector and regional relationships that already exist. At the same time, the alliance seeks to identify gaps, areas of overlap or synergy, and opportunities for further collaboration.

The alliance asked CGR to gather information in a nine-county region extending from Buffalo to Rochester, including Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Erie, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming counties. In addition to locally-based coalitions and collaboratives, the project team gathered information on statewide collaborative work that is relevant to Liftoff's priorities and / or in which local organizations or individuals play important roles, as well as local engagement in such state-level efforts.

Our Methodology

CGR conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with more than 45 individuals working on early childhood issues in the region, including organizational leads or managers at local foundations and funders, nonprofits, early childhood initiatives, child care resource and referral agencies, county Early Intervention offices, chambers of commerce, statewide advocacy and policy groups and other relevant organizations. CGR defined “collaborative groups” somewhat broadly by identifying coalitions and collaborations, but also individual programs, organizations or initiatives that operate in a fundamentally collaborative way – Help Me Grow WNY, for example. This approach helped us to more fully capture important relationships that exist among organizations working to improve early childhood outcomes across the region.

In each interview, we used a “snowball” approach, identifying new or additional groups or individuals to contact. Using a pre-established set of questions, the project team gathered consistent information about each collaborative group’s members, mission and / or focus areas, geographic focus, years in existence, methods of working, potential alignment with Liftoff priority areas, accomplishments, meeting locations and frequency (as applicable), and connections to similar groups.

This information is provided in detail in the spreadsheet-based, searchable inventory that accompanies this document. This report is intended to complement the inventory with additional context and analysis, and to identify areas of potential areas of overlap, gaps or opportunity in collaborative work taking place across Western New York.

Context

Liftoff formed as an alliance in 2016, seeking to better understand how existing systems and programs serve young children in the region, what other options there might be to address their needs, and how organizations and individuals who interact with those systems could work together to effect change.

As of spring 2019, Liftoff’s members included:

- Allegany County United Way
- Blue Fund BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York
- Cattaraugus Region Community Foundation
- Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB)
- Chautauqua Region Community Foundation
- The Children’s Guild Foundation

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- Erie County
 - Health Foundation for Western and Central New York
 - Greater Rochester Health Foundation
 - Grigg-Lewis Foundation
 - James H. Cummings Foundation
 - John R. Oishei Foundation
 - March of Dimes
 - Niagara Area Foundations
 - Northern Chautauqua Community Foundation
 - The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation
 - Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
 - R.C. Sheldon Foundation
 - Rochester Area Community Foundation
 - United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
 - United Way of Cattaraugus County, Inc.
 - United Way of Greater Rochester
 - United Way of Northern Chautauqua County, Inc.
 - United Way of Southern Chautauqua County
 - Western New York Foundation
 - WNY Women's Foundation
 - Wyoming Foundation

Liftoff commissioned and released in 2018 an assessment of Western New York early childhood systems and programs. The report, "Looking toward the Future: A Review of Western New York's Early Childhood System," identified assets and gaps, documented successes and shortcomings, and presented opportunities for systems change. Its findings informed the current Liftoff priority areas, described above. In a statement appended to the report, Liftoff explained its focus on early childhood:

A successful early childhood strategy is also a successful economic and community development strategy. Today's children are tomorrow's neighbors, workers, voters, business owners, and civic leaders. Unfortunately, too many of our children are not ready for success when they arrive at the kindergarten door, representing a significant challenge for

the region. Children's earliest years are the most important for development, and success in the early years helps our children to live rich and fulfilling lives. We believe that positive impacts and pivotal systems change achieved for young children today will reverberate throughout our communities for generations to come.

State Policy Context

Early childhood has long been a policy focus for many in New York State, and it has taken on added urgency and attention in the last few years, with the creation of the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid initiative, the Board of Regents Early Childhood Work Group's Blue Ribbon Committee and the Child Care Availability Task Force. In this section, we outline these and other state policy and program efforts that form an important context for Liftoff's work and collaborative efforts taking place locally.

State Initiatives

First 1,000 Days on Medicaid

This state-level initiative is a multi-agency, cross-sector effort to determine how the state Medicaid program, which provides health insurance to low-income, disabled and others without access to insurance, could improve outcomes for children from birth to 3 in New York State, 60% of whom are covered by Medicaid. The initial effort in 2017 brought together 200 stakeholders from education, child development, child welfare, pediatrics and mental health. The work group developed 10 recommendations, including expanding group prenatal care and home visiting programs that target at-risk mothers (generally low-income or young, first-time mothers) with education and support, and piloting and evaluating peer family navigation programs that assist parents in accessing complex systems and resources needed to address health needs and social determinants impacting health.

Five of the recommendations are moving forward with pilots, including home visiting, peer family navigation, Centering Pregnancy (group prenatal care), promotion of early literacy through Reach Out and Read program in pediatric settings, and data system development to support cross-sector referrals. This last pilot is aimed at sharing information about child screenings and referrals across clinical and community settings to ensure that families are better connected to appropriate community-based programs. The Pritzker Foundation is funding work with the Rockefeller Institute to work on implementation and evaluation of the pilots; Rockefeller has contracted with Melodie Baker, director of education at the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, to help support and evaluate the pilot programs.

Other recommendations pertinent to Liftoff's priorities of universal screenings, quality child care and transportation are:

- Standardize a developmental inventory on kindergarten entry: The state would adopt a measurement tool to assess child development at the start of kindergarten, which would allow tracking trends, assess the impact of policy/program changes, and identify areas (regions, developmental domains) in need of improvement, investment and policy change.
- Braided funding for early childhood mental health consultations: This brings representatives from several state agencies together to explore innovative approaches to pay for mental health consultation for early childhood professionals in child care and other settings. Evidence suggests it promotes health social and emotional development of children in child care, prevents problem behaviors and promotes interventions to reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors.

Regents Early Childhood Work Group

The Early Childhood Work Group of the state's education policymaking board (the Board of Regents) convened a Blue Ribbon Committee to develop budget recommendations to support healthy development in early years. The committee adopted as its vision:

To transform the birth to age eight early care and education system in the State of New York. The Committee envisions a New York where ALL CHILDREN thrive from birth, flourish in preschool, enter the school age program on a trajectory of success, and are academically proficient in third grade by growing up healthy and having opportunities for high-quality early learning experiences that are culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate.

The committee endorsed 18 specific recommendations, which include expanding pre-Kindergarten programs, requiring full-day kindergarten statewide, piloting blended learning programs for 3 and 4 years olds with and without disabilities and funding for local family engagement programs. Several recommendations overlap with First 1,000 Days, such as a new data system to share screening and assessment results, and the committee report states that the two initiatives will work together. In the recently adopted NYS budget for 2019-2020, \$15 million of the requested \$20 million to expand pre-K was included, and other recommendations are still being pursued. Several recommendations address Liftoff priority areas:

- Universal screenings: Provide \$700,000 to fund two pilot communities as a first step toward comprehensive developmental screenings for children 0 to 8.
- Child care: Fund expansion of the Quality Stars program to support quality improvement in early care and education settings by reaching more providers as well as improve assessment tools, staff support and coordination. The

recommendation would boost funding from \$5 million to \$8 million and improve care for 10,000 children. Other recommendations called for development of career pathways for early childhood educators and a change to teacher certification requirements to allow candidates to choose a concentration in infant/toddler, pre-K, grades 1-2, bilingual education, special education or a combination.

- Transportation: Address pre-K transportation (pre-K students are not currently bused using state dollars) by convening state agencies to develop solutions, including state aid for pre-K transportation.

Child Care Availability Task Force

In 2018, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo appointed a task force to recommend ways of improving access to quality, affordable child care that is expected to complete a study and make recommendations by the end of 2020. This followed a budget cut to state funding for child care subsidies in 2017 of \$7 million, to \$799 million.

In addition to prompting the creation of the task force, the cuts brought together advocates for increasing subsidy support for child care, providing additional incentives for high-quality and off-hours care, and other measures into a new coalition called Empire State Campaign for Child Care.

Quality Stars is the state-funded effort to support quality improvement in early care settings. Unlike many other states, New York has not fully developed a quality rating system to establish standards, rate child care providers, provide enhanced funding to highly rated providers, and educate parents about what constitutes quality child care. Quality Stars is a voluntary program operated by the New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council with 804 participating providers across the state that have access to standards and resources to support quality care. No public ratings of quality are currently available and New York has a very low share of providers participating, less than 3% in 2016, due to funding constraints.

Council on Children and Families: NYS Preschool Development Birth through Five Project

The state Council on Children and Families has obtained a federal grant to conduct the New York State Preschool Development Birth through Five project. This project intends to study and gather wide stakeholder input into the mixed delivery systems serving children from birth to 5. The goal is to improve those systems so that they better achieve the state's vision that every child is supported by a system informed by parent voice and has access to high quality, equitable and comprehensive early care and learning environments and services. The mixed delivery systems include child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, Pre-Kindergarten – both community and school-

based – and Preschool Special Education. As described in the Council’s grant application, the multiple oversight agencies, funding streams, and workforce qualifications and compensation scales across the systems result in inefficiencies and unequal access to quality care and learning opportunities.

The Council on Children and Families is made up of 12 state agencies, four of which oversee early childhood systems and 8 of which support them. These include the Education Department, Department of Health, Office of Children and Family Services, Department of Labor, and several others.

The first activity in the birth-5 project is the development of a comprehensive needs assessment. This assessment will inform the creation of a strategic plan and activities to make improvements and pursue alignment across the mixed delivery systems serving young children, including increasing parent choice and knowledge about early care, sharing best practices across systems and providers, and improving the quality of early care and education. All the activities are particularly focused on improving the systems for under-served and vulnerable populations, including low-income children, children of color, homeless children, children living in rural communities or multi-language households, immigrant children and children receiving Early Intervention or Preschool Special Education services. This project is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services over four years.

Key Advocacy Efforts

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA)

SCAA is a leading state advocacy organization with a mission to shape policies to improve health, welfare and human services for all New Yorkers, especially children and families who are living in poverty. SCAA pursues a variety of policies related to early childhood and child welfare and has an informal relationship with The Children’s Agenda in Rochester to share information and coordinate efforts. While SCAA has state relationships, Children’s Agenda brings a local, on-the-ground focus. Another related organization is Children’s Institute in Rochester, which is leading efforts to promote universal screenings. All three groups have contributed knowledge and advocacy to the state’s major initiatives, First 1,000 Days and the Regents Blue Ribbon, and SCAA and TCA are involved in the Child Care Availability Task Force.

The Education Trust-New York

The New York office of this national advocacy organization is launching a new early childhood coalition called Raising New York, funded by the Pritzker Children’s Initiative, which is funding multiple states to work on improving outcomes for children prenatal to age 3. The coalition’s focus areas are healthy supported families (including access to screenings and services, and programs such as home visiting), access to

affordable, quality child care, and economic security (tax credits, access to higher education). The coalition expects to have about 20 organizations as part of its launch in May 2019 and aims to keep pressure on policymakers to fund and implement the recommendations of initiatives such as First 1,000 Days and the Regents Blue Ribbon Committee, as well as pushing for other policies, particularly related to families' economic security. Improving outcomes for low-income families and families of color is the coalition's priority. The Education Trust-New York has discussed its efforts with both the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and The Children's Agenda.

National Center for Children in Poverty: Two-Generation Effort

The National Center, currently at Columbia University but moving to Bank Street College of Education, is promoting consideration of two-generation programs in New York State, to target families with young children in deep poverty. The programs would integrate home visits, quality early care and education, and workforce development to try to help vulnerable families establish a firm foundation. The group is working with a legislative sponsor to develop pilots that would test and evaluate models.

Early Childhood Funders Collaborative / Raising Child Care Fund

This is a national, 25-year-old collaborative of funders that work together to improve outcomes for children between birth and age 8. Its members include three New York City-based foundations: the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, the Rauch Foundation, and the Foundation for Child Development. Collaborative members recently pooled funding to launch the Raising Child Care Fund, which calls attention to a national crisis in the availability and affordability of quality child care. The Fund will initially support local groups that recruit and educate parents, child care teachers, home-based child care providers and other caregivers to advocate effectively for solutions to the child care crisis. Ultimately, the Fund will support experimentation in innovative policy and advocacy strategies and identify policies that can be scaled at the federal level.

The Fund will initially focus on eight states, not including New York, but it is offering matching grants in other states for applicants who have secured other sources of funding for programs that align with the Fund's goals.

Winning Beginnings NY

This longtime coalition develops and supports a statewide advocacy framework for early childhood issues in New York State, with a focus on policies and programs that affect children from birth to age 8. The group develops annual goals in several policy areas, including child care in general, quality rating and improvement for child care, pre-kindergarten, home visiting and early intervention.

Over the past year, Winning Beginnings NY has worked closely with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care and adopted its agenda for child care, which included securing increased funding in the 2019 state budget for child care subsidies for low-income parents and higher reimbursement rates for providers. In other policy areas, Winning Beginnings develops its agenda independently. Another item of relevance to Liftoff this budget year was Winning Beginnings' effort to restore funding cuts to the Quality Stars quality rating and improvement program. The coalition typically holds lobby days and works to disseminate its agenda throughout budget season.

Winning Beginnings NY's steering committee includes representatives from organizations that work on early childhood issues across the state. This includes several local organizations: the Child Care Resource Network in Buffalo, the Western New York Women's Foundation and Jamestown Community College. The coalition has larger work groups in each policy area which include a broader cross-section of organizations across the state that work on early childhood issues.

WNY Collaboratives: Our Findings

Overview

CGR identified more than 30 collaborative groups or initiatives in the region that are working in Liffott's priority areas. Most are based in Erie and Niagara counties or in Monroe County, with particular focuses on Buffalo and Rochester. There also are efforts with regional reach, as well as collaborative work taking place in the region's less populous counties – particularly in Chautauqua County – but the major cities and their surrounding counties are the main focal points. Two initiatives – Help Me Grow WNY and Infancy Leadership Circles – are now working to substantially expand their footprint in the other counties that make up this region (excluding Monroe).

While there are numerous collaboratives working on screenings and quality child care, there are a limited number engaged in work on transportation with attention to families with young children (with the notable exception of the GO Buffalo Mom program and a Mobility Management Pilot project in Monroe County). We have included collaborative efforts with a somewhat broader transportation focus that at least touch on access to child care or other services critical to families.

As at the state level, the landscape in Western New York is crowded with actors working to improve early childhood. There is good and bad news in this. The good is that so many organizations and leaders across sectors recognize the importance of early childhood as setting the stage for development and how critical it is to improve experiences and outcomes, particularly for children born into less than ideal circumstances. The bad news is that many of these efforts are working in parallel – focused on the same, or similar issues, but different mixes of them and with different priorities. It is clear that many of the same people are involved in these efforts, and know at least generally about each other's work. It is not clear that the efforts are coordinated and aligned to be as effective as possible at reinforcing their common goals.

A particular concern is that very few collaborations do significant work outside of Erie, Niagara and Chautauqua counties. Making a difference in the rural parts of the region is a challenge. With travel times of 3 hours round trip from some parts of the region to Buffalo or Niagara Falls, it can be difficult for leaders in counties like Cattaraugus to even be involved in regional collaborations – much less to coordinate sustained activities across the region. But there are major issues in rural counties, including inadequate child care and limited transportation options.

Collaborative group or initiative	Liftoff priority area		
	Universal screenings	Quality child care	Transportation
All Kids Thrive	•	•	
All Our Kin / family child care project		•	
Center for Family and Child Wellbeing project	•		
Chautauqua Connections Children's Coalition	•	•	
Chautauqua County Education Coalition	•	•	
Directors as Leaders		•	
Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems study	•		
Early Childhood Development Initiative (Rochester)	•	•	
Early Childhood Direction Center working group	•	•	
Early Childhood Education Quality Council		•	
Early Childhood Initiative (Buffalo)	•		
Empire State Campaign for Child Care		•	
Employ Buffalo Niagara Coalition		•	•
Erie/Niagara Birth to 8 Coalition	•	•	
Genesee County Child Care Coalition		•	
GO Buffalo Niagara			•
GROW	•		
Healthi Kids		•	
Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait			
Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Coalition		•	
Healthy Start, Healthy Future for All			•
Help Me Grow WNY	•		
Infancy Leadership Circles	•	•	
Lead Safe Task Force	•		
Mobility Management Pilot			•
Niagara County Early Child Care Quality Improvement Project	•	•	
Nurse-Family Partnership	•		
Orleans County Child Care Coalition		•	
Read to Succeed Buffalo	•	•	
ROC the Future	•		
Training, Resources and Coaching Center (TRACC)		•	
Winning Beginnings NY		•	
WNY Behavior Collaboration		•	
WNY Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning	•		
WNY Pyramid Model Group		•	

Of the 35 collaboratives we documented, the most (13) are working on quality child care as a focus or partial focus of their work. Nine are working on screenings, while another 9 are working in some capacity in both areas. Just four collaboratives or joint initiatives are focused on transportation. This includes one that is working on both quality child care and transportation.

While two large efforts are prominent in the screening area – Help Me Grow WNY and GROW in Rochester – there appear to be no such broad-based coalitions working in the areas of child care or transportation. Child care is peppered with many groups working on similar goals and related initiatives, often as part of larger initiatives, while transportation is receiving less attention overall.

In geographic terms, as mentioned above, the collective work is focused in Erie and Niagara counties, with 8 collaboratives focusing their work there. Another five are based in or have a major presence in Monroe County. Two are focused on Chautauqua County, 2 on the City of Buffalo, 3 on the City of Rochester, and 2 on both the City of Buffalo and Erie County. Eight collaboratives have a wide focus covering many of the Liffort counties (see spreadsheet of collaboratives accompanying this report for specifics). Only a handful are located primarily in more rural counties, including child care coalitions in Genesee and Orleans counties.

We talked with collaborative leaders about the methods they use in their collective work, asking whether they engage in a variety of activities, such as advocacy, policy work, convening, providing services or technical assistance, and the like. Some of the most frequent activities were:

- Roughly a third said they engage in convening and strategizing. For example, this is a key focus of several larger groups, such as the Western New York Behavior Collaboration and an informal collaborative working to understand the impact of the upcoming closure of the Early Childhood Direction Center in Buffalo.
- 10 said they provide direct services or programs, including a number of initiatives focused on screenings, child care quality improvement and health.
- 10 said they engage in advocacy and/or policy work, including a number of Rochester-based initiatives like ROC the Future or All Kids Thrive;
- About two-thirds said they share resources and information with each other and/or the broader community, showing that one of the major forms of collaboration is simply informing like-minded organizations or a target audience.
- 7 said they provide technical guidance or expertise to members, or offer a pipeline for expertise, including collaboratives focused on child care quality improvement, such as the WNY Behavior Collaboration and the Niagara County Quality Improvement Project.
- 6 said they do capacity building; this would include helping child care centers get or stay accredited, or increasing the capacity of child care setting to screen and refer children for services, for examples.

Collaboratives

The summaries below group collaborative efforts working in each of the 3 Liftoff priority areas of screenings, child care and transportation, as well as collaborations working in more than 1 of these areas. This list is not comprehensive, but represents some of the largest efforts most tied to Liftoff's priorities. Additional collaboratives working in important areas that are a bit more tangential to Liftoff's priorities (lead screening or a number of other health-focused initiatives, for example) are not listed here but are included in the collaboratives spreadsheet that accompanies this report.

Collaborations Working Across Liftoff Priorities

This section discusses several collaborative groups and projects whose work concerns *both* screenings and improving quality of child care. It is not meant to be a comprehensive list, but to provide additional context and observations about some of the key collaborative groups and initiatives working across Liftoff's priority areas. This includes, for example, Read to Succeed Buffalo and the Niagara County Early Child Care Quality Improvement Project.

Erie/Niagara Birth to 8 Coalition

The United Way of Buffalo and Erie County's Erie/Niagara Birth to 8 Coalition encompasses more than 50 partners working to improve the well-being and education of children 0-8 with goals to ensure children are healthy, enter school ready to learn and raised in safe, nurturing environments with responsive adults. It grew out the United Way's Success by 6 initiative and is the latest form of the United Way's significant work in education, which has included support for community schools and the Quality Stars initiative to improve quality in child care. Recent work has focused on early learning and child care, with providers making up the majority of active coalition participants. One recent program created "born learning trails" in underserved neighborhoods to raise awareness of developmental milestones in an engaging way in the community, with signage suggesting various outdoor activities that caregivers can do to promote learning with children (count petals in a flower, feel the sap on a tree). Another created a mobile app called Care Find to help parents find quality child care and to share with each other their own experiences with caregivers.

Read to Succeed Buffalo

Read to Succeed Buffalo's efforts are fundamentally collaborative. The organization has worked closely with licensed home child care providers, Head Start staff, and teachers at the preschool and early elementary level to improve literacy instruction to support low-income children in Buffalo. The organization's coaching work is currently focused in large part on child care and Head Start settings. Read to Succeed Buffalo also uses an evidence-based program of the AARP Foundation called Experience

Corps, which uses trained volunteers over age 50 to tutor children from kindergarten through third grade.

Developmental screenings also play an important part in Read to Succeed Buffalo's work. The organization incorporates screenings into its work with young children, including the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and other assessments, to identify those who may require further assessment for services to better prepare them for kindergarten, as well as to assess literacy instruction.

Early Childhood Direction Center collaboration

An informal coalition of organizations came together this year to better understand and prepare for the planned closure of the Early Childhood Direction Center in Buffalo, which provides services to families of children with disabilities in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagara and Orleans counties. A network of such centers across New York State currently provides information and referral services for children with disabilities from ages 0 to 5, as well as training and technical assistance for families and preschool staff working with students with disabilities. New York State is phasing out these centers, along with regional Special Education Parent Centers, and restructuring how these services are provided to students with disabilities ages 0 to 21. The state's goal is to increase efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of services.

In the meantime, a number of local organizations are concerned that the local closure may leave a gap in early childhood services and have been discussing potential impacts. Organizations involved in these discussions include Buffalo Prenatal-Perinatal Network, Child Care Resource Network, Kaleida Health, Help Me Grow WNY, Every Person Influences Children, Parent Network of WNY and Read to Succeed Buffalo. This work may not directly touch on Liftoff's priority areas, but it represents a collaboration among local organizations to prepare for a major change in Western New York's early childhood landscape, and may present opportunities for future partnerships.

Early Child Care Quality Improvement Project (Niagara)

This initiative is led by the Levesque Institute at Niagara University and works with child care centers, Head Start programs and pre-kindergarten providers to improve child care quality through an embedded coaching model. Since it began in 2010, the project has had three phases. The first focused on assessing child care centers throughout the county and working with staff using an embedded coaching model. The second phase focused on training child care staff to implement screenings with infants and toddlers and other types of professional development. In the third phase, now underway, the program has focused on working with pre-K and kindergarten staff and administrators to improve academic and social-emotional transitions for children entering kindergarten, including Pyramid Model training. Pyramid is a conceptual framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's

healthy social and emotional development, and is currently a major subject of emphasis in child care-focused projects across the region.

The project's screening efforts have been carried out in collaboration with Help Me Grow WNY, the county's early intervention program, and service providers, among other partners. Project staff has worked to train various early childhood staff in delivering screenings and works to ensure that children and families connect with any necessary services.

Collaborations focused on Chautauqua County

Chautauqua Connections Children's Coalition

This coalition includes more than 40 organizations, including service providers, child care centers and the Chautauqua County early intervention program. The coalition falls under the direction of Chautauqua Connections Inc., a member corporation of The Resource Center in Jamestown, which provides services to individuals with disabilities. In the screening arena, the coalition has partnered with Help Me Grow WNY to expand its services to the county, including developmental screenings.

The coalition works on a variety of other projects, including the organization of annual summer "learning institutes" for pre-K teachers and early childhood leaders at which training is offered to improve the quality of local child care and education. The coalition has worked with the Jamestown Public Schools, Chautauqua County Association for the Education of Young Children and the Chautauqua County Education Coalition to put on these training events.

Chautauqua County Education Coalition

More than 70 organizations are represented in this coalition, including local employers, the Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce, school districts and United Way of Southern Chautauqua County. Screenings are not the coalition's primary focus, but one of its major efforts is the expansion of the evidence-based Parents as Teachers home visiting program operated by the Jamestown Learning Council. The program, which provides home visits and services to families from birth through kindergarten, includes a child screening component. The coalition has worked to scale the program from one school district to several throughout the county by securing private funding and working to access state reimbursement funds through a cooperative services agreement with Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES, which also is a coalition member.

This coalition also has worked to improve child care by supporting expansion of the Quality Stars program to Chautauqua County. It also has convened businesses and school districts to communicate the importance of early child care and worked with

local communities and employers to try to address families' child care needs. These efforts include work to address a shortage of licensed child care providers in the City of Dunkirk and an effort to work with Cummins Inc., a major employer in Jamestown, to address employees' child care needs. In addition, the Education Coalition's efforts to scale up the Parents as Teachers home visiting program is largely an effort to better support parents who raise children at home until they reach school age, without using child care programs. The Parents as Teachers model provides services to families from before birth until kindergarten, helping to bolster parents' knowledge of early childhood development, identify developmental delays or other issues early, and better prepare children for school.

Rochester-area Collaborations

Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI)

Funders, business leaders and those in the early childhood field formed ECDI to promote quality early learning for children out of the recognition that City of Rochester children were not entering kindergarten ready to learn. One focus was getting child care centers accredited, a function now carried out the Early Care and Education Quality Council.

ECDI is likely one of the longest running early childhood collaborations in the country, having gotten its start in 1987.

ECDI funded the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership, which since 1992 has been assessing quality in early education settings, particularly pre-K. ECDI is seen as responsible for Rochester's large, high quality pre-K system (37% of 3-year-olds and 74% of 4-year-olds were served in 2017-18), and it now works broadly to promote communication, communitywide learning and advocacy around early childhood. More recent areas of focus include advocating and helping to implement the Pyramid Model to promote social-emotional development in early years.

All Kids Thrive

Rochester's leading child-serving organization formed All Kids Thrive to advocate for a system of supports for children 0-8 to ensure every child is developmentally on track and physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively healthy. The group is pushing for systems that are family-centered, universal, integrated, customized and accountable and promoting 11 policies/programs including home visiting, peer family navigation, universal screenings, high quality care 0-3, universal pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds, summer learning and more. The group includes The Children's Agenda, Children's Institute, United Way of Greater Rochester, Common Ground Health, University of

Rochester Department of Pediatrics, Rochester City School District and Accountable Health Partners, a clinically integrated network of hospitals and physicians.

Collaborations Focused on Screenings

Developmental screenings take place in numerous settings: child care, pediatrician's offices, school districts and pre-kindergarten programs. Collaborative efforts on screenings in this region typically focus on introducing Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental and social-emotional screenings in more settings, establishing more consistent approaches to screenings, coordination of screenings, and collecting and analyzing screening data to inform broader efforts (such as Liftoff) to improve early childhood outcomes. The overall goal is to get more young children screened so that problems are identified and addressed as early as possible. There is, however, broad agreement among groups working in this area that screenings are a first step toward identifying issues and connecting families with services they need.

Most collaborative work on screenings focuses on one particular setting and/or audience, rather than across sectors, with the exception of Help Me Grow WNY. Some other efforts, for example, focus on training child care and early educators to deliver screenings, while others involve pediatricians and other medical professionals. Other key collaborative work in this area includes the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems initiative and Say Yes to Education Buffalo's work with the Buffalo Public Schools.

Region-Wide Collaboration

Help Me Grow WNY

Help Me Grow WNY plays a central role in collaborative work on screenings at the regional level and is one of few organizations working across the various settings in which children are screened. Established in 2011, Help Me Grow WNY is meant to be a collaborative program that works closely with existing partners, rather than as a standalone organization. The initiative serves as a central access point to make ASQ screenings universally available to families, and to work with partners to provide access to and training on how to interpret screenings. In addition, the initiative serves as a hub to refer children and families to services as needed, to help families connect with and coordinate services, and to collect and analyze data to inform efforts such as this one. The initiative has close to 150 active working partners, including physicians, United Ways, school districts, county departments and service providers.

Help Me Grow works across settings – child care, pediatrics, pre-K – to promote screenings, referrals and connections to services.

While Help Me Grow WNY's work initially focused on Erie and Niagara counties, it has taken on a larger regional role since 2014, and is now working to expand to the other counties of Western New York (except Monroe). The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., Foundation has funded this expansion effort. Its work across sectors includes the following examples, each of which are discussed in greater detail later in this report:

- **Medical settings:** Help Me Grow WNY is a partner in the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems study led by UBMD Pediatrics. The project aims to achieve a 25% increase in age-appropriate developmental skills among 3-year-olds in participating pediatric practices and health centers by July 2021. Help Me Grow WNY is helping six participating practices to implement ASQ screenings and follow up with families.
- **Pre-kindergarten:** Say Yes to Education Buffalo is partnering with Help Me Grow WNY and the Buffalo Public Schools to embed social-emotional screenings in the central registration process for pre-kindergarten programs.
- **Child care centers:** In Niagara County, the Early Child Care Quality Improvement Project led by the Levesque Institute at Niagara University works with child care providers to implement screenings and provide service coordination through a collaboration with Help Me Grow WNY.
- **Multiple settings:** In Chautauqua County, Help Me Grow WNY has worked with the Chautauqua Connections Children's Coalition to implement screenings, along with other resources, across various settings.

Help Me Grow WNY has had an important relationship with Niagara University, which has often served as a grant-holder for the initiative. Help Me Grow is now in the process of establishing Community Connections of New York as a regional administrative backbone for its efforts across the region. It then plans to collaborate with organizations based in each county to carry out Help Me Grow's work at the local level, including a number of medical providers. The initiative's core staff will continue to serve as a hub for technical assistance and data collection.

County-Level Collaboration in Medical Settings

Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems project (Erie and Niagara)

As noted above, UBMD Pediatrics staff is leading the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) project, which also involves Help Me Grow WNY, six pediatric practices and health centers, Oishei Children's Hospital, and the early intervention programs for Erie and Niagara counties, among other partners. The six practices, all based in Buffalo or nearby suburbs, are:

- Niagara Street Pediatrics;
- Towne Garden Pediatrics;
- Main Pediatrics;
- Tonawanda Pediatrics;
- Neighborhood Health Center; and
- Jericho Road Community Health Center.

Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems is focused on screenings in pediatric settings and study of how families navigate systems for services.

The initiative is now in the third year of a five-year grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, administered by the New York State Council on Children and Families and held by the SUNY Research Foundation. The project, which focuses on Erie and Niagara counties, is one of two ECCS project sites in New York State. (The other is in Nassau County on Long Island.)

Developmental screenings play an important part in the project, which has an overarching goal of developing partnerships to build early childhood systems and form a seamless system of care for children from birth to age 5. Working with Help Me Grow WNY, the six practices are implementing developmental screenings with the goal of identifying children who potentially need services, using consistent referrals for services, and following families through the system to ensure they connect with services and identify any barriers or pitfalls they encounter along the way. This requires coordination with early intervention programs and service providers. Project staff with UBMD also collect and analyze data and discuss it with other participating ECCS project sites across the U.S. The project aims to achieve a 25% increase in age-appropriate developmental skills among 3-year-olds at participating practices by July 2021.

Related to ECCS, but funded separately, five of the six practices above are involved in a National Institute for Children's Healthy Quality project called Pediatrics Supporting

Parents. The initiative focuses on improving social-emotional development of young children and includes the implementation of social-emotional screenings. This effort is in its very early stages.

Center for Family and Child Well-Being (Erie and Niagara)

While still under discussion, Oishei Children's Hospital has been exploring the feasibility of creating a Center for Family and Child Well-Being. Rather than a physical facility, the center is envisioned as a coalition of pediatricians, community nonprofits, child advocacy centers, schools and other organizations that could share information, strategize and collaborate on community projects to improve early childhood health, as well as on advocacy, legislative affairs and funding opportunities. The effort would leverage the medical system's infrastructure and resources to strengthen and build partnerships, rather than supplant existing work on early childhood issues.

The Center for Family and Child Well-Being is entering a strategic planning phase, and screenings would be part of a broader mission to improve overall child health.

Potential projects could include working toward more comprehensive implementation of screenings across an integrated network of medical providers, child care agencies and other programs and organizations that work with young children. Other possible initiatives would have more of a focus on child health, such as asthma or preventing child abuse. The overarching goal would be to use data to identify and prioritize community-wide projects that could improve child health outcomes. Discussion at this stage is informal and specific partners are not in place, but potential partners might include child advocacy centers, existing child health coalitions, and nonprofits that work with young children and their families.

County-Level Efforts with an Indirect Focus on Screenings

Infancy Leadership Circles (Erie, Niagara and Chautauqua)

While not focused directly on screenings, these multidisciplinary county-level groups connect pediatricians, child care providers, service providers and other professionals who serve infants and toddlers with the goal of better identifying families' needs and coordinating access to supports. More specific goals vary by county. Originally championed by the New York Zero-to-Three Network, Infancy Leadership Circles are active in Erie, Niagara and Chautauqua counties. The Buffalo-based Child Care Resource Network recently secured funding to expand, revive or form circles in the other counties that make up Western New York (excluding Monroe).

Nurse-Family Partnership (Erie and Niagara)

This home visiting program launched in Erie and Niagara counties earlier this year. Operated by Catholic Health Home Care, the program has a collaborative element in that its community advisory board includes representatives from United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Buffalo Prenatal-Perinatal Network, Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Buffalo Public Schools, Kaleida Health and the WNY Witness Project. The program connects low-income, first-time mothers with nurses who visit from early pregnancy until the child's second birthday. While the program may not conduct screenings directly, it presents opportunities for nurses to identify developmental issues and refer young children for screenings or services as needed.

City-Level Collaboration

Early Childhood Initiative (Buffalo)

Help Me Grow WNY has been partnering with Say Yes to Education Buffalo and Buffalo Public Schools to embed ASQ social-emotional screenings in the registration process for Buffalo pre-Kindergarten programs. These screenings are meant to complement a more developmentally-focused screening already used by the Buffalo Public Schools in the pre-Kindergarten registration process, known as Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning or DIAL-4.

Early Childhood Initiative is focused on screenings in pre-K in the City of Buffalo.

The project began last school year and continues this year. Screening data is being used to inform pre-Kindergarten staff and other ongoing work in the district on social-emotional development. This includes the Positive Emotional Development and Learning Skills (PEDALS) project, which coaches pre-Kindergarten teachers on building students' social and emotional skills. The project team also is working with community organizations and leaders, including religious and youth groups, to discuss screening data and encourage screenings in the wider Buffalo community.

GROW (Rochester)

GROW-Rochester is an initiative to promote screenings for 3-year-olds in the City of Rochester to identify needs in hearing, vision, dental health, language and speech, cognitive, and social-emotional development. It developed out of a subcommittee of the ROC the Future collective impact initiative to improve outcomes for City youth cradle to career that was examining kindergarten readiness. The group saw that even though children who attended pre-K had higher levels of readiness, there was a need to detect and address developmental and other issues earlier than pre-K.

GROW is a collaborative of 15 organizations including medical and screening providers, higher education and health plans, with the Children's Institute as a managing partner. The coalition has primarily worked to promote screening in child care centers, to collect data about screenings and to share resources and information with families. It is also working to promote screenings in pediatric settings but has not made as much progress in that area. It is expanding to cover children 0-8 and the Finger Lakes Performing Provider System (13 counties, including Allegany, Monroe, Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming).

Collaborations Focused on Quality Child Care

Western New York does not have an overarching collective group working on quality child care; rather, a variety of groups are working on pieces of the quality child care picture in parts of the region. One area receiving a lot of focus recently is social-emotional development, behavioral issues and the Pyramid Model for fostering social-emotional competence. Efforts to improve quality are centered in Niagara County (see Early Child Care Quality Improvement Project listed above) and Erie County, discussed below.

Regional Collaboration around Social-Emotional and Behavioral Issues

WNY Behavior Collaboration

This collaborative focuses on improving opportunities for children to develop and maintain social-emotional health in child care settings. Led by education consultant Christina Fecio, it includes Child Care Resource Network, the Erie County early intervention program, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Help Me Grow WNY, Family Help Center and various child care centers and service providers. The collaborative grew out of concerns that too many children are being expelled from child care due to behavioral challenges. The collaborative focuses on providing information and professional development to child care staff on social-emotional development and positively managing behavior. This includes establishing the website wnybehaviortoolbox.com, which provides resources and strategies for child care professionals, and a day-long annual conference called Building Joyful Classrooms. While primarily focused on Erie and Niagara counties, the collaboration has some engagement with programs and organizations in other counties.

WNY Pyramid Model Group

A group of Western New York organizations is working toward community-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model, a conceptual framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development, in early childhood programs. The effort grew out of a New York State request for proposals to create regional hubs to pilot implementation of the Pyramid Model at

interested early childhood care and education programs within each region. Child Care Resource Network in Buffalo received technical assistance toward this goal, while the Child Care Council in Rochester was designated a regional hub. Participants in the Western New York group include Child Care Resource Network, Niagara University, Help Me Grow WNY, ACCORD Corp. and Chautauqua Opportunities (the child care resource and referral agencies for Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua and Wyoming counties), and the Health Foundation for Central and Western New York.

County/City-Level Collaboration Focused on Quality

All Our Kin / family child care discussion (Erie)

Child Care Resource Network is exploring a quality improvement effort for family child care providers with Quality Stars, family child care providers, the CSEA / VOICE union, the Buffalo regional office for the Office of Child and Family Services and other potential partners. Home-based providers often have training needs that differ from child care centers. One potential model the group has discussed is All Our Kin, a Connecticut-based model for training and supporting family child care providers. The discussion is in very early stages, but represents an effort to address a portion of the child care world that receives limited attention in some other improvement efforts.

Directors as Leaders (Erie)

This is a group of child care directors in Erie County who network and collaborate on professional development, leadership education, mentorship and quality improvement. The organization includes representatives from Head Start, private multi-site centers, college-based facilities and Child Care Resource Network. The group recently hosted WNY Leadership Day, a daylong conference for early childhood directors, owners and administrators, as well as other professional development events. While the group has been supported by Child Care Resource Network, it is currently working with a consultant to operate more independently as a standalone leadership organization.

Early Childhood Education Quality Council (Rochester)

This collaboration focuses on supporting child care centers in achieving and maintaining quality, through national accreditation or Quality Stars ratings. Participants include child care centers, and others in the early childhood field are on executive committee, such as retired child care administrators, the Child Care Council, behavior consultants, and the Early Childhood Direction Center. The council provides technical assistance and guidance to achieve quality, problem-solving around issues facing centers, and research emerging issues such as nutrition and staff wellness. A related but separate group, Family Child Care Satellites of Greater Rochester, supports quality efforts for home-based child care settings. The Rochester Area Community

Foundation, through its Rochester's Child initiative, funds staff support for these efforts.

Collaborations Focused on Health that work in Child Care Arena

Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Coalition (Niagara)

This longtime coalition began more than two decades ago primarily as a breastfeeding coalition. It has since evolved to take on a broader focus on maternal health and early childhood outcomes. Recently the coalition has secured funding to create a map of early childhood systems in Niagara County, with the aim of identifying needs or gaps in programming, which will likely touch on child care and early learning settings. Other focuses include parent education and home visitation, as well as addressing shortages of service providers.

Members include representatives from Help Me Grow WNY, which serves as coalition facilitator, as well as home visiting programs, hospital maternity units, March of Dimes, schools, parent outreach organizations, the county Department of Health and the Catholic Charities WIC program.

Healthy Start, Healthy Future

Founded in 2010, this coalition is convened by United Way of Buffalo and Erie County and co-chaired by members of UBMD's pediatric and OB/GYN groups. It focuses on programs and policies that support healthy environments for infants, children, youth and their families. One of its major initiatives is GO Buffalo Mom, a partnership with the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council to help pregnant women arrange transportation to prenatal care (discussed in further detail in the transportation section of this report).

The coalition has a general focus on improving birth outcomes and is working to screen pregnant mothers of more than one child for premature birth risks during well-child visits for their other children. The coalition also has supported efforts on breastfeeding and operated five Baby Cafés in the Buffalo area. These drop-in sites provide lactation expertise and support for mothers and families.

Healthi Kids Coalition

This Rochester-based coalition initially focused on advocacy for greater opportunities for safe play, physical activity and healthy food for local children. More recently, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation and other funders have supported an expansion of the coalition's agenda to include whole-child health, which encompasses the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children ages 0 to 8. The coalition recently launched a new website that reflects this broader policy agenda and calls for an end to childhood inequities caused by structural racism, poverty, violence

and adverse childhood experiences. The coalition's current policy agenda includes advocacy for high-quality, trauma-informed early childhood education and social-emotional learning in both schools and child care settings.

Healthi Kids is focused on advocacy related to whole-child health for ages 0 to 8.

The coalition's focus area is the Finger Lakes region (Monroe, Wayne, Livingston, Ontario, Yates, Steuben, Schuyler, Seneca and Chemung counties). Members include representatives from more than 60 nonprofits, government agencies, funders, service providers, neighborhood groups and other organizations.

Training and Coaching Center for Healthy Futures (TRACC)

This is a partnership of 13 organizations in the Rochester area, led by Children's Institute, working to develop coaching and training for organizations that work with children with a particular focus on ages 0 to 8. This includes, but is not limited to, training staff at early education centers. The collaboration focuses on whole-child health, including social and emotional learning, physical and mental health, and fitness and nutrition. The Greater Rochester Health Foundation funded this effort in 2018 as part of its Healthy Futures Strategy, which focuses on investments that support whole-child health.

TRACC is focused on training to support whole-child health across setting for children 0-8.

TRACC's initial work focuses on a small cohort of schools, early education sites and after-school programs, with the intent to eventually expand to organizations across the Health Foundation's 9-county region (Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming and Yates counties). Members include United Way of Greater Rochester, child care centers and Action for a Better Community's Head Start program.

Collaborative Initiatives Focused on Transportation

There are few transportation collaboratives or initiatives in Western New York with a specific focus on children or families with young kids. Work in this area tends to focus more broadly on providing additional transportation options to a range of people who lack vehicles, whether by necessity due to cost or by choice. In this section, we discuss a pair of collaborative projects that focus on transportation specifically for low-income

pregnant women and families of young children, as well as a workforce development coalition paying attention to transportation issues.

GO Buffalo Mom (Erie County)

This transportation program is the result of a collaboration between the Healthy Start, Healthy Future for All Coalition led by United Way of Buffalo and Erie County and the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council. Other partners include Catholic Health Systems, Kaleida Health, Buffalo Prenatal-Perinatal Network and Belmont Housing Resources. The project is part of the Healthy Start coalition's multi-pronged effort to reduce premature births and was designed in part through interviews and focus groups with more than 100 pregnant women. The program helps low-income pregnant women to access and navigate transportation to prenatal care and other health-related appointments, as well as to other important destinations – grocery stores, jobs, pharmacies, etc. Transportation navigators embedded at health clinics work one-on-one with participants to develop personalized travel plans. The program also helps participants to set aside savings toward economical transportation options with the help of a financial coach.

Mobility Management Pilot (Greater Rochester)

United Way of Greater Rochester is working with the Finger Lakes Performing Provider System (FLPPS), four clinical sites, transportation vendors and public transit agencies on a pilot project to assist families in getting to medical appointments. The project focuses on Medicaid beneficiaries who have not been to their doctor in 12 months, recently visited or were discharged from a hospital, or missed well-child visits. Mobility managers embedded in clinical settings will contact and work with patients to find, arrange and navigate transportation options. Options can include Medicaid transportation, public bus passes, and taxi or livery services. Additional Medicaid waiver funding is available to help patients travel to pharmacies, groceries, support groups and other destinations that impact their health.

Participating clinical sites are Anthony Jordan Health Center in Rochester, Nurse-Family Partnership in Monroe County, Finger Lakes Community Health Systems in Ontario and Wayne counties, and Tri-County Family Medicine in Livingston and Steuben counties. The project is now in its second year.

Employ Buffalo Niagara Coalition

This coalition of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, businesses, the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board, local governments, nonprofits and funders is primarily concerned with workforce development. It has work groups, however, that focus on transportation issues for employers and challenges for people who are

enrolled in workforce training programs and have difficulty accessing child care subsidies tied to work requirements.

Gaps and Opportunities

CGR's review found there is substantial collaboration among organizations working in Liftoff's priority areas across the Western New York early childhood landscape. The current approach to collaboration, however, may not be as effective as it could be. Leaders of several organizations interviewed for this project described what might be termed "coalition fatigue" – the sense that they are involved in so many collaborative groups and meetings that it has become difficult to manage them effectively or make substantive progress on their work.

Some also described a sense that despite earnest efforts by organizations involved in early childhood work in Western New York to combine efforts to maximize their impact, they lack an overarching framework, structure or agreed-upon approach that would allow multiple groups to do so effectively. While most organizations and collaborative groups have a clear sense of their individual missions, there is not necessarily a common agenda toward which each organization is contributing and understands its role as part of a larger whole. Another result is groups collaborating toward missions that are often similar, but not quite aligned; for example, while some efforts focus on children birth to 5, others are concerned with children from birth to 8. It also is not clear to the collaboratives involved in these efforts whether they share an understanding with other groups and coalitions of what it means for children to be prepared to reach their full potential by kindergarten. By many accounts, despite collaboration, services and resources for families still are not comprehensively connected or linked to one another. Families seeking assistance or services for their children still may have to make several phone calls in order to get a full understanding of the available options.

A key opportunity that exists is the potential for a coherent, comprehensive region-wide collaboration to increase communication, align efforts and increase the effectiveness of current efforts.

In interviews, there was no clear consensus on whether an existing organization or coalition might be positioned to step into a role as a backbone organizer or regional convener of efforts to improve early childhood outcomes. There also was interest and some uncertainty about what role Liftoff might play, as well as whether Help Me Grow WNY might ultimately play a larger convening role given its ongoing work to expand its regional footprint. Help Me Grow itself, however, notes that some aspects of the

early childhood landscape may fall outside the initiative's main objectives – to serve as a regional hub for screenings, provide resources to parents, to help families connect with and navigate services, and to use data to inform larger early childhood efforts. Some interviewees previously saw the United Way Birth to 8 Coalition or the Say Yes to Education Buffalo Birth to 3rd Grade Task Force as collaboratives that might have taken on a larger role, but felt that they have since evolved in a different direction or had fallen inactive, respectively.

Some Buffalo-area interviewees pointed instead to collaborative work in other communities as potential models, including the Rochester area's ROC the Future cradle-to-career initiative and/or the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI), in providing greater structure to regional efforts on early childhood issues.

Among existing collaboratives, there are noteworthy areas of overlap as well as opportunities for greater cooperation:

- **Chautauqua County:** As noted above, collaboration is sometimes fragmented, with groups working toward similar ends. For example, the Chautauqua Connections Children's Coalition and Chautauqua County Education Coalition have clear potential for greater collaboration. While they have different emphases and engage with different stakeholders, and while they have successfully completed work together, both have interests that overlap (quality child care, provision of services to families with young children) and other common ground that suggests potential for further coordination.
- **Child care quality:** There are child care collaboratives working to improve quality or professional development for staff in multiple counties, and some are limited in reach, scope or funding. A more regionally aligned and consistent approach might provide greater impact.
- **Collaboration among early childhood groups and the medical community:** While there is collaboration between Western New York early childhood organizations / initiatives and the medical community on a number of projects, this cooperation is somewhat limited, and there is clear potential for further partnership. This might include further coordination and implementation of consistent screenings, exploring further use of programs like Pediatrics Supporting Parents to embed social-emotional learning for parents in pediatric settings, or closer partnerships on advocacy. The Early Childhood Collaborative Systems (ECCS) project and Oishei Children's Hospital's exploration of a Center for Family and Child Well-Being are two examples of the medical profession recently taking on a greater role in early childhood issues, which may make this an opportune time for further collaboration. The launch of Oishei Healthy Kids, a Medicaid Health

Home providing care management for children who have Medicaid and chronic conditions or serious diagnoses, also may present new opportunities for partnership to better serve low-income families. This report also notes several health coalitions or initiatives that focus primarily on screenings or interventions for pregnant women or young mothers. Some already touch on Liftoff's priority areas, but there is clear potential to further coordinate or align childhood initiatives with these efforts.

- **Cross-pollination with Rochester/Monroe County efforts:** Liftoff's addition of Monroe County to its geographic focus area offers new opportunities for collaboration or information-sharing among Buffalo- and Rochester-based organizations and initiatives. For example, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, a Liftoff member, recently commissioned its own scan of early childhood care and education programs serving children 0-5 in Monroe County. The scan will help the foundation to inform its efforts to fund projects supporting whole-child health for children ages 0 to 8. The review included early pre-K, Head Start, UPK, center-based programs and family child care providers. The resulting report recommended further investments in existing approaches for extended periods of time, rather than new programs or pilot projects, among other suggestions. The effort in some ways echoed Liftoff's initial early childhood report last year and suggests that organizations on opposite ends of the region may be able to do more to identify common goals and strategies and support one another.
- **Transportation efforts aligned to early childhood goals:** While there is collaborative work on transportation taking place in the region, child care or service for families with young children tends to be a limited or partial focus of these efforts. GO Buffalo Mom and the Mobility Management Pilot project in Monroe County, while limited in scope, serve as important exceptions and show potential for further work to improve transportation opportunities for families. The Employ Buffalo Niagara Coalition also recently has focused on child care access and subsidy challenges in its discussions of workforce development, and there may be opportunities for early childhood organizations to play a greater role in these conversations. Notably, there is little collaboration around transportation in more rural parts of the region, where alternatives to driving a private vehicle are even more limited. Leaders involved in early childhood efforts in more rural counties cited transportation as a major and largely unaddressed barrier for families with young children in their communities, as well as child care staff.
- **Engagement of rural communities:** While more rural counties are engaged with in regional efforts, including work on the Pyramid model and the expansion of the Help Me Grow WNY initiative, most collaborative work is centered in Erie, Niagara

and Monroe counties. This makes sense, given the concentration of population and relatively high poverty rates in these areas. Rural areas, however, face their own challenges and might benefit from further integration in regional efforts (as well as resources to allow greater participation). Interviewees involved in the child care realm noted several challenges specific to rural areas, including transportation challenges noted above, an overall shortage of licensed child care providers, and difficulties recruiting staff with the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

- **Support for collaborative infrastructure/operations:** A number of collaboratives with promising accomplishments have limited reach, due in large part to inadequate funding and the limited capacity of volunteers to dedicate time and resources to these efforts. Consider the WNY Behavior Collaboration: The group has successfully launched a website offering resources and strategies for child care providers to positively manage difficult behaviors, and it secured funding to organize and lead a sold-out training conference for child care staff on social-emotional development. The collaboration itself, however, has little ongoing or operational funding and its facilitator volunteers a substantial portion of her time. Providers involved in other work on the Pyramid Model or quality improvement efforts in the region in general also described difficulties of sending staff to trainings, given their limited funding.

Some Systems Issues Merit Additional Attention

Difficult systemic issues limit the ability of some collaborations to make significant impact. These include:

- Organizations that work on child care emphasized the challenges of **limited funding and compensation for their employees**. Collaborations in this area are doing important work to improve quality and provide critical professional development, but many issues related to funding and reimbursement rates are outside their control and in the hands of state decision-makers. There may be opportunities for greater advocacy work at the regional level or to further develop partnerships with organizations like Winning Beginnings NY, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy or The Children's Agenda.
- Per several interviewees, there is limited focus on **supporting families and children who receive services navigating transitions in early learning**. Children move from the early intervention system (through age 2) to committees on preschool special education (ages 3 to 5) to committees on special education once children enter kindergarten, and there is limited support to ensure these transitions

are handled smoothly with continuity of services. This may not fall directly within Liftoff's priority areas, but there may be opportunities to address this issue in child care settings and/or through organizations that provide screenings and informational resources to parents.

- There are relatively few child care quality improvement efforts that include **home-based family child care providers or legally exempt providers**, which represent child care settings for a large number of children in this region. While some efforts are under way to address this, including early discussions of the potential to create a family child care network in the Erie County area, there is clear potential for further exploration or investment.
- Several interviewees stressed the importance of embedding screenings as part of a larger system that has capacity to **connect families with the services they need**. There are limited providers of early intervention services or service coordinators in parts of the region, which makes connecting with these services difficult. Interviewees emphasized the value of screenings, but primarily as a first step to get families the help they need.
- Transportation is a critical issue for families to access opportunities and resources for their children, but a number of interviewees noted **other important barriers to access** and expressed interest in exploring these issues more broadly. This includes, among other issues, availability of child care subsidies for parents and language barriers in parts of the region with large refugee populations.

Key Takeaways

The observations above hopefully provide issues and options for Liftoff to consider as it plans its next steps in promoting screenings, quality child care and transportation for families with young children.

There is tremendous commitment and dedication in Western New York to work toward improved early childhood outcomes that crosses organizations and sectors. Much energy is being expended toward similar goals, and we believe that energy could be harnessed to be an even more powerful force for change than it currently is.

With Liftoff's region encompassing two mid-sized metro areas around Buffalo and Rochester, comparisons between the two are natural and informative (and not intended in a competitive or judgmental spirit). We observe some unique assets in the Buffalo region, including more collaboration between early childhood and the medical community (particularly regarding screenings in pediatric settings).

The Rochester region seems to have more organized philanthropic and infrastructure support of its child care sector through ECDI, ECEQC and Family Child Care Satellites

of Greater Rochester, efforts that have been funded in some cases for decades largely through the Rochester Area Community Foundation. This may be an opportunity for Liftoff to explore in Western New York.

In addition, Rochester has large initiatives (ECDI and ROC the Future) and an advocacy center (The Children's Agenda) that pay a lot of attention to early childhood. ECDI and ROC the Future offer potential models for Liftoff to consider as it thinks about ways to support and enhance collaboration in this area, though it should be noted that both ECDI and ROC the Future are focused more narrowly on the City of Rochester, compared to the 9-county region that Liftoff is concerned with.

The benefits of a large table such as ECDI or ROC the Future include not only the potential for more coordination and collaboration but also a clear pipeline to state and local policy and advocacy initiatives. The inclusion of key Western New York people such as Melodie Baker of the United Way, Dennis Kuo of the Children's Hospital and Sheri Scavone of the WNY Women's Foundation would help ensure that local experts and practitioners keep up to date and have input into key initiatives such as First 1,000 Days and advocacy groups like Winning Beginnings. To be clear, these connections already exist but might be coordinated more effectively to maximize Western New York's impact on these statewide policy initiatives.

With some in the early childhood space already feeling as though the number of collaborations is unwieldy, the creation of a new, large group may or not be welcomed or understood. It would be important to carefully think through the value proposition before attempting to start up.

As funders, Liftoff members can play a unique role in encouraging collaboration and alignment through grantmaking. This could include working with potential grantees to think through potential partnerships and to understand and address the system-level implications of grantee programs and proposals.

It is also important, we think, for Liftoff members to consider carefully how they want to engage in the critical work of policy analysis and advocacy. Western New York has informed experts involved in state initiatives and representatives on state-level groups. There may, however, be opportunities for funders to formalize their relationships with or even financially support key advocacy efforts to ensure that local and regional priorities are advanced at the state level, and to fund pilot programs and/or studies of efforts to address systemic issues such as low compensation for early childhood educators.