



# ZERO TO FIVE

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Introduction
  - 02** Zero to Fives Impact Areas and Outcomes
  - 03** Key Metrics: Three Areas of Impact
- 04** Harnessing the Power of the Zero to Five Network
- 05** Zero to Five Montana: Connecting, Convening, and Communicating for Statewide Impact
- 08** Local Community Collaborative Profiles
  - 09** Zero to Five Missoula
  - 11** Mineral County Family Connection Collaborative
  - 13** Zero to Five Lincoln County
  - 15** Early Childhood Coalition of Beaverhead County
  - 17** Zero to Five Flathead Reservation-Lake County
  - 19** Zero to Five Butte-Silver Bow
  - 21** Early Childhood Coalition of the Greater Helena Area
- 23** Partnership Spotlight
- 24** Conclusion

This report was prepared by  SCHOOL READINESS CONSULTING



# INTRODUCTION

## THE ZERO TO FIVE INITIATIVE ENVISIONS A MONTANA DEDICATED TO EVERY CHILD.

The belief that reaching this goal is possible—and imperative for ensuring the well-being of the state’s youngest children and their families—is what drives the Zero to Five network to work together to advance advocacy, policy, and equity-centered system design.

Since its inception, Zero to Five Montana—the statewide arm of the network—has worked to build relationships with key actors within the state and local early childhood system and other related sectors as well as to identify resources and establish strategic national partnerships. The office has lent its capacity and expertise to influence policy and build systems at the state level aligned to Zero to Five’s vision and mission, and thus has built its reputation as a champion for early childhood and a pillar of Montana’s early childhood system.

At the same time, the Zero to Five Local Community Collaboratives (LCCs) have established transformative relationships and added capacity to local early childhood networks within their communities, creating opportunities for state-level work developing early childhood policy and systems and an array of local efforts to inform each other. The LCCs have forged inroads with partner organizations, key community stakeholders, and the public by communicating key issues and engaging both traditional and nontraditional allies in the most-pressing issues facing young children and their families. Meanwhile, the University of Montana Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development supports the Zero to Five network through extensive research, data, and policy work around Zero to Five’s three focus areas: healthy pregnancies, supported families, and school readiness.

This state-local model of bidirectional support and communication has been key to the success of efforts to advance early childhood policy, advocacy, and systems-building across the state. Working together, Zero to Five Montana and the LCCs have established effective partnerships that enhance coordination and leadership within the communities where families and children live.

# ZERO TO FIVE'S IMPACT AREAS AND OUTCOMES

In 2019, the Zero to Five network worked to define a shared commitment and collective approach to statewide and local work through the development of a theory of change. The work started with the identification of three broad child and family impact areas to guide and focus efforts going forward.

These areas are as follows:

- **Healthy pregnancies and births:** Expanding access to prenatal care and health insurance for mothers and infants; reducing preterm births and infant mortality
- **Supported families:** Reducing rates of child poverty, child abuse and neglect, and children entering the foster care system
- **School readiness:** Increasing reading and math proficiency; increasing access to high-quality early childhood experiences

The network realized that creating this impact on a large scale would be an “all hands on deck” undertaking—requiring the buy-in and support of stakeholders across Montana, including policy makers; governmental agencies; leaders and advocates of state and local early childhood systems; leaders representing a range of business, governmental, and civic interests; leaders of early childhood programs; early childhood service providers; communities; and families. Indeed, change on this scale would require a Montana dedicated to every child.

To build upon its vision, the Zero to Five network identified and defined four necessary system outcomes below:

## REACH

Every child has access to universal and targeted services to meet their unique needs.

## COMMITMENT

Montanans value and prioritize early childhood through action.

## EQUITY

Every child, regardless of race, geography, or family income, has what they need to thrive.

## COORDINATION

Community partners coordinate to provide high-quality, easy-to-access services.



Each of these outcomes relies upon strong relationships and the power of relationships to transform mindsets, conditions, and actions related to the state's commitment to young children. These four outcomes reflect the aspirational conditions that Zero to Five believes are most essential and in which the network can best stabilize, innovate, and build the early childhood system in Montana so all children, families, and businesses can thrive.



## KEY METRICS: THREE AREAS OF IMPACT

### Healthy Pregnancies and Births

- Twenty-two Montana counties currently implement an evidence-based home-visiting model. Home visitation staff make 10,613 home visits to 1,225 households. In 2018, 86 percent of households receiving home visits were low income, and 45 percent of households reported a history of child abuse or maltreatment.<sup>1</sup>

### Supported Families

- Seventy-three percent of Montanans are concerned that families are facing more financial stress and uncertainty.
- Seventy-five percent of Montanans are concerned about parents not being able to work because of a lack of child care.

- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of voters say access to high-quality, affordable child care is important to the economy getting back on track and getting people back to work (38 percent say it is essential).
- Seventy-one percent of Montanans favor reduced child care costs for working parents.
- A majority agree that the wages for child care professionals are too low (58 percent) and the cost Montana parents are currently paying for child care is too high (54 percent).<sup>2</sup>

### School Readiness

- Eighty-one percent of Montanans agree that “a quality early education experience is a good investment in our children and grandchildren.”
- Overall, a majority of Montanans favor publicly funded preschool for four-year-olds (61 percent).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2018 Montana home-visiting summary report

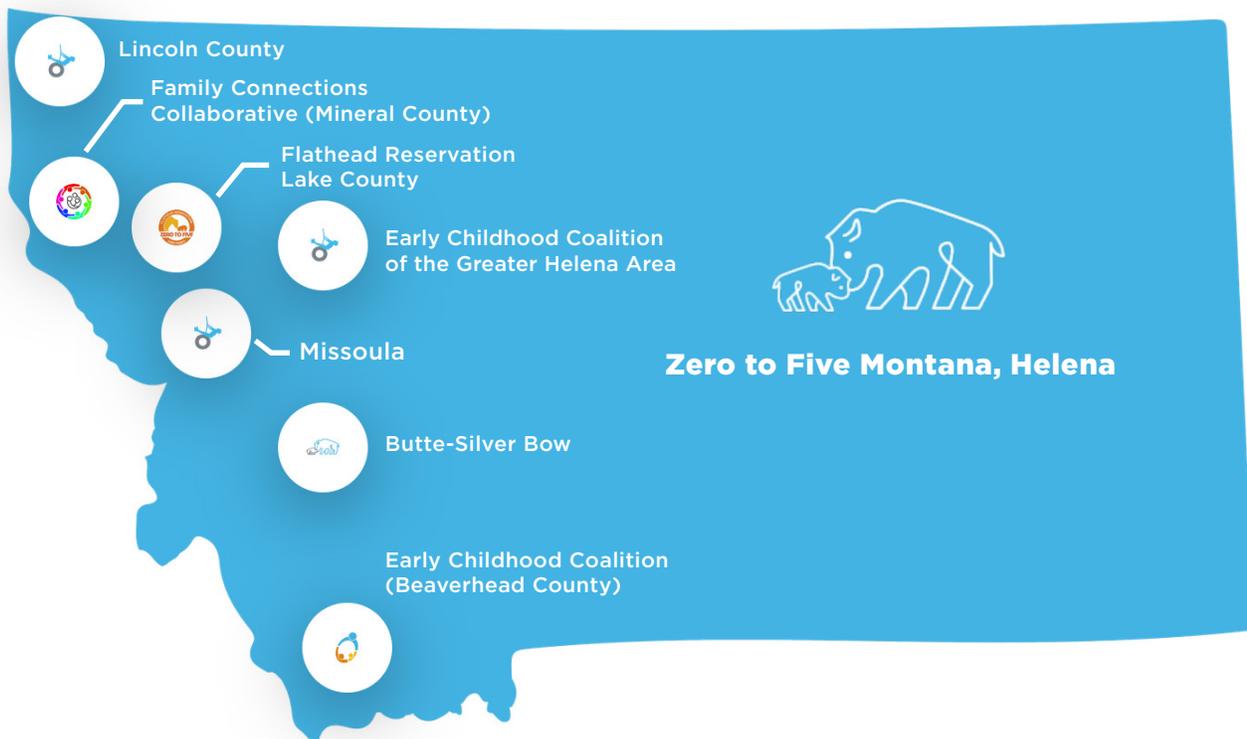
<sup>2</sup> Zero to Five Montana 2020 public opinion poll

<sup>3</sup> Zero to Five Montana 2020 public opinion poll



# Harnessing the Power of the **ZERO TO FIVE NETWORK**

This report shares and celebrates the powerful movement taking place in Montana to elevate the value of early childhood. It highlights the capacity created through the commitment and investment of the Headwaters Foundation to support community change and the subsequent growth of state and local partners helping to coordinate and advance efforts to build a strong and durable early childhood system in Montana. To that end, this report illustrates the power of the Zero to Five Network composed of a statewide advocacy office in Helena and seven locally-led community coalitions.





# Zero to Five Montana

Connecting, convening, and communicating for statewide impact

## IMPACT

Zero to Five Montana has been a leader in strengthening Montana’s early childhood system by serving as a trusted and neutral convener, connector, and communicator. The organization has effectively leveraged these three key functions to create the conditions it seeks for young children and families across the state.

## AS A CONVENER

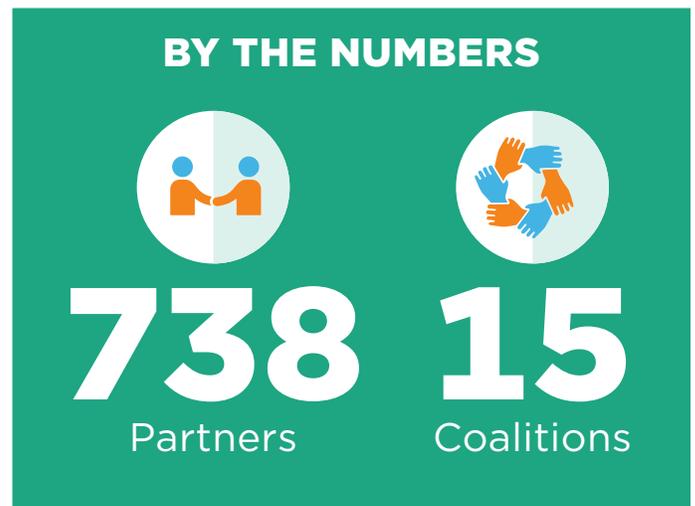
Zero to Five Montana brings diverse cross-sector and cross-system stakeholders together to set directions and build collective power to drive common state-level policy and action priorities. Similarly, Zero to Five Montana brings together local networks of early childhood stakeholders to focus on collaborative efforts and elevate community-specific needs. Major convening milestones have focused on:

**Expanding access to child care and supporting working families:** Zero to Five Montana convened the Business and Employer Working Group to address the economic impacts of child care and increasing access for working families.

- **Success:** Convened a Business and Employer Summit, launched **Family Forward Montana** and developed the **Montana Child Care Ecosystem and Framework**.

**Tackling the infant-toddler care crisis:** Through the Building *Sstrong Foundations for Families* (BSFF) initiative, Zero to Five Montana convened and led a cross-sector team of state leaders to explore policy options for expanding infant-toddler care.

- **Success:** Leads the **Infant-Toddler Policy Workgroup** which continues the **BSFF work** to expand access and supply of infant-toddler child care, build the capacity of the infant-toddler workforce, and include indigenous content and leadership in infant-toddler care. Zero to Five Montana also participates in the **Emerging Leaders National Cohort** to advance advocacy for infants and toddlers and family engagement.



**Advancing support for quality preschool and the ECE workforce:** Zero to Five Montana co-leads the Montana Preschool Alliance convened to support collaboration across programs and systems, deepen work to advance preschool for the state’s four-year-old’s and strengthen the ECE workforce.

- **Success:** Created a unified, cross-system vision for Montana’s four-year-old’s and launched the Workforce Development group to identify policy targets for increasing compensation and to create more alignment between higher education and the state’s current workforce development system.
- **Success:** Created a unified, **cross-system vision** for Montana’s four-year-old’s and launched the **Workforce Development group** to identify policy targets for increasing compensation and to create more alignment between higher education and the state’s current workforce development system.

## AS A CONNECTOR

Zero to Five Montana fills the need to connect early childhood stakeholders to resources and supports for their work. This includes connecting agencies and organizations with financial and nonfinancial resources and establishing champions for early childhood within the legislature and among others who have a stake in building early childhood systems. Major connector milestones have focused on:

**Connecting local community-led initiatives to resources and supports** Zero to Five Montana builds local capacity and supports community-led innovation by connecting community stakeholders and agencies to funding, technical assistance, and new partners.

- **Success:** Funded and launched the **Montana Community/Employer Child Care Innovations pilots** and the **Montana Infant-Toddler Tribal Language pilots** - community-led initiatives focused on expanding local access to quality child care and is leading the **Child Care Specialized Training and Technical Assistance Project** to support child care business stabilization and expansion.

**Working with key partners to fill policy gaps** Zero to Five Montana connects with state agencies, organizations and institutions such as the governor’s office, legislative committee chairs, agency leads—including those not historically connected to ECE —statewide organizations such as chambers of commerce and economic development councils, and institutions of higher education.

- **Success:** Partnered with private, state, and tribal colleges to address gaps in state policy and increase quality and supply of infant and toddler care and secured funding with Salish Kootenai College for a **state early childhood tribal policy coordinator**.

**Forging Partnerships with National Policy and Advocacy Organizations** Zero to Five Montana has established partnerships with three national policy and advocacy organizations that provide connections with other state teams and content experts to build capacity around systems policy change. Following is a list of the three organizations and how Zero to Five Montana is leveraging their support to advance outcomes for children and families

- **The Alliance for Early Success:** The Alliance works with teams in all 50 states to facilitate peer networking with other states, and provide professional assistance, consultation, and funding to advance early childhood policy. Zero to Five Montana has sought information and support from other states and expert advice from national TA providers to address current policy needs in Montana.
- **Zero to Three:** Zero to Five Montana was selected to participate in a multi-state initiative - *Building Strong Foundations: Advancing Comprehensive Policies for Infants, Toddlers, and Families* designed to advance policy focused on comprehensive supports for infants, toddlers, and families. Zero to Three provided technical assistance to advance state policy discussions and funding to support community-led innovations.

- **First Children’s Finance Business Collaboratory.** Zero to Five Montana was a member of a 14-state national collaboration designed to support state efforts to create effective child care systems. The Montana team utilized the Child Care Business Ecosystem to assess current conditions and develop a Framework and recommendations designed to meet local needs.

## AS A COMMUNICATOR

Zero to Five Montana creates an exchange of knowledge between state and local early childhood initiatives and links efforts and programs to advance child- and family-centered policy at the state and federal levels. Communication efforts also include advocacy to build public awareness among Montanans about key early childhood issues and the potential for investments in early childhood to move the state forward.

Major communicator milestones have focused on:

**Building Public Awareness:** Using a variety of communication strategies, Zero to Five Montana ensures policy makers, families, program administrators, and communities have access to the information they need. The website provides information on relevant policy issues and developments, updates on efforts and opportunities available in local communities, and a place where families and providers can go to access important resources such as toolkits and family support materials.

- **Success:** Revamped and updated the Zero to Five Montana website to reach multiple stakeholders, share policy updates, and disseminate information on community-led initiatives more effectively.

**Facilitating state-to-local communication:** Zero to Five Montana plays an important role as intermediary and trusted liaison supporting two-way communication between state policy makers and local community coalitions. State leaders benefit from having a reliable and consistent source of information on community needs and accomplishments. Communities benefit by having a more direct line to state decision-makers.

- **Success:** Increased understanding of community context through stories and community case studies that provide nuanced, on-the-ground experiences of children and families that inform state decisions.

**Informing policy development and maintaining engagement with state decision makers:** Zero to Five Montana has increasingly become a valuable source of education and information to the legislature, helping to clarify complex ECE systems issues and identify policy opportunities that address needs and gaps.

- **Success:** Developed targeted resources and information for policy makers on **stabilizing child care costs** as a contributing factor to economic development and building comprehensive early childhood systems. Input provided to the Governor’s Task Force on Child Care, the Long-Range Planning Committee (workforce development and child care access), and the state American Rescue Plan Commission.

**Elevating family voice:** Placing families at the center of its work, Zero to Five Montana focuses both on increasing awareness of what families and children need to thrive and on building the capacity of families to serve as advocates and key messengers. These efforts build on a belief that “families provide a critical perspective that is many times lacking when decisions are made” and that “those closest to the challenges, have the best solutions.”

- **Success:** Launched **Montana Parent Voice** a statewide parent advocacy network designed to provide parents with the resources, tools, and peer support they need to advocate for their children and themselves and inform early childhood system building.



# Local Community Collaborative Profiles

## ELEVATING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND ENRICHING COMMUNITIES

Following is a series of community spotlights profiling the important on-the-ground work being done in seven Local Community Collaboratives (LCCs). Each collaborative tells the story of their community impact, the focus of their efforts, programs they implement, and challenges and successes encountered along the way.





# Zero to Five Missoula

## Missoula County, MT

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

The impact of Zero to Five Missoula's work has led to community leaders becoming more engaged in active problem-solving and investing in early childhood solutions. Zero to Five Missoula (ZtFM) works to ensure racial equity is at the core of all their programs and is working hard to collect and leverage data needed to drive impact for all children and coordinate across all sectors.

### PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

Collecting and using data to drive coordination is an important element of ZtFM's work. Challenges have occurred, however, in making the case to grant makers that data collection is not only essential to understanding what children need for academic success, but also foundational to implementing systems change.

ZtFM's activities connect organizations and people across the early childhood system who may not already be working together or who may not be aware of one another. Here are two examples of this work:

- The Parent Leadership Institute brings together diverse stakeholders focused on the needs of parents to provide logistical and strategic support and help each organization become more involved with family engagement and empowerment.
- The Early Learning Fellows (working to bridge a connection between early childhood and the K-12 system) creates shared understanding between professions and supports data-driven action planning based on Kindergarten Entry Assessment data.

### FOCUS

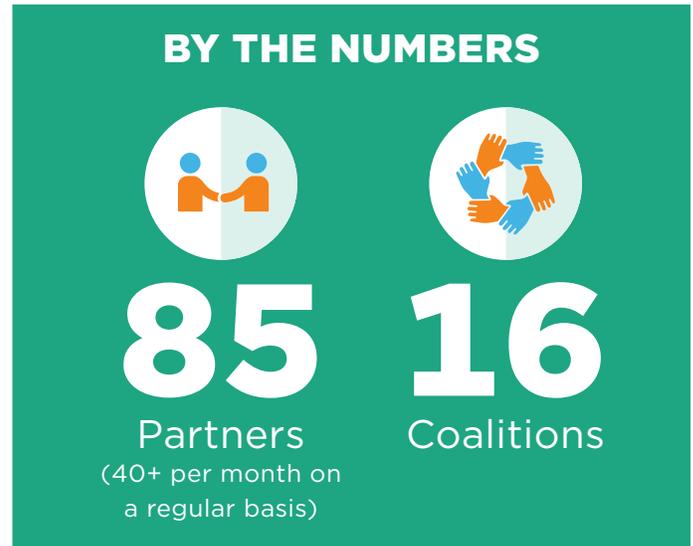
- **Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of the sector in which they work (Coordination)**
- **Building connections with other sectors (Coordination)**
- **Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children (Equity)**
- **Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs (Equity)**

These groups are learning from one another and building relationships along the way. ZtFM is working to build an understanding of what kindergarten readiness looks like and develop cohesiveness among providers when interacting with families.

ZtFM is also focused on expanding access to high-quality child care and convenes and participates in a monthly cross-sector roundtable discussion that is key for sharing resources and building relationships. They also convene and participate in a group of high-level community members to connect and keep the community's early childhood system on the agenda.

## SUCCESSES

One of ZtFM's biggest successes is serving as the catalyst to bring the issues of early childhood to the minds of many different stakeholders and sectors in the Missoula community. The Kindergarten Entry Assessment continues to grow—currently more than 60 classrooms are participating and ZtFM has engaged with the first county outside of Missoula to implement the assessment. Completing the first year of the Parent Leadership Institute and Early Learning Fellows was a big success for ZtFM, and both programs received great positive feedback.





# Mineral County Family Connections Collaborative

Mineral County, MT

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Through a number of important family and child-centered initiatives, Mineral County Family Connections Collaborative (FCC) has positively impacted the health and well-being of many parents and young children across the county.

## PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

Funding received from Zero to Five Montana helped support a new, free doula program that provides support for healthy pregnancies and parenting. Home visitors are trained doulas and can provide free doula service to anyone. By connecting birthing classes, doula services, lactation services, and home-visiting services to the Parent Liaison program, FCC ensures that families receive a warm hand off and have access to a continuum of services as their children grow. FCC has also facilitated a Circle of Parents and a mothers' group in the community that have taken off and become self-sustaining.

During the pandemic, the Parent Liaison program provided an opportunity to get parents engaged in supporting children' learning at home while schools were shut down. However, FCC faced a number of challenges in implementing the program, including varying school rules and regulations regarding COVID protocols as well as a lack of a strong, positive culture of family engagement among schools and community partners. To address the latter challenge, the collaborative has been working to make a cultural shift in the community to remove the stigma of receiving help—one message they are conveying is that every parent “deserves support.”

To address challenges related to connecting with diverse community partners, FCC participated in a crisis-mapping activity that resulted in engaging with partners such as law enforcement and schools in a new way. Those new partners then learned about crisis services offered by FCC's anchor organization, the county health department, which increased opportunities to connect families to needed services.

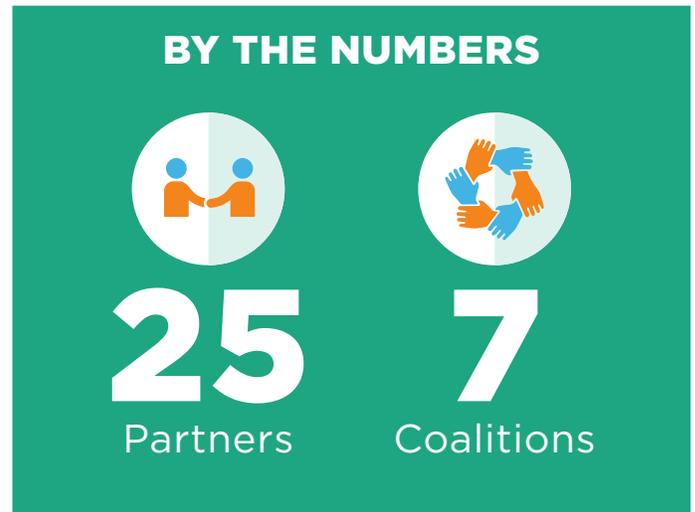
## FOCUS

- Working to increase the reach of their services across the community (Reach)
- Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs (Equity)

The overall challenge for FCC is capacity—it takes time and effort to tackle other important tasks, such as writing grants and developing website content, outside of the work FCC engages in for the community. FCC has learned they can't do everything by themselves and will continue to engage with others and seek new funding sources. These groups are learning from one another and building relationships along the way. ZtFM is working to build an understanding of what kindergarten readiness looks like and develop cohesiveness among providers when interacting with families.

## SUCCESSSES

Ultimately, FCC's greatest successes are the relationships they are building with families. Through their efforts, FCC has been able to continue to support the home-visiting program through kindergarten in their community. The FCC has also had a great response to community events, including an outdoor gathering during the cold holiday season that was very well attended and a bouncy house event in the spring. Weekly library story times using the Mother Goose on the Loose curriculum have also been popular.





# Zero to Five Lincoln County

## Lincoln County, MT

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

Zero to Five Lincoln County (Zt5LC) is a multisector, county-wide collaborative working together with a variety of partners, agencies, and community members to make a positive impact in the lives of families with young children. They strive for a county in which all families with young children are valued, connected, and empowered because they believe that “every kid in every corner of Lincoln County counts.”

### PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

Building capacity and creating sustainable systems through solid partnerships is a primary goal of Zt5LC. For this large and rural county, overcoming geographic and transportation barriers remains the number one challenge. Zt5LC values relationships to ensure resources and programs are implemented in partnership with local families and communities and understands that trust-building takes time. The collaborative works diligently to include new partners to sustainably share and grow the work.

Families in rural communities often lack access to opportunities and resources available to families in other communities—and are often required to travel long distances to access services. To address this barrier, Zt5LC worked collaboratively with the Lincoln County Health Department to secure a mobile resource van through American Rescue Plan Act funds. The Lincoln County Connections mobile resource van is in the process of being customized and will provide services throughout the county in partnership with other agencies.

Zt5LC prioritizes creating spaces and places that are anchored within communities and easy to get to for families. They are also taking their show on the road by bringing Kid’s Corner to every farmers market in every community. Feedback indicates that families are gaining a sense of community and belonging, and they enjoy the family-focused addition to the farmers markets.

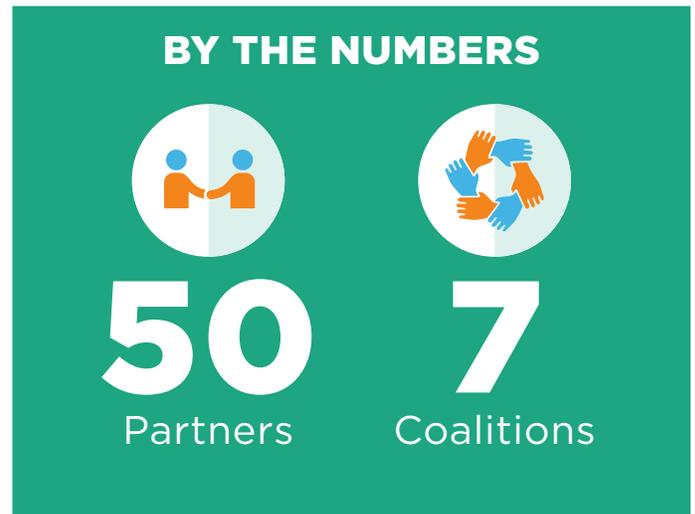
### FOCUS

- Working to increase the reach of their services across the community (Reach)
- Providing opportunities in ways that are easy to navigate and that meet families where they are (Equity)
- Building capacity and sustainability with partners to assure that opportunities are well coordinated and integrated (Coordination, Commitment)

Zt5LC also works in collaboration with the Lincoln County Library to offer Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which provides free books to all children under five; supports the Troy Library and Opportunity Center, which provides resources to families; and hosts playgroups in communities. Zt5LC remains focused on building relationships with families and offering a variety of programs based on recreation and play.

## SUCCESSSES

The free Family Strong events have successfully promoted family engagement and increased the rate at which families are connected to vital early childhood services. The Kid’s Corner at the Market Program has been very successful in bringing together partners and families, offering a fun and engaging place for families to connect with resources and with one another. Connecting diverse and committed partners to compliment and build upon what Zt5LC is able to offer has been a win for Lincoln County. With the introduction of remote meetings during the pandemic, Zt5LC is building a strong network using technology to connect with partners, and as a result, the county “doesn’t feel so big!” Through consistent work with families and by following through with commitments, Zt5LC has become a trusted resource and partner in Lincoln County. The connections they are making have a positive ripple effect throughout the county.





# Early Childhood Coalition of Beaverhead County

Beaverhead County, MT

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Beaverhead County has historically experienced poor access to early childhood programming. Some programs that were available were not sustained; both the local Head Start program and the child care facility on the University of Montana Western campus lost funding. Today, some programs are being reintroduced by the Early Childhood Coalition of Beaverhead County (ECCBC). The community and key stakeholders are now talking about early childhood issues, and access to and knowledge of resources has increased.

ECCBC conducted a landscape assessment and worked to deliver quick wins for families in the community. They have created programming responsive to parent voices and have been mindful to recruit parent volunteers and leaders. A longer-term goal is to help solve the child care crisis in Beaverhead County.

## PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

One of the biggest challenges Beaverhead County faces is being both system poor and program poor—ECCBC is working to build both. There has been a lack of connection between sectors, and the coalition is working hard to be the link that brings everyone together. ECCBC has developed sustainable programs that create a sense of community and connection as well as provide education. Knowing funding will run out eventually, the coalition understands the need to diversify connections to strengthen the work. They need partners that are invested and creating solutions. To address these challenges, ECCBC is engaging in activities and working to implement programs like those below that will build both system and program capacity:

- ECCBC received a Community Child Care Innovations mini grant from Zero to Five Montana to help start the conversation about a community solution to child care. The coalition needed a variety of stakeholders at the table, and this gave them a way to bring partners together and hand off pieces of the work to others. It also helped to raise awareness of and start early discussions about sustainability. Key partners who supported writing the grant included the Canvas Early Learning Center, the University of Montana Western, Zero to Five Montana, the public health office, and community employers.

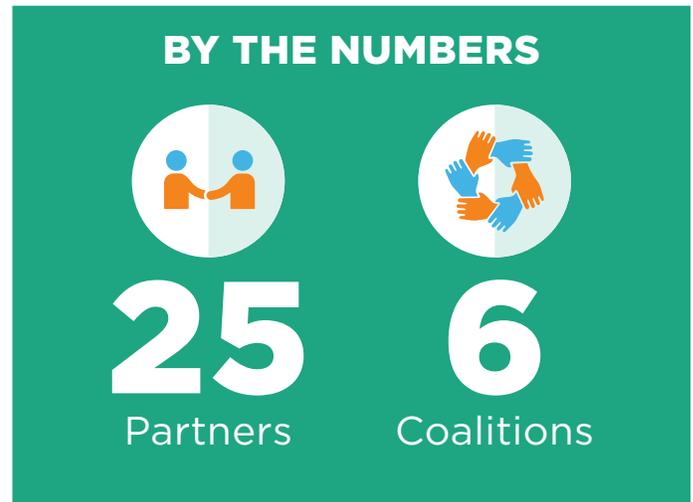
## FOCUS

- **Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs (Equity)**

- The Circle of Parents program out of Butte is another valuable community resource. The coalition leveraged funding from that program to start two family support groups that led to more connection and change. The next step for ECCBC is writing a proposal for the Statewide Circle of Parents contract to continue that work statewide.
- To address the need to create better cross-sector connections, ECCBC hosted a local expert series that provided parents with important information and resources and helped to close the gap across sectors by engaging teachers, medical professionals, and lactation consultants. Other supports to increase access to and availability of early learning opportunities included offering community playdates as an easy way to give parents a sense of community and belonging and the creation of The Village, an indoor play space that serves as a connector and hub for families with young children.

## SUCCESSSES

The two biggest successes for ECCBC are opening the indoor play space and getting the innovation grant through Zero to Five Montana to start the conversation about child care and get stakeholders at the table.





# Zero to Five Flathead Reservation—Lake County

Lake County, MT

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Zero to Five Flathead Reservation–Lake County (ZtFFRLC) is a newer collaborative. During their first year, ZtFFRLC conducted an environmental scan/community assessment and connected with the community’s Young Child Wellness Council (a diverse group of community representatives focused on bringing together those who work with young children) to learn more about resources available and to create seamless services between organizations.

## FOCUS

- **Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of the sector in which they work (Coordination)**

## PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

Even after returning to some normalcy “post” pandemic, ZtFFRLC found it is still an issue for people to engage and get together in person. Having the option to meet virtually has been helpful, especially given the fact that the team brings different perspectives as well as different partners to the work. Efforts to build capacity and gear up for full operations are ongoing. Nevertheless, ZtFFRLC was able to hire a contractor to manage their website. The website is an important tool to share and highlight information and serves as a great way to engage with community leaders and gain their support. The collaborative has developed a profile feature called Leading the Way that is designed to empower community members, build pride, and increase awareness among potential supporters.

Another challenge is the unique situation of the Flathead Reservation, including much historical trauma. The collaborative aims to engage with individuals on the Young Child Wellness Council in hopes that the work will trickle down and impact kids and families across the reservation and the county. The council gives various groups the space to discuss important topics while promoting connection, relationship building, and collaboration. This will be critical as the ZtFFRLC implements plans in year two and will need the help of committed partners.

## SUCCESSSES

ZtFFRLC held two big events that were very well-received by the community: the Penguin Parade in December and the Spring Family Fitness Event.



## BY THE NUMBERS



30

Partners



11

Coalitions





# Zero to Five Butte–Silver Bow

Butte–Silver Bow County, MT

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

In Butte–Silver Bow County, the growth of collaboration and coordination with new stakeholders has been tremendous with the desired result of families recognizing and placing their trust in Zero to Five Butte–Silver Bow (ZtFBSB). Many programs that have been in the planning stages are on the brink of becoming a reality.

## PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

ZtFBSB proposed a Learning Landscapes project designed to transform everyday places into learning opportunities for children with an emphasis on positive parent/caregiver interactions. Early selection plans for a site located in an area frequently accessed by parents was not approved. However, Zero to Five Butte–Silver Bow faced this challenge and continued to work with city officials to solve the location issue. Key stakeholders involved in investigating new locations included parks and recreation, the transportation department, Butte–Silver Bow community and economic development, and Northwestern Playground Equipment.

Incorporating parent voice has also been a challenge for ZtFBSB. The Families Leading Our Community parent group was created and in its infancy when COVID-19 occurred. During the pandemic, parents were overwhelmed and also hesitant to participate in virtual meetings, so the group dissolved. Many families are still in recovery from the collective trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic, but ZtFBSB has plans to revitalize the group in the next year. Parent voice is important in representing the whole community; parents should be recognized as a vital voice in the conversation and actively engaged to develop solutions “with them” not “for them.”

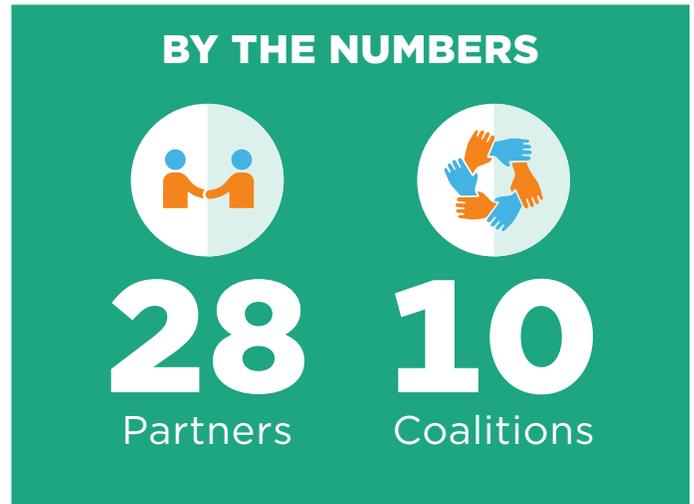
## FOCUS

- Working to increase the reach of their services across the community (Reach)
- Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children (Equity)
- Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents’ needs (Equity)

## SUCCESSSES

Butte-Silver Bow has one of the highest rates of children in foster care in the state. Recognizing this was a system that needed support, ZtFBSB set a goal to reduce the number of children in foster care in the county by 75 percent by the year 2025. To begin the work, empathy interviews were conducted with parents who had experiences with child and family services. Findings revealed an unmet need for a support system for biological families. To fill this gap, ZtFBSB began work to develop Parents 4 Parents, a peer parent-support program. While there was early support for the program, the community was hesitant to address the local judicial system. ZtFBSB then established a relationship with the local child and family services office, bringing key new partners to the table including the child and family services regional intake office and drug court. These two partners were instrumental in hiring the first program coordinator. ZtFBSB also established a relationship with the local Montana peer-support team that provided thought partnership regarding the details of bringing Parents 4 Parents to the community. Other successes include the following:

- Helping to coordinate a relationship between Child Protective Services (CPS) and Bulldog Outfitters to provide clothing in the CPS office for late-night, emergency child removals
- Working with the peer-support network to understand peer-support models and families and individuals that utilize the program
- Participating in community events, such as the farmers market and Music on Main
- Starting Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in the community





# Early Childhood Coalition of the Greater Helena Area

Lewis and Clark County, MT

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Early Childhood Coalition of the Greater Helena Area (ECCGHA) is very new—launched in April 20, 2022. It is housed at St. Peter’s Hospital, an organization that has shown great support for early childhood issues.

## FOCUS

- **Building connections with other sectors (Coordination)**

## PROGRAMS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES

ECCGHA is focused on receiving community feedback and learning about the needs of the area. They have held one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders to get to know them and hear their input. The four main points that continued to come up in the conversations were a need for the following:

- Access to quality child care
- Parent classes/support groups
- Maternal mental health resources
- A central website with resources for parents

In addition, the collaborative conducted a public survey to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Lewis and Clark County’s early childhood system and will host community forums in the future based on themes gathered from the survey. ECCGHA has encountered some challenges associated with a larger community, including competitiveness from established early childhood organizations.

## SUCCESSSES

The ECCGHA leadership team has agreed on a structure and is bringing new people to the table to move the work forward.



## BY THE NUMBERS



**21**  
Partners





## PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

### University of Montana's Center for Children, Families, and Workforce Development

The University of Montana's Center for Children, Families, and Workforce Development (the UM Center) works closely with the state's human services, health, education, and justice systems to help improve current systems of delivery and maximize underutilized resources so more Montanans have access to quality services, including mental health and substance abuse services. Its services focus on (1) workforce development and training, (2) technical assistance, and (3) research and evaluation with a primary emphasis on serving Montanans who live in rural, frontier, and tribal communities and whose lives are complicated by behavioral health conditions, poverty, homelessness, family violence, and substance use.

The UM Center supports the Zero to Five statewide office and LCCs through assistance with program sustainability, data and evaluation efforts, diversification of funding, and policy work.

## 2021 & 2022

### The UM Center supported the Zero to Five statewide office and LCCs in the following activities:

- Provided LCCs with information on evidence-based best practices to accurately measure the impact of their local programs, case studies, and related initiatives
- Created county data snapshots, research fact sheets, research briefs, research and evaluation reports, and online toolkits
- Supported LCCs in collecting and analyzing data to help communities identify nuanced priorities within the three focus areas (healthy pregnancies, supported families, school readiness)
- Assisted in developing data tools and aligning local goals and outcomes with the Zero to Five theory of change initiative
- Supported primary and secondary data collection, aggregation, analysis, and dissemination
- Supported community usage of various data collection methods (observation, interviews, focus groups) through training materials, including materials in the Data into Action Toolkit, and updated and aligned Zero to Five's Core Indicators and County Snapshots/Fact Sheets

Additionally, the UM Center provided technical support and assistance by designing and implementing the leadership and capacity-building webinar series, Let's Lead Montana. LCCs and public health and human services staff across the state were invited to attend the webinar held via Zoom the first Friday of the month. Webinar topics included core values, measuring organizational impact, bridging the political divide, and marketing human services.



# CONCLUSION

The Zero to Five network has identified and raised awareness of the challenges facing children and families, established important partnerships, and leveraged resources to address gaps in Montana’s early childhood system and build local capacity.

It has also played a critical role in informing advances in state systems-building efforts. In addition to establishing a strong state presence, Zero to Five Montana has been instrumental in building partnerships focused on finding solutions for local needs through support for community-led innovations and local capacity building. In turn, everyday efforts in communities are making a difference for families—demonstrating the immense value of early childhood investments to state-level policy- and decision-makers.

