



# North Lawndale Innovation Zone 2015

## Pipeline of Partners, Comprehensive Services

Illinois has designated North Lawndale as one of eleven Early Childhood Innovation Zones, the North Lawndale Innovation Zone (NLIZ). Innovation Zones are communities with strong leadership and collaborative relationships, and with an interest in serving the highest needs children. In these Innovation Zones, the various programs that can positively impact the lives of young children are planning and testing creative ways to enroll children from "Priority Populations," and meet their needs through the highest quality services. Funding is being provided by the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and local philanthropies.

In the North Lawndale region, more than three-quarters of children birth-to-five years old are in low-income families. To better serve the high needs priority population, the North Lawndale IZ is building an active referral network – a pipeline – with teen programs, hospitals, homeless shelters, the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and others to connect families to the formal programs available to them.

The NLIZ strives to enroll families to quality programs that fit the unique needs of each family, especially families in need of accommodation due to non-traditional work schedules and other specific needs. Early learning programs include educational home visiting (birth-to-three years) and child care/preschool. Preschool programs include both community- and public-based programs.

### PARTNERSHIP IN THE NORTH LAWNDALE COMMUNITY

During the last year, the NLIZ team has been engaging more partners to incorporate early childhood referrals and information into their work directly with families. Pipeline partners include the health sector, mental health providers, child welfare and other community based organizations. The NLIZ has built a systematic referral partnership with the Lawndale Christian Health Center, TRI4M (mental health collabora-

tion) and A Safe Haven Foundation (support for homeless families). NLIZ is working with St. Anthony Hospital as well. The pipeline of partners creates a fluid system of coordinated referrals to quality early learning and development programs, and increases the numbers of referrals.

Part of the success experienced by the NLIZ with placement of priority families has been the transparency of slot information provided by many of the early learning partners (Carole Robertson Center for Learning, Catholic Charities, Gads Hill, Chicago Youth Centers, Lawndale Child Care Connections, Family Focus, Sinai Community Institute, Healthy Families, CPS early childhood and Child and Family Connections #9). The NLIZ also has an effective feedback loop with Chicago Public Schools' early childhood education office, allowing the NLIZ to provide better access for more children to quality early learning programs.

For the 2015-2016 school year, CPS early childhood office all public based programs filled across the community for the first time. CPS attributed the increase in enrollment to the partners/families working together to increase enrollment within NLIZ. Because of this work, the North Lawndale community has more resources than ever before, making it possible to enroll more children easier and quicker than in the past.

### COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

In 2015, the NLIZ successfully developed a referral program with the Lawndale Christian Health Center. Pediatricians from the clinic began sending parent referrals directly to the NLIZ team via a secure email through the health clinic's electronic medical record system. Once the NLIZ team receives this information, a representative provides the referred families with detailed information about school-based, community-based and/or summer early learning programs, helping to facilitate enrollment.

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The NLIZ – for the first time –engaged bothCPS and a Community-Based Organization (CBO) in the Ready to Learn application process. The NLIZ team helped connect a CBO partner to a special preschool application event. The CBO could share informations with families to offer a 6AM to 6PM day and home-visiting option for children birth to three. The event was a true success as both roaming team recruiters and CBOs connected with parents seeking to enroll in a program.

In addition to referrals to early learning programs, the NLIZ has helped provide more home child care providers with information, access to and coordination of developmental screenings for children in their care. The members of the Lawndale Child Care Connections, a network of home child care providers, are working together to ensure screening of more children across the community.

## CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION FOR OUTREACH

The NLIZ is implementing outreach strategies, coordinated across community systems that service high need children, to facilitate communication, referral and enrollment of children into early learning programs. To increase awareness of existing opportunities, the NLIZ schedules time with community agencies and schools, to provide them with early learning enrollment information for the upcoming school year.

In 2015, the Innovation Zone created and distributed information packets that included a list of available schools, along with the number of classrooms in which each school had full-day or half-day options. The packets also included eligibility requirements and contact information for the sites. The NLIZ also hosted an Early Learning Outreach Day at seven locations including the local Family and Community Resource Center, a grocery store and four Chicago Public Schools during report card pick-up. The event was a major success for the community and in connecting children to early childhood education. The team engaged approximately 100 families and identified 69 families in need of preschool/childcare and home visiting information. In one day, the North Lawndale IZ made 35 preschool referrals, 34 home-visiting referrals and two referrals to Beacon Therapeutics. Several additional families received child care subsidy information. To-date, the NLIZ has connected more than 300 families to early learning programs Overall, the community's early learning providers have increased the number of priority families enrolled in their programs.

## ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD INNOVATION ZONES

Illinois Action for Children supports each Innovation Zone in planning and implementing activities, while the Illinois Education Research Council will evaluate the success of the strategies chosen by each Zone. The Innovation Zone model uses action learning cycles, an iterative process, to quickly learn and adapt strategies for immediate use in each community. The federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and local philanthropies provide funding.

[www.actforchildren.org/for-providers/innovation-zones/](http://www.actforchildren.org/for-providers/innovation-zones/)