

# *Huntingdon County*



Child  
Care &  
Early  
Education Initiative

*Executive Summary*  
*2004-2005*

## Acknowledgements

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Charles States, *Commissioner*

Roy Thomas, *Commissioner*

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Huntingdon County Child Care and Education Initiative



A project of

## **Families and Communities Together Collaborative**

*...promoting healthy children and youth, strong families and safe communities  
in Huntingdon County*

# Care4Kids Initiative

## *Executive Summary*

### **Introduction**

Care4Kids is a community-based early care and education planning team working with parents, child care and early education providers, and member organizations of Families and Communities Together (FACT) Collaborative to promote a comprehensive plan for enhancing early care and education in Huntingdon County.



Families and Communities Together (FACT)

Collaborative to promote a comprehensive plan for enhancing early care and education in Huntingdon County.

### **Vision/Mission Statement**

Our vision that children in Huntingdon County will be healthy, safe, successful and ready for life. Our mission is to promote quality, affordable, and accessible child care for all children of Huntingdon County. To accomplish our mission, we support parents and child care and early education providers with the best tools, skills, and resources to create a healthy, safe, and educationally-appropriate child care environment.

### **Primary Initiative Goal**

The primary focus of the Initiative is to improve the quality of life of children from birth to 16 years of age through activities in five focal areas of concern: (1) capacity, (2) quality of early care and education, (3) child care provider career development, (4) child care for children with special needs, and (5) public and parent awareness and education.

### **Local Planning Committee Structure**

The Huntingdon County Child Care and Education Initiative, now known as Care4Kids Initiative, began its work in March 2003 under the sponsorship of Families and Communities Together (FACT) Collaborative as part of their Children's Action Team to develop a comprehensive early care and education plan for Huntingdon County.

**Organizational infrastructure.** An Executive Committee representing the community, Child Care Information Services (CCIS), business and the Collaborative coordinates the work of the Initiative. The current membership (35 active members) consists of child care providers, parents, local and state government, education, community-based organizations, and social service agencies actively working in subcommittees to achieve the Initiative's major goals. Group leadership and consensus-based decision-making structure how the Initiative identifies and addresses early care and education concerns.

The members of the Initiative come from the various regions of the county associated with the four school districts: Huntingdon Areas School District, Juniata Valley School District, Mount Union Area School District, and Southern Huntingdon County School District.

## Progress for Planning Year 2003-2004



Care4Kids has worked toward the following goals, objectives, and activities with respect to its primary goal of developing a comprehensive,

integrated and quality early care and education system in the past year:

### 1. Capacity Committee: Increase the Capacity for Child Care in Huntingdon County

- *Increase the capacity of the current child care provider system.* Increased the number of child care providers from 3 to 7 applying for the “First Step to Stars” grant opportunity with all (100%) receiving funding to enhance the quality and capacity of child care services.

- *Increase accessibility to child care services by reducing barriers to service.* In collaboration with the local Child Care Information Service and the Huntingdon County Planning Office created a Geographical Information System (GIS) map of child care providers in the county.



This assists the CCIS and Capacity Committee to identify gaps in child care and early education services within the county, and parents and employers to more easily access child care services.

- *Address costs associated with capacity-building initiatives and investigate available and additional funding sources.* Collaborated with Head Start/ Early Head Start to develop and submit an Early Learning Opportunities Act federal grant to improve early literacy and to support and expand early care and education throughout Huntingdon County. While not

funded, the workgroup intends to resubmit a revised competitive application in the future to provide tools and materials and provider education about early learning opportunities and literacy activities.

### 2. Quality Committee: Improve the Quality of Child Care and Education in Huntingdon County

- *Increase Safety of Child Care Provider Sites.* Collaborated with the local Emergency Management Coordinator to plan, develop, and present a provider training about ways to create an approved emergency plan. Of 35 child care providers, 33 (94 % attendance rate) attended the training. The EMS Coordinator reviewed each plan to ensure its coordination with the county’s emergency plan.

- *Increase Funding to Ensure Quality of Services and Accessibility.* Increased from 3 to 7, the number of child care providers applying for the “First Step to Stars” grant opportunity with all (100%) receiving funding to enhance the quality and capacity of child care services.

- *Ensure that Child Care Services are Reliable and Dependable.* Action yet to be taken.

- *Improve System of Communication among Providers, Parents, and State.* Conducted regular meetings of Care4Kids where providers, parents, and state representatives were informed of and discussed local and state needs and initiatives. A “Provider Support Network” of home, group, and center providers was formed to discuss issues and needs, and to share resources.

- *Improve Quality Assurance Monitoring of Child Care Services.* Cooperated with Smart Start, Center County Local Community Planning Initiative, to distribute window clings to providers and their families that say “I Can Be

At Work Today Because Of Quality Child Care,” as a way to increase awareness of, need for, and extent of quality child care used by employees.

3. Career Development Committee: Increase Child Care Career Development Opportunities within Huntingdon County

- *Develop training schedule that meets the local needs of Huntingdon County child care providers.* Local providers and Penn State Cooperative Extension created a Huntingdon County Child Care Provider Training Calendar, to increase access to local DPW and TQAS approved hours for those involved with Keystone STARS.

- *Increase the number of available training opportunities.* Developed a local training calendar that increases the number of local trainings from 2 to 10. DPW credit hours will be available as well as “one time” TQAS certification to qualify the training toward the Keystone STARS process.

- *Make trainings more accessible to providers throughout Huntingdon County.* Local training events are scheduled to increase access and address a high priority issue for providers who previously traveled out of the county for training. Local trainers have been approved for a “one time” TQAS certification to qualify the training toward the Keystone STARS process. Training was leveraged from state and local systems and trainers to provide local, low or no cost training to child care providers.

4. Special Needs Committee: Increase the Availability and Accessibility of Child Care Services to Families with Special Needs Children

- *Identify the needs of families with children with special needs.* Action yet to be taken.

- *Increase the availability of child care that makes accommodations for children with mental and physical disabilities.* Action yet to be taken.

- *Increase linkages among family, child care providers, and educational system.* Worked within the various other committees to ensure that planning process was aware of, considered, and included special needs issues.

5. Parent/Public Education Committee: Increase Parent and Public Education relative to Child Care Services in Huntingdon County

- *Develop a media strategy to promote child care.* Created a new name and logo for easier public identification and awareness of the Care4Kids Initiative.

- *Develop stronger relationships with the medical community (i.e., pediatricians and medical centers), non-profit and business sectors.* Plans to produce and distribute a literacy development tool, “Books for Babies” booklet, which lists available children’s books in the public library, parenting tools and tips for early literacy, and local parenting resources is in process. Window clings have been developed and will be distributed by providers to their families that say “I Can Be At Work Today Because Of Quality Child Care,” as a way to increase awareness of, need for and utilization of quality of child care used by employees.

- *Develop educational and promotional materials on quality child care.* Care4Kids “Fact Sheets” are being finalized to serve as the Initiative’s brochure, community report card, and other topics on readiness for school, developmental stages, etc. for distribution to parents at work, community education events, and health fairs.

# Quality and Capacity Child Care Plan 2004-2005

## Goals and Objectives

Last year's focus upon: 1) assessing and strengthening the child care provider system and 2) increasing parent and public awareness of the importance of quality child care in Huntingdon County will continue within a broader framework--quality early learning system--consistent with state and federal initiatives.

Accordingly, the major goal of the initiative for 2004-2005 has been refined to: *Develop a comprehensive quality early learning system that involves partnership and collaboration at the local level so that children are ready for school and success in life.*

The Initiative's priorities have been linked to the Commonwealth (CP) and federal BUILD Initiative's (BI) early learning priorities. Each respective committee (Capacity, Quality, Professional Development, Advocacy, and Parent/Public Education) will be responsible for implementing the following goals, objectives, and activities in 2004:

### 1. Increase the Capacity of Early Care and Education in Huntingdon County

a. *Increase the capacity of the current early care and education system.* The Capacity Committee will focus upon:

- 1) providing support and advocacy to encourage the adoption of full-day kindergarten in the remaining district;
- 2) recruiting, encouraging and assisting new child care providers to seek technical assistance when setting up their business to fill a current service gap.

b. *Increase accessibility to quality early care and learning services by reducing financial and availability barriers to service.* Proposed activities include:

- 1) monitoring the number of regulated and unregulated early care providers,
- 2) encourage awareness of and complete participation in available funding and training programs, and
- 3) ensure the functionality of FACT Collaborative's website and availability of the GIS map of child care providers and provide quarterly updating of child care provider information and resources.

c. *Address costs associated with capacity-building initiatives and investigate available and additional funding sources to assist early care educators.* Activities to include:

- 1) consult with current providers about regulations,
- 2) reduce these barriers with available technical and financial assistance through CCRD, and
- 3) conduct a provider technical assistance training program.

### 2. Improve the Quality of Child Care and Education in Huntingdon County

a. *Increase Safety of Child Care Provider Sites.* Activities to be completed by the Quality Committee will include:

- 1) coordinate and conduct two safety training programs for child care providers with safety incentives to induce unregulated providers to attend,

2) distribute a safety checklist to parents for home use and when selecting or using a child care provider with emphasis upon unregulated neighbor/relative child care providers.

b. *Increase Funding to Ensure Quality of Services and Accessibility.* Actions to be completed include:

1) ensure that all providers are aware of funding opportunities and,

2) coordinate technical support within two weeks of an announcement and arrange, as needed, a training event to complete necessary applications.

c. *Improve System of Communication among Providers, Parents, and State.* Actions to include:

1) conduct six (6) Care4Kids meetings and distribute minutes and announcements on the Collaborative's website,

2) continue to support and develop the monthly "Provider Support Network" meetings, and

3) develop a Parent Forum for increased awareness of the importance of early care, general expectations of skills required for school readiness, and early learning opportunities to increase school readiness.

d. *Improve Quality Assurance Monitoring of Child Care Services.* The committee will accomplish the following:

1) research indicators of quality early care and education,

2) develop a monitoring

instrument/survey for use by parents and providers to enhance the quality of child care,

3) devise a method for measuring whether the instrument changed the quality of parental and professional child care, and

4) report the findings to the Care4Kids Initiative.

### **3. Increase Child Care Career Development Opportunities within Huntingdon County**

a. *Implement the approved training schedule to increase the availability and accessibility of training opportunities.* Activities to be accomplished by the Career Development Committee include:

1) coordinate training events and publicize the calendar through ads, web and provider list,

2) coordinate events with trainers and credentialing organizations to ensure proper credit is available,

3) determine type of participant incentives to provide following each training, and

4) conduct and evaluate the training event and post the results of the event on the website within 30 days of the event.

b. *Increase the number of cross-systems trainings to promote and enhance early learning opportunities provided by early care professionals.* To accomplish this objective, the following will occur:

1) committee will coordinate and develop a cross-system training event with early

care providers and full-day kindergarten school districts to enhance early learning opportunities, school readiness expectations, and knowledge of state standards, and

2) develop a countywide early learning opportunities and school readiness booklet for use by parents and child care providers to enhance their understanding of the districts' school readiness expectations.

#### **4. Increase the Availability and Accessibility of Child Care Services to Families with Special Needs Children**

a. *Identify the needs of families with children with special.* The Special Needs Committee will:

1) survey families with children with special needs as to their child care needs, and

2) report their findings.

b. *Increase the availability of child care that makes accommodations for children with mental and physical disabilities.* The committee will:

1) prepare and conduct a training for child care providers to increase their knowledge and skills in early identification of and in dealing more effectively with children with disabilities, and

2) produce a information packet for parents and child care providers about the early warning signs of a disability to increase early identification and referral sources for follow-up.

c. *Increase linkages among family, child care providers, and educational system.* The committee will:

1) increase by two the number of early screenings of infant and toddlers at regularly scheduled child-oriented community events (October, April, May, June) and provide follow-up contact for those in need of more complete evaluations.

#### **5. Increase Parent and Public Education relative to the Importance and Value of Early Care and Education in Huntingdon County**

a. *Develop a media strategy to promote child care services in Huntingdon County.* Activities to be completed by the Education Committee will be:

1) implement Care4Kids flier campaign to promote quality early care, school readiness, safety, parental and local stakeholder advocacy of affordable early care services, etc..

b. *Develop stronger relationships with the medical community (i.e., pediatricians and medical centers), non-profit and business sectors.* The Parent/Public Awareness committee will:

1) implement the "Books for Baby" program by identifying needed books,

2) recruit business and community financial support, and

3) announce and launch the distribution of the booklet.

c. *Develop educational and promotional materials on quality child care.* The

committee will:

1) go to scale with the Care4Kids fliers, “I Can Be at Work Today Because of Quality Child Care”, and “Books for Baby”; and

2) provide materials for posting on the Collaborative’s website on a quarterly basis related to quality care, early learning, school readiness, and other related topics.

d. *Develop an outcomes monitoring and reporting system on the impact of early care and education in Huntingdon County.* Activities associated with this objective will be to:

1) collect, organize and report information about the status of children, youth and families in Huntingdon County;

2) identify a core set of expectations that schools have regarding school readiness, coordinate these with state and national indicators, and with the Parent and Public Awareness Committee, promote increased parental and early care provider understanding of school readiness expectations and early learning opportunities to prepare children for pre-school;

3) develop relationships with each full-day kindergarten so that the current status of entering children’s readiness for school can be assessed as baseline data to measure the impact of full-day kindergarten;

4) inform the Initiative semi-annually of progress toward improvements of children in the county related to school readiness as well as systems integration

efforts from data available from school districts; and

5) collaborate with the Parent and Public Awareness Committee in the development and presentation of an annual community report and have it available to the public through the (FACT) Collaborative’s website.

### **Care4Kids Advisory Group**

The membership of the Care4Kids Advisory Group, by stakeholder groups, number and percentage of the group, is as follows: child care providers (6, 23%); early intervention (5, 19%); parents (4, 15%); education and school districts (3, 12%); Head Start (2, 8%); communities-based organization (2, 8%); social services organizations (2, 8%); government services (1, 4%); and business (1, 4%).

Early membership—at the inception of the initiative--consisted of child care providers, parents and early intervention and prevention specialists. For the current planning year, the following will occur:

- a) recruit early childhood professionals and district administrators from the remaining two school districts,
- b) recruit additional business sector representatives to support early care and learning advocacy and activities; and
- c) recruit an additional county-level official to participate and advocate for early care and learning at the local and state level.

The role of the Care4Kids Advisory Group is to implement identified goals and objectives, identify unmet needs, strategize a course of action and monitor the community agenda, and collect and disseminate outcome

information related to early care and learning.

## **Resource Development**

In the current planning year, the following resource development activities will occur:

1. Business sector support for implementing the “Books for Baby” booklet project.
2. The Resource Development Committee of FACT Collaborative will identify at least one additional funding source to support early learning, literacy, professional early care development, and/or parent involvement.
3. School district and business support of a teacher and child care provider cross-system training on and publication of a parent resource book about early learning environments and opportunities.
4. Business support (cooperative project with Huntingdon County Business and Industry and Huntingdon Area Chamber of Commerce) to conduct two (2) business breakfasts related to early care and education to raise awareness and to seek resource sharing of parent and public awareness campaign.

## **Child Care Systems Infrastructure Development**

The development of a professional development and training calendar consisting of DPW and TQAS approved trainings has been an important infrastructure development

in the previous year.

Support of the local training system (PA Pathways and Keystone STARS) and Penn State Cooperative Extension has been instrumental in assuring that training hours will apply to the respective programs, and are more widely and easily available within the county for child care providers.

In the current planning year, greater emphasis and support of local training events will continue in close collaboration with CCRD and other state-funded training programs.

## **Community Collaboration**

There are a limited number of local planning efforts within Huntingdon County: Huntingdon County Healthy Communities Partnership (SHIP), Head Start, Literacy Council, and Families and Communities Together Collaborative and its associated planning endeavors (Care4Kids and Huntingdon County Community Prevention Collaborative Initiative). Members of Care4Kids are actively involved and key leaders in these planning initiatives as they relate to child development, school readiness and success, and prevention-oriented services to young children and their families.

Several initiatives are working toward the development of a common set of community indicators and a comprehensive community “Report Card.” Care4Kids will be involved in developing the early childhood, and early care and education section of the Report Card.