



# Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Family Shelters in North Carolina



## Technical Assistance Project

PHASE I REPORT

NOVEMBER 5, 2021

Working to strengthen shelter environments in ways that facilitate the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of young children while also developing and deepening relationships between shelters and local Early Care and Education (ECE) programs.

Report prepared for Child Care  
Services Association

by



## Partners for Impact, LLC

Beth Bordeaux, MSW  
Co-owner/Sr. Advisor

Charlene Reiss, Ph.D.  
Consultant

Alma Davis  
Consultant

Fiona W. Dunn  
Design Consultant

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# Introduction

Children's earliest experiences are built into their bodies – shaping the brain's architecture and creating the foundation for future health and learning. Everything a child experiences in their earliest years impacts that child's opportunity to fulfill their potential. When we provide young children with a sturdy foundation, we create a healthier and stronger North Carolina for generations to come.

## Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Project

Child Care Services Association contracted with Partners for Impact from December 2020 through October 2021 for year one of a three-year pilot to develop and implement the **Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Shelters** in North Carolina Technical Assistance Project. The purpose of this project is:

1. To ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers **experiencing homelessness** receive early childhood services to promote their children's wellness and readiness to **succeed in school** and are **connected to needed resources** for their young children.
2. To help shelter staff members **create shelter environments** that are **safe** and **developmentally appropriate** for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Partners for Impact are contracted to **provide training** and **technical assistance** to Emergency Homeless Shelters and Transitional Housing programs serving families with children ages 0-5. Using the newly validated and revised [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters](#),<sup>1</sup> Partners for Impact consultants are **providing shelters assistance** to create environments that facilitate the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of young children as they experience homelessness. Project consultants are also helping to **develop and deepen relationships** between shelters and local Early Care and Education (ECE) programs.

With more than 100 criteria, the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters provides recommendations and information that shelters can use to assess their physical environments and programmatic capacities to offer safe and healthy living situations for young children. The tool lists numerous ways shelter staff can connect to resources for families including childcare, Head Start/Early Head Start and pre-K programs, thereby providing access to high-quality early learning environments for children experiencing homelessness. Finally, the tool offers a planning form to help shelters set goals and make improvements.

<sup>1</sup>Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/ec\\_self\\_assessment\\_tool\\_for\\_shelters\\_v5\\_21\\_2020.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/ec_self_assessment_tool_for_shelters_v5_21_2020.pdf)

Two shelters were selected to participate in the first cohort, followed by second and third cohorts. They each participated in a series of activities with technical assistance, including:

- **Assessing** the shelter environment, policies and practices using the ECSAT tool
- **Planning** for shelter and program improvements with receipt of mini-grant funds to make improvements
- **Strengthening connections** with the early childhood service system in their local community
- **Participating** in cohort meetings with other shelters who are also enrolled in the project
- **Sharing** data with and providing feedback to project consultants

Through this pilot project, the team at Partners for Impact and Child Care Services Association will be working together to develop processes and a tool kit for assisting additional shelters who would like to engage in self-reflection and technical assistance to improve their support for young children experiencing homelessness.



## Why Focus on Shelters?

When we think of homelessness, we don't think of children. Even as we consider families experiencing homelessness, it is overwhelming to consider a child in our town, sleeping in a car or wrapped in Mama's arms through the night on a park bench. And yet, our national data from 2018-19, the most recent available, estimates the number of children under age 6 experiencing homelessness in North Carolina was 32,189 or 1 in 23 children.<sup>1</sup> Experiences of homelessness can lead to toxic stress and the adverse effects associated with it. Because of their rapidly

developing brains, young children experiencing homelessness are at particular risk for problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.<sup>2</sup>

The federal Department of Education estimates that 92% of these children are not served by Head Start/Early Head Start or McKinney-Vento Act programs. Much work is needed to strengthen the support for these vulnerable children. As we strengthen the support inside shelters, we will also be connecting families with extended early childhood resources and services.

## Logic Model

To map the work of this project and more clearly define the pathways to its multiple objectives, Partners for Impact created a basic Logic Model (see Attachment A). The short and long-term outcomes identified in the model will provide a framework for evaluating the project as shelters move from completing the assessments and creating their improvement plans through the implementation of their plans. It also provides a model for connecting shelters with early childhood services in their communities.

<sup>1</sup>Yamashiro, Amy & McLaughlin, John (2021). Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles: 2018-19. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Office of the Chief Data Officer. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepd/ppss/reports.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Sucsy, Anna (2021). An Invisible Crisis: Early Childhood Homelessness — A Primer. Childcare Services Association. <https://www.childcareservices.org/2021/08/30/an-invisible-crisis-early-childhood-homelessness-a-primer/>

## Methodology

The earliest stages of this pilot project focused on creating guidelines, tools, and materials to recruit and work with shelter agencies. Partners for Impact began identifying potential shelters using information from multiple sources, including the list of homeless service agencies receiving Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG) funding and Continuum of Care rosters. At the same time, Partners for Impact created a one-page flyer explaining the project in clear, concise language to share with shelters during the recruiting process. (See Attachment B.) Partners for Impact also finalized the pre-test with input from CCSA and created documentation procedures for all meetings and communications with participating shelters. Partners for Impact also created a process chart detailing each step:

- Recruitment and onboarding for each shelter
- Setting the pace with each shelter
- Completing the pre-test
- Completing the 5-part ECSAT
- Reviewing the results as a team and developing an action plan
- Engaging the ECE system
- Accessing mini-grant funds
- Following through with the initial steps of the action plan
- Meeting with other shelters in cohort meetings
- Completing a post-test

### Instruments and Materials

As Partners for Impact began creating the process, instruments, and materials to implement this pilot project, one of the first steps was to define relationships and responsibilities for the technical assistance and support that Partners for Impact consultants provide for shelters throughout their engagement (see Memorandum of Agreement in Attachment C). This document, along with the process chart seen later in this section and the logic model, defined the overall scope of work for Partners for Impact and for each shelter. Instruments created to guide the work included protocols for shelter recruitment and interviews, data collection, and information sharing. In collaboration with CCSA, consultants created a pre-test for the shelters (Attachment D). Materials created included a one-sheet informational flyer about the project and another page with more information about the expected process and timeline (Attachment B).

# Overview of the Pilot Project Process

## Phase I Timeline

The initial Phase I timeline projected recruiting shelters as early as March. Shelters were expected to complete the pretest, self-assessment, and implementation plan by October. Due to the longer time required to prepare for and recruit shelters as well as the impact of the covid pandemic and how shelters were affected (see page 16 for more details), the first cohort of shelters signed on in May. Both shelters were in the process of completing the self-assessment at the end of October at the writing of this report. Developing and implementing their improvement plan and making connections with early childhood professionals will continue with these shelters in year two.

## Selection of Shelters

For this initial year of the pilot project, Partners for Impact worked with CCSA to identify criteria for shelters invited to participate. All participating shelters had to own facilities where they provide overnight housing to families with young children for more than a few nights at one time. Shelters receiving ESG funding were preferred, as these agencies have already met HUD requirements for their facilities. Other considerations include:

- a staff large enough to have capacity to participate meaningfully in the project
- financially sound to continue to provide services through duration of project
- a primary contact person with authority over the shelter facilities
- mix of urban and rural; eastern, central, western North Carolina
- staff that is interested in making change, working with project
- familiarity with empowerment model and trauma-informed care

Not all shelters will meet all these criteria, but this provided a starting point for identifying potential participants. The initial list included 17 shelters from across the state, including several that serve victims of domestic violence and their children. The pilot will have a total of four cohorts, each with 2 shelters. Two cohorts have already been recruited, with the intention of recruiting four additional shelters in two additional cohorts in the second and third years of the pilot.

## Shelter Recruitment

Partners for Impact recruited shelters for the project through direct outreach. A consultant made initial contact by phone or email, including sending a one-page informational flyer explaining the project. Recruitment took more time than anticipated. While the shelters contacted expressed a general interest in participating, recruitment was slowed by several factors including:

- COVID-19 and the ongoing challenges facing shelters in managing their facilities in a pandemic,
- uncertainty about the amount of time required to participate in this pilot project, and
- general staff capacity at the shelters.

An incentive to participate of \$500, provided from [Education Leads Home](#) funding, was helpful in getting shelters to agree to participate. The Education Leads Home grant for NC from [SchoolHouse Connection](#) seeks to engage state leaders working at the intersection of education and homelessness by building and scaling best practices, including through a virtual Community of Practice. Grant funds were used for the Shelter Assessment Tool and work at the higher education level.

In the initial recruitment phase, Partners for Impact contacted more than one dozen shelters across the state. Because staff at

shelters are often inundated with emails requesting participation in events, a consultant followed-up each email with a phone call. In conversations with those who responded to emails or phone calls, staff at every shelter asked, “How much time will staff have to invest?” Providing assurances that the staff would be able to set their own timeline and that the tasks were manageable helped some shelters to consider the project more closely.

At each shelter, Partners for Impact’s consultant also had to navigate finding the right person who (1) would have interest and be a champion in leading the project; (2) had the authority to give the okay to participate; and (3) who would give buy-in for the staff to participate. During initial recruitment, contact usually started with the Executive Director who then passed the responsibility to direct staff.

Shelters declined to participate for different reasons. Some did not have staff bandwidth to start a new project. Some wanted more information on the project and others were interested in participating after the pilot was complete and more information was available. At least one shelter expressed concern about how information from the project would be used. Finally, some shelters said they were just not interested at this time while others did not return any emails or phone calls. From the initial 12-14 shelters, two were recruited for the first cohort with two more identified for the second cohort.



## First Steps with Participating Shelters

Once a shelter agreed to participate, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA - Attachment C) with Partners for Impact was signed and the \$500 incentive was processed. Partners for Impact then had meetings with leadership about the process, including requesting documents about the organizational structure, staffing, and budget. To collect information about capacity without creating an additional reporting burden, shelters were also asked to provide a report about the numbers of clients that they served in the past two years that they had already submitted to a funder or other agency. These documents provide background data that can be compared across shelters to determine facilitators and barriers to implementing the self-assessment and future improvements.

To ensure that this project would not add unmanageable burden to the shelter staff, Partners for Impact committed to moving at the pace of the shelters, even if it meant an extended timeline. Similar to the recruitment process, these first steps of working with shelters who had agreed to participate were slow and required more time than expected. Several shelters experienced COVID-19 outbreaks, others were moving residents back into shelter after having moved them out due to the pandemic, staff were out for summer vacations, and shelters generally had difficulty finding time to prioritize getting the project under way. Weekly phone calls and emails from Partners for Impact consultants helped keep the shelters engaged while meetings were scheduled to begin the assessment process.

## Guiding Teams and Design Meetings

Partners for Impact worked with leadership of each shelter to identify members of their Guiding Teams. The Guiding Teams comprise **staff who are working directly with families** as well as **shelter directors**. Members of the team meet regularly throughout the process, complete the self-assessment, contribute to the development of the improvement plan, and hold accountability to implementation of plan goals. Each shelter determined the size and composition of its own team.

With the Guiding Teams in place, Partners for Impact led Design Meetings with each shelter. The goal of these meetings was to walk through the full engagement process and to create clear timelines for at least the initial self-assessment phase of the project, including deadlines and people responsible. Each shelter determined the frequency of meetings and the speed at which they expected to complete the self-assessment.

## Pretest

CCSA and Partners for Impact created a “pre-test” to be completed by shelters prior to beginning the ECSAT. This pre-assessment survey captures basic information about the staff’s training in early childhood and development, trauma-informed care, and attitudes about working with children and families in the shelter. This information will be used to develop recommendations for staff training. Partners for Impact will also compare results across shelters to determine how staff training and attitudes may correlate with facilitators or barriers to implementing the shelter self-assessment.

## Completing the ECSAT

Once the shelter staff completed the pretest and designed the timeline for their project, the Guiding Teams were ready to begin the assessment process. Partners for Impact adapted the format of the assessment tool to make the process more manageable, including putting the content into five Google forms corresponding to Sections A-E. The Guiding Team at each shelter was instructed to complete one section of the tool at a time, with each member of the team completing their own form.

Once all Team members completed a section, Partners for Impact facilitated a meeting with the Team about the results. Key points for discussion were:

1. Any questions on which staff provided different answers
2. Questions that some or all staff indicated the shelter was not meeting the higher standards listed in the assessment
3. Brainstorming ideas for improvement

At the time of this report, the first cohort of two shelters have reached the stage of working through sections of the ECSAT and meeting with Partners for Impact. Neither have completed all five sections.



## Making an Improvement Plan

Once the Guiding Teams have completed the ECSAT and brainstormed their ideas for moving their shelter towards meeting the highest standards in prioritized areas, Partners for Impact will work with them to develop an Improvement Plan. **This plan will identify actions that can be taken quickly with few resources, those that may take a bit longer and more money, and those improvements that will need a longer time horizon and significant investment.** Some shelters may choose to implement some of the “low hanging fruit” action items during the previous stage, as they continue completing the assessment.

## Improvement Plan Funds

As an additional incentive for shelters to participate, the pilot project budget includes funds for each shelter to help them achieve some of the changes they identify in their Improvement Plan. This money is intended for shelters to use on items or programs that will support improving the environment for young children, particularly those that other restricted funding might not support.

## Cohort Meetings

In order to provide additional support to the shelters as they work through the assessment and improvement planning process, Partners for Impact is bringing together the Guiding Teams from each shelter for periodic cohort meetings. These convenings will give shelter staff a chance to **exchange information, learn from each other, and provide mutual support.** A staff member from Families Moving Forward, a family shelter that has used the ECSAT to make significant improvements to its services, has agreed to participate in these cohort meetings and provide additional support to participating shelters. These meetings will also provide Partners for Impact an opportunity to hear from Guiding Teams about their experiences with the process and learn ways that this pilot project can be improved.

## Connections with Early Childhood Development and Education

A key component of this pilot project includes **facilitating connections** between shelters and services in the community for families with young children. These services include high-quality, licensed childcare and preschools, developmental services, and other supports that young children and families need.

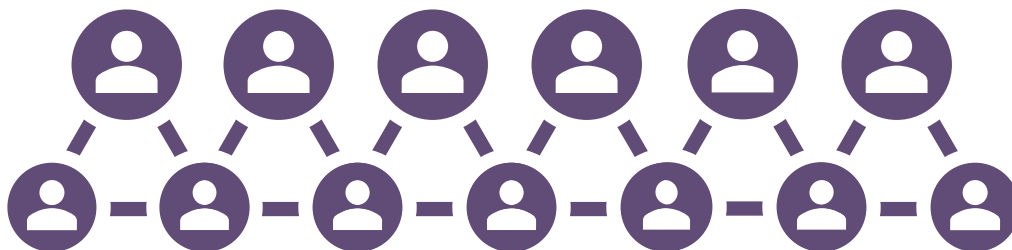
Partners for Impact is working with CCSA to **identify key early childhood contacts** in each shelter's community. Key contacts include representatives from the following:

- Local Partnership for Children/Smart Start
- Child Care Resource & Referral agencies
- Head Start and Early Head Start
- Early Intervention providers and agencies that do developmental assessments
- McKinney Vento Liaisons
- Childcare subsidy agencies
- Others from child health, child mental health, ECE advocates and representatives from high-quality childcare centers

Once the Guiding Team at each shelter has completed Section C of the ECSAT that addresses collaboration with early learning programs, Partners for Impact will set up meetings with local agency representatives.

The intention of these connections is two-fold. First, shelters will **be better equipped to serve families with young children** when they have strong relationships with early childhood providers in their communities. This includes knowing how families apply for childcare, how to access subsidies, and what other resources are available to support families so they can find and keep high-quality care.

Second, early childhood service providers will better serve families experiencing homelessness when they have **accurate information about the specific needs of these families and the issues they encounter when trying to access services**. Helping childcare providers lower the barriers for these families will increase the likelihood that children will be placed and able to stay in high-quality care during their time at the shelter and when they move into stable housing.



## Post-test

At the completion of the assessment and improvement planning process, and once shelters have embarked on the implementation of their Improvement Plans, Partners for Impact will administer a post-test to the Guiding Team. This survey will ask some of the same questions as the pre-test as well as others about what staff learned during the process. It will also gather information about how the implementation of the ECSAT could be improved and any additional support that shelters may need to successfully embark on and complete the self-assessment process. The exact timing of the post-test will vary by shelter. Because the expectation is that each shelter will have both short- and long-term action steps in their Improvement Plans, Partners for Impact will work with each Guiding Team to identify the best time for the post-test.

## Pilot Project Process Chart

Getting Started with Each Shelter		
What	Who	Why
Initial conversations with appropriate shelter staff	Partners for Impact and shelter leadership	Explore interest and eligibility
Memorandum of Understanding	Partners for Impact and shelter leadership	Agreement about expectations and responsibilities
\$500 payment for shelters	Partners for Impact requests from CCSA	Incentive for joining pilot program
Document review	Shelter leadership provides documents to Partners for Impact	Partners for Impact begins to learn more about shelter agency. Shelter provides Partners for Impact with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational chart</li> <li>• Organizational or shelter budget</li> <li>• Client demographics for the two most recent reporting periods</li> <li>• Sample reporting forms for funders</li> </ul>
Onboarding interview	Partners for Impact interviews Program Manager, ED, other key personnel about shelter	Information gathering about agency
Design meeting	Agency leaders and Partners for Impact	Create timeline, goals, outline for project together

Completing the Assessment		
What	Who	Why
Introductory Meeting	Shelter staff	Explain project, introduce ECSAT
Pre-test	All program staff related to family shelter	Data gathering on training needs, information for assessing pilot project process
Self-Assessment	Guiding Team identified by agency leadership, with assistance from Partners for Impact	Complete the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool

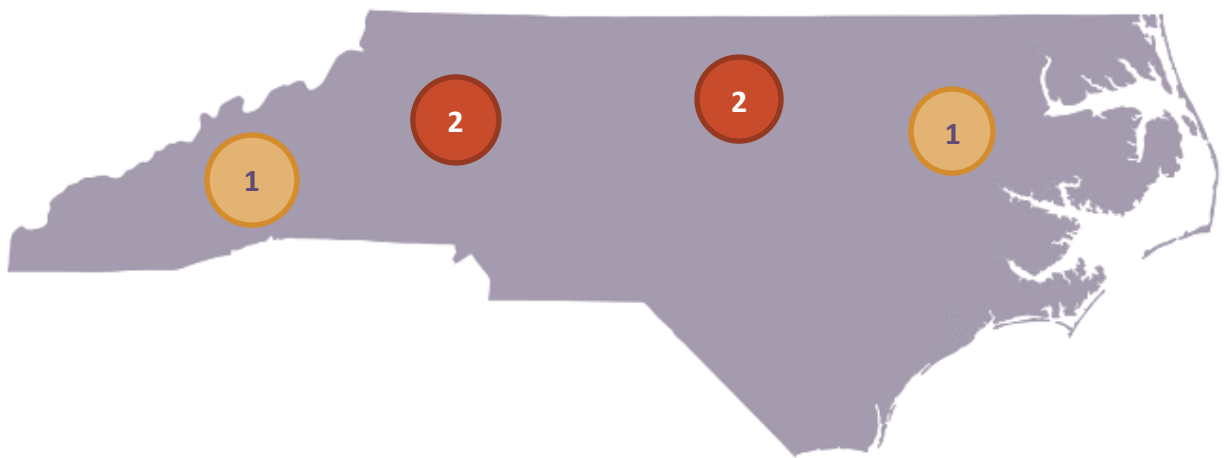
Planning & Improving		
What	Who	Why
Improvement plan	Guiding Team and Partners for Impact	Identify specific action steps for improvement based on self-assessment
Monthly work meetings	Guiding Team and Partners for Impact	Checking in with team, assessing progress, tracking improvements, ongoing needs
Training	Shelter staff	As needed based on ECSAT and Improvement plan

Follow Up & Support		
What	Who	Why
Connections with local Early Childhood System contacts	All pilot sites	Increase collaboration; referrals; understanding of system resources, philosophies, and priorities; system integration
Cohort Meetings	All pilot sites	Share information about ECSAT experience across pilot sites
Post-test	All program staff related to family shelter	Data gathering on impact of project, information for assessing pilot project process

## Participating Shelters

In the first year of this project, two shelters agreed to participate as the first cohort and two shelters have recently engaged for a second cohort. At the writing of this report, the first cohort is fully underway in using the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool, while the second is just getting onboard and will complete the assessment in year two.

The first cohort includes one shelter in north central North Carolina and one in the western part of the state. One is a family homeless shelter while the other serves victims of domestic violence. Both are in small cities. The second cohort that is just getting started, includes one family shelter in the northwestern part of the state and another in the north central area. These four shelters vary in size and capacity. Two of the shelters have only 3 paid staff and the other two have 30-40 staff. Their shelter budgets also vary, ranging from \$425,000 to \$5,245,000 annually. Shelters in more rural areas with less funding and less staff, also served fewer families. In the first cohort, the smaller shelter served 30 children between 0-5 in 2020, out of a total of 76 children. The larger shelter served 50 children 0-5 out of a total of 104 children 0-16.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Based on existing data reports from the larger shelter that grouped youth and young adults aged 17-24 in one category.

Differences in philosophy, programming, operations, and priorities are becoming clearer as the first and second cohorts of shelters join the project. HUD-funded family homeless shelters **prioritize getting their clients into stable housing as quickly as possible** with support services often coming into place after housing is stabilized. Domestic violence shelters **focus primarily on their clients' safety** and providing a space in which to heal and rebuild. The family shelter without HUD funding focuses on rehabilitation and skill development as they more slowly help their clients find stability. The larger shelters have more capacity for programming and services while the smaller shelters are more limited in what they can offer to their clients.

Generally, shelters focus on serving **families with children** rather than **families and children**. Therefore, across the types of shelters in this pilot, none have developed strong connections to early childhood programs and supports in their communities.

### Challenges of COVID-19

Starting this project during the COVID-19 pandemic has presented some real and significant hurdles. In addition to the already challenging nature of crisis work, COVID-19 has added substantial additional burdens to serving clients safely and effectively. Shelter staff already operating at maximum capacity have been asked to do even more, often with few additional resources and little past experience to draw on to solve these new problems. Early in the pandemic, some shelters moved families out of their group facilities and into hotels to reduce the risk of spreading. Later as shelters were beginning to engage with this pilot, some were moving families back to their facilities, causing additional delays in the project timeline. COVID-19 outbreaks at shelters have continued to delay the processes.



## Initial Learnings

The lessons from the first year of this pilot project can be summarized with a few key points:

- Recognize and honor the history, values, priorities, and capacities of each shelter
- Be flexible and work at the speed of the shelter
- Determine how to provide the benefit without increasing the burden
- Incentives matter, even small amounts of money
- The impact can go beyond the immediate improvements
- Celebrate the wins

Partners for Impact consultants documented all meetings and conversations, including planning meetings among the consultant team. Throughout phase I, consultants identified insights and challenges that impacted the progress of the project. These critical learnings will inform modifications to the project design as additional cohorts are recruited. Each iteration of the process will strengthen the three-year results and contribute to the project's scalability at the completion of the pilot.

### Time

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In this first year of the pilot project, much of the learning for Partners for Impact has a central theme of time. Time spent in the earliest part of the project to create materials and instruments played a key role in being fully prepared when shelters were ready to start working. This includes tools and processes to collect baseline data at the very start of the engagement with each shelter.

The time to recruit shelters, from identification and first contact until they signed the Memorandum of Agreement, was longer than originally anticipated. It simply took more time than expected for shelters to process the information about the project within their agencies and decide to participate.

During the recruitment process, shelters were also most concerned with the amount of time the project would require of their staff. The consistent message was that shelter resources were already stretched thin and taking on even the most worthwhile project had to be weighed carefully against competing priorities. Even with reassurances that they would be setting their

own schedules to complete the assessment and improvement plan, many shelters declined to participate at this time while acknowledging the potential value of participation.

As work with the participating shelters has gotten underway, Partners for Impact has modified processes several times in our commitment to working at the speed of the shelters. As we learned of the lean practices of the shelters, the impact of COVID-19, and the huge demands and flexibility needed for staff who are operating in a crisis response environment (more on that below), Partners for Impact recommended that the shelters complete the ECSAT in sections followed by short one-hour meetings to review each session before developing the improvement plan. The consultants set up biweekly meetings with shelter staff to discuss the results of each section as it was completed. Both shelters in the first cohort have been challenged to meet this schedule. Partners for Impact is working with them to determine a better plan.

## The Nature of Crisis Work

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An important lesson emerging from this pilot project is about the nature of crisis work. While all of the Partners for Impact consultants have firsthand experience working in crisis services, working from the outside with these agencies has brought into sharper focus how they differ from other types of service organizations. No matter what the staff plans in advance, meeting the immediate needs of clients always takes priority. This means last minute changes in meeting times and people being called out of meetings as they are in process.

Another aspect of crisis services requires staffing around the clock, not just during standard business hours. Some staff members working directly in the shelter facility who have the most experience and interest in participating in the ECSAT process may work second or third shift. Setting meeting times that can include these staff members requires additional advance planning and may even entail paid overtime.

Unpredictability is an essential reality of crisis work. It is important to have front line staff, those who are working directly with families and children, to be actively involved in the assessment and planning process because they will have the most accurate reflections on how policies are actually implemented. Recognizing and working with staff according to their needs for flexibility is key to success. Building ongoing flexibility into timelines and expectations will improve the experience and minimize frustration for all involved.

## Shelter Capacity

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The shelters in the first cohort differ significantly in staffing, budget, and shelter size. Partners for Impact's initial expectation was that the larger shelter would have more capacity to meet regularly and adhere to a consistent schedule. The smaller shelter, with its very small paid staff, was expected to have difficulties staying on schedule and completing tasks in a timely manner.

In the first months of working with both shelters, these expectations are changing. While the larger shelter has more staff, they also serve more clients and have larger caseloads. Their capacity to manage this project is continually taxed by crises and the needs of their clients as much as the smaller agency. Initial observations conclude that while the larger shelter has more capacity overall to serve clients, they do not have much more *extra* capacity for additional work than the smaller shelter.

## Initial and Longer-term Benefits of Pilot Project Participation

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The two shelters from the first cohort were still in the early stages of the assessment process at the end of this first year. Some benefits have already emerged. Working through the first sections of the ECSAT has already prompted conversations about policies and procedures among staff. They have **identified some changes that can be made immediately and with no new resources**. Partners for Impact consultants have encouraged shelter staff to recognize and celebrate these achievements as demonstrating the value of participating in this process.

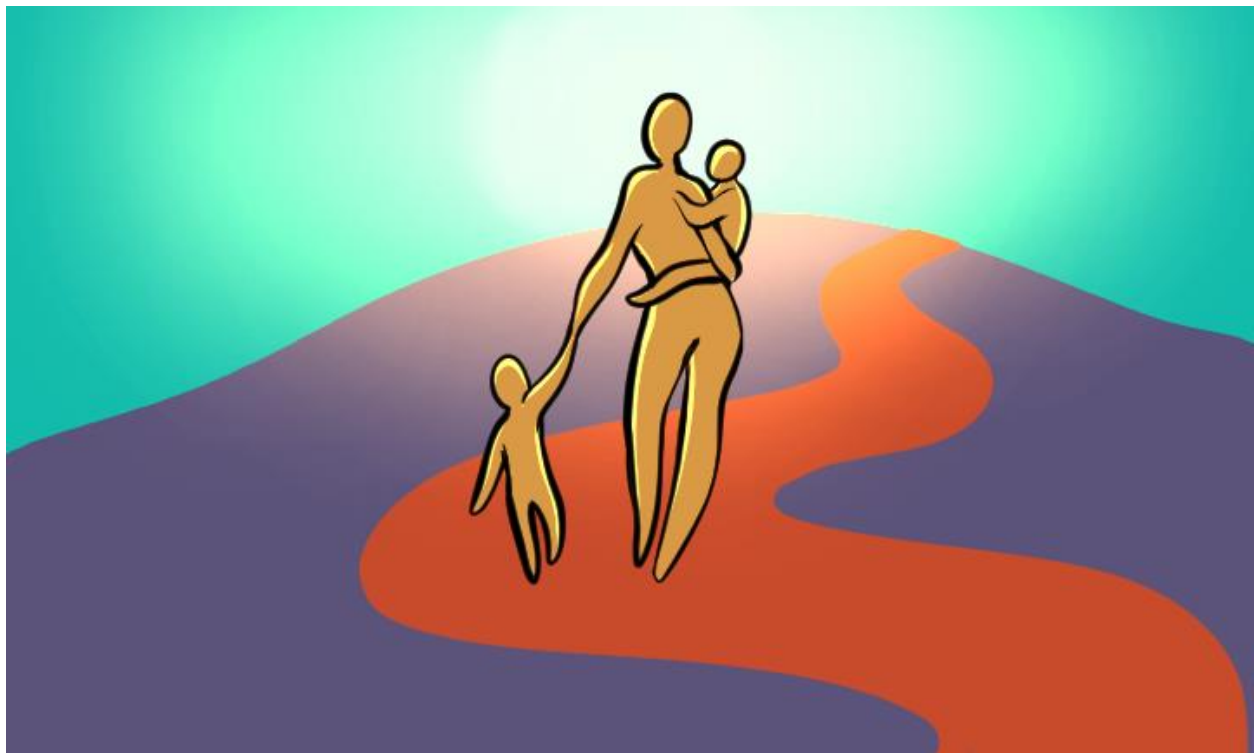
One shelter in the first cohort is in the process of planning to build a new facility in the coming 3-5 years. The timing of this assessment and planning process will dovetail into that planning process and could have long-term implications as they design their space with the needs of young children freshly considered.

The potential for impact beyond the initial use of the ECSAT also becomes clearer as this project is proceeding. With guidance from the Partners for Impact consultants, the shelters can learn from the process itself. This can include frameworks for examining their own policies and procedures as well as environment and culture. Partners for Impact has provided each shelter with tools for documenting conversations, using online technology for meetings, and sharing documents in online workspaces. Ultimately Partners for Impact will be introducing a practice of continuous quality improvement - assessing, reflecting, planning, implementing, gathering feedback, and then following the loop again. We anticipate the engagement with this process around early childhood supports will not be a one-time assessment activity but will begin a process of continuous improvement with an early childhood focus that can expand to other areas of improvement.

Similarly, making connections with the early childhood system can lead to initiating or strengthening collaboration with other agencies and systems, including food security, K-12 education, and workforce development. This project will also connect the participating shelters from across the state with each other through regular cohort meetings. These connections have the potential for developing deeper relationships for ongoing mutual support and information-sharing.

This opportunity may also shift the mindset of shelter staff from serving adults *with* children to serving adults *and* children. Increasing shelter staff's understanding of the needs of young children and the impact they can have on both young children and their parents can lead to improved short and long-term outcomes for these families.

In year two, shelters in the first cohort will complete their assessments and improvement plans and will begin implementing changes. Cohort meetings among shelters and connections with local early childhood service providers will begin. Two more shelters will begin the ECSAT process and additional shelters will be recruited. Partners for Impact will continue to review the lessons of the first year and adjust procedures to ensure an efficient and effective process with the greatest opportunity for impact for all shelters, families, and communities involved.



## Attachment A - Logic Model

CCSA Pilot Project  
Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for  
Shelters  
Logic Model



Impact: Improved social and emotional  
well-being of children experiencing  
homelessness living in shelters and  
connection to early childhood services

Physical Environment				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Self-assessment tool Staff time PFI Consultant time	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff understand what is working, what needs improvement	Shelter has environment that supports children's well-being and development
Staff time PFI TA	PFI provide TA to create improvement plan	Shelter improvement plan	Staff has plan to guide improvement work	
CCSA funding for training Trainers PFI TA Staff time <i>Pre/post-test on staff understanding</i>	PFI facilitate training/TA on places and spaces for children	Shelter staff are trained	Shelter staff understands connections between space and well-being	
Staff time PFI TA CCSA funding for equipment	PFI provide TA to implement improvement plan	Staff implement changes according to improvement plan	Shelter improves safety, environment for children	
Staff time PFI TA Self-assessment tool	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool again	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff/PFI know where changes have been made, where additional improvement is needed	

Programming				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Self-assessment tool Staff time PFI Consultant time	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff understand what is working, what needs improvement	Shelter has programming that supports children's well-being
Staff time PFI TA	PFI provide TA to create improvement plan	Programming improvement plan	Staff has plan to guide improvement work	
CCSA funding for training Trainers PFI TA Staff time <i>Pre/post-test on staff understanding</i>	Staff training on needs of children	Staff are trained	Shelter staff understand developmental and social-emotional health needs of young children	
<i>Reporting form</i> Staff time <i>Pre/post-test on staff understanding</i> Trainer	Staff training on screening	Staff are trained Policies/protocols on screening created/reviewed	All children are screened	
Staff time PFI TA	PFI provide TA to implement improvement plan	Staff implement changes according to improvement plan	Shelter improves programming for children	
Staff time PFI TA	Shelter staff complete self-assessment tool again	Completed self-assessment	Shelter staff/PFI know where changes have been made, where additional improvement is needed	

Connections with Community Resources				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Information about local licensed childcare facilities PFI time	Identify childcare resource and referral agency/local partnership Identify licensed childcare facilities	Connection between shelter and resource/referral agency List of licensed childcare facilities	Shelter has relationship with resource and referral agency and licensed childcare facilities	Shelter successfully connects families to appropriate resources in the community
List of licensed childcare facilities Staff time PFI time	Make connections with childcare facilities	Shelter staff have contact information for childcare facilities		
Information about processes Trainers/local experts <i>Pre/post test on staff understanding</i>	Information sessions for staff, if needed		Shelter staff understands processes for accessing community resources that support children's well-being and development, e.g., identification, vouchers, transportation, 4% set aside for subsidies	
<i>Reporting form</i> Policies/protocols on referrals to resources that support children's well-being and development	Staff training on referrals, if needed	Staff are trained	Shelter staff refers families to appropriate services	



## WANTED: SHELTERS TO IMPLEMENT EARLY CHILDHOOD SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Why Invest in Early Childhood?**

Children's earliest experiences are built into their bodies – shaping the brain's architecture and creating the foundation for future health and learning. Everything a child experiences in their earliest years impacts that child's opportunity to fulfill their potential. When we provide young children with a sturdy foundation, we create a healthier and stronger North Carolina for generations to come.

**About this Project**

Child Care Services Association and Partners for Impact are developing and leading a pilot program in North Carolina designed to provide training and technical assistance to Emergency Homeless Shelters and Transitional Housing programs serving families with children ages 0-5. Using the newly validated and revised **Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters**, shelters will receive assistance to create environments that assist the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of young children as they experience homelessness. Project consultants will also help develop and deepen relationships between shelters and local Early Care and Education (ECE) programs.

With more than 100 criteria, the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters provides recommendations and information that shelters can use to assess their physical environments and programmatic capacities to offer safe and healthy living situations for young children. The tool lists numerous ways shelter staff can connect to resources for families including child care, Head Start/Early Head Start and pre-K programs, thereby providing access to high-quality early learning environments for children experiencing homelessness. Finally, the tool offers a planning form to help shelters set goals and make improvements.

**Project Mission**

To ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers experiencing homelessness receive early childhood supports to promote their children's wellness and readiness to succeed in school and are connected to needed resources for their young children, and to help shelter staff members create shelter environments that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In this tool, you will find recommendations and information on how your shelter environment, programming, policies, and staff can support early childhood safety and development.

For more information about participating in this project, please contact Alma Davis at [alma@partnersforimpact.com](mailto:alma@partnersforimpact.com) or by phone at 919-964-5105.



### Benefit to Shelters

- Incentive for participation
- Grant funding for physical improvements and/or training for staff
- Technical assistance with implementing the self-assessment tool
- Assistance in creating and implementing an action plan based on the results of the self-assessment
- Assistance facilitating connections with early childhood services
- Dedicated time from the project team to ensure success

### Expectation of Shelters

- A desire to improve their services for children and families
- Utilize the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelters, as well as create and implement action plans with assistance from project consultants
- Willingness to collect and share data on improving outcomes for children

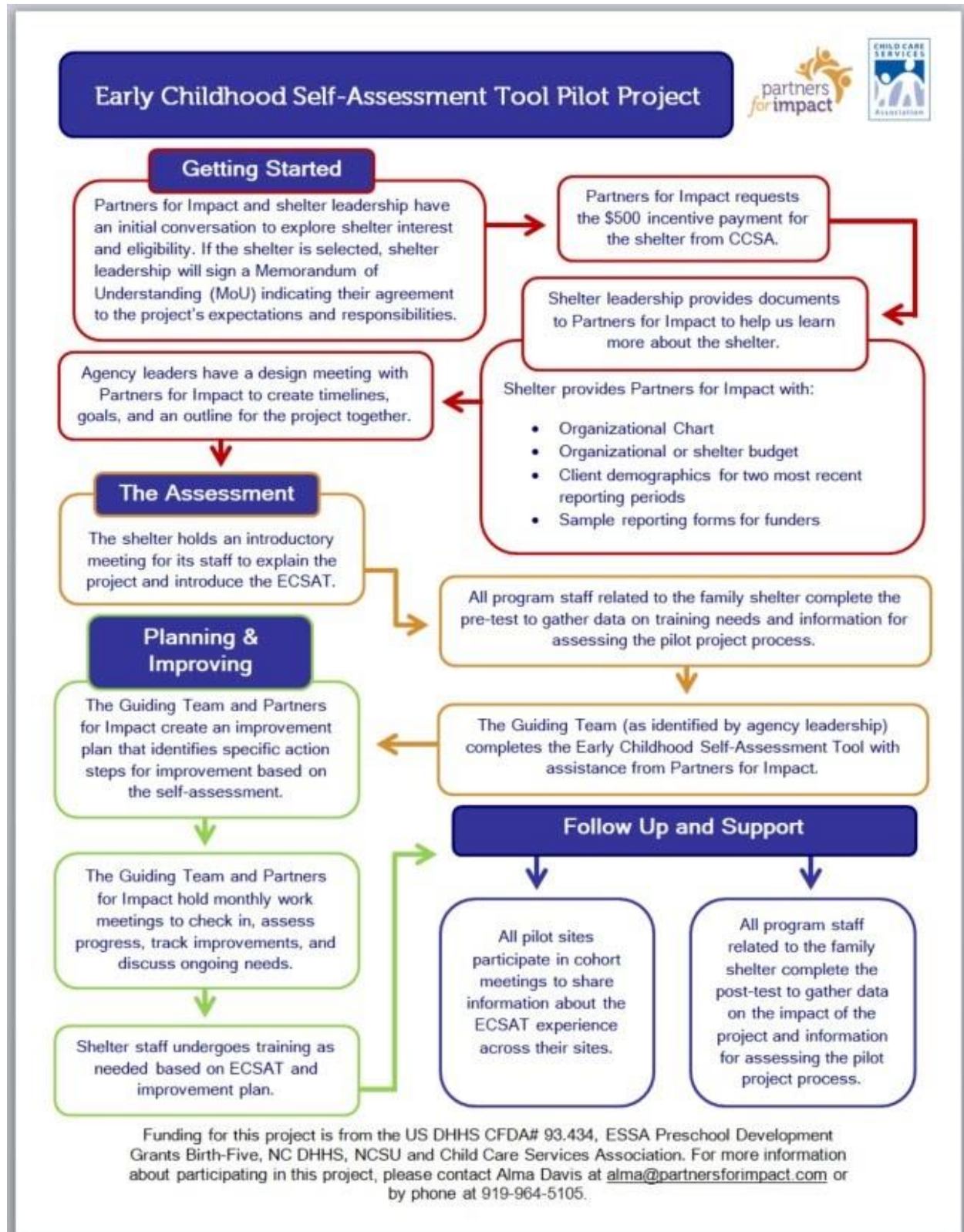
### About Child Care Services Association

Founded in 1974, the mission of Child Care Services Association (CCSA) is to lead efforts to strengthen accessible and affordable quality early care and education by providing supports for families, communities, and the workforce. Using a holistic approach, CCSA supports children and families, helps child care professionals improve the quality of early education children receive and ensures all families can afford and access the high-quality early care and education that is so important for a child's early development. Our T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®, Child Care WAGES® and Infant-Toddler Educator AWARDS® programs give child care professionals the means to obtain an education and supplement their salary based on that education. CCSA also licenses T.E.A.C.H. and WAGES across the U.S. and conducts early childhood systems research and policy development statewide and nationally. For more information, visit [www.childcareservices.org](http://www.childcareservices.org).

### About Partners for Impact

Partners for Impact, LLC is a consulting firm with a mission to strengthen the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations, coalitions, and collaborative initiatives. The firm partners with agency and community leaders to gain maximum impact through system-level thinking, targeted planning, data utilization, innovative programming, intentional communications, and skilled facilitation. For more information, visit [www.partnersforimpact.com](http://www.partnersforimpact.com).

Funding for this project is from the US DHHS CFDA# 93.434, ESSA Preschool Development Grants Birth-Five, NC DHHS, NCSU and Child Care Services Association.



## **Early Childhood Shelter Assessment Pilot Project**

Memorandum of Agreement between

\_\_\_\_\_ (Family Shelter)

and

Partners for Impact, LLC (Project Consultants)

The parties above acknowledge and agree to enter into this MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) as a part of the Early Childhood Shelter Self-Assessment Project, led by Child Care Services Association.

The mission of this project is to ensure that the parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers experiencing homelessness receive early childhood services to promote their children's wellness and readiness to succeed in school and are connected to needed resources for their young children.

The goal of this project is to develop and lead a pilot program in North Carolina designed to provide training and technical assistance to Emergency Homeless Shelters and Transitional Housing programs serving families with children ages 0-5 using the newly validated and revised [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Shelter](#) (ECSATS). Shelters will receive assistance to create environments that support the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of young children as they experience homelessness. Project consultants will also help develop and deepen relationships between shelters and local Early Care and Education (ECE) programs.

### **Partners for Impact agrees to provide the following services for the [Family Shelter] according to their contract with CCSA:**

1. Provide a \$500 signing bonus from CCSA within 60 days of execution of this agreement.
2. Conduct an initial interview to ensure eligibility for participation in this pilot program.
3. Provide technical assistance in implementation of the ECSATS, utilization of data collection forms, and pre- and post- tests.
4. Facilitate meetings to 1) review the assessment results and quantitative data with [family shelter] staff and leadership and 2) complete a planning process for an improvement plan that identifies high priority areas, action steps, and implementation timeline. [Maximum of three two-hour meetings]
5. Attend consultation meetings with [family shelter] staff and others to provide technical assistance with implementation of the improvement plan, including training, facility improvements, and other action items.
6. Collect and manage data from interviews, meetings, pre- and post- tests, and ECSATS to document pilot project processes for CCSA. We agree not to share any client specific information.
7. Facilitate connections with local, regional, and state-level early childhood development and education services and resources.
8. Provide (or submit requests to CCSA for) mini-grant funds to assist with shelter improvements identified in the improvement plan.

9. Facilitate two learning cohort meetings with other Family Shelter programs that have used or are using the ECSATS for program and facility improvements.

**[Family Shelter] agrees to participate in the Early Childhood Shelter Assessment Pilot Project in the following ways:**

1. Develop a team to work with Partners for Impact to implement the self-assessment and improvement process.
2. Commit staff time to participate in interviews and complete the pre-test, post-tests and the ECSATS.
3. Share data with Partners for Impact and Child Care Services Association including content from meetings, interviews, pre-test, post-test, ECSATS, and tracking data with the Partners for Impact consulting team.
4. Develop an improvement plan with specific action steps based on the interpreted results of the ECSATS.
5. Commit staff time to training as determined in the improvement plan.
6. Agree to engage in relationship building, use of resources, and strengthening the connection between [Family shelter] and the local early childhood development and education resources.
7. Commit to attending two cohort meetings with other shelters that have used or are using ECSATS for program and facility improvements.

This MOU is supported by the service contract between CCSA and Partners for Impact, LLC. If at any time this service contract is terminated or discontinued, this agreement becomes null and void and Partners for Impact, LLC is no longer responsible for the above listed services.

Signatures for Family Shelter

Signatures for Partners for Impact, LLC:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(print & sign)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(print & sign)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Principal Consultant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Attachment D- Pre-test

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*Hello and thank you for completing this brief survey about your work at this shelter agency. Through this survey, Partners for Impact is interested in your experiences and training focused on young children. Information collected in this survey will be used only by Partners for Impact to determine any training needs and to assess the impact of the pilot project using the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool. Partners for Impact will make every effort to de-identify data in reports and updates and will not attribute answers to individual survey respondents.*

1. What is your role in the organization?  
E.g., case manager, shelter manager, shelter associate, etc.

2. I've had training and/or coursework on child development/working with children ages 0-5.

- 1 = no training
- 2 = some training
- 3 = a lot of training

3. I've participated in training on trauma

- 1 = no training
- 2 = some training
- 3 = a lot of training

4. I've participated in training on resilience

- 1 = no training
- 2 = some training
- 3 = a lot of training

**As you answer these questions, please think about your interactions specifically with children ages 0-5 that are separate and distinct from your work with parents/guardians.**

On a scale of 1-4:

5. I have enough time and capacity to adequately support the well-being and development of children ages 0-5 in this shelter.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

6. I understand how physical space can support the well-being and development of young children ages 0-5.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

7. I feel confident when I am engaging with children ages 0-5.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

8. I feel like I have the knowledge I need to support the well-being and development of children ages 0-5.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

9. I know how to access community resources (e.g child care, early intervention services) for children ages 0-5 staying in this shelter.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

11. I understand our shelter's procedures for screening children for developmental delays.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = Our shelter does not provide developmental screenings

10. I understand our shelter's procedures about connecting families with outside resources that support the well-being and development of children ages 0-5.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = strongly agree
- 0 = This is not part of my job

12. Please rank the following in order of how enjoyable you find different aspects of working with families and children. Rank the least enjoyable as 1 and the most enjoyable as 5.

- Providing parenting classes
- Working with other community agencies
- Helping families find services
- Spending time playing with or caring for young children
- Longer-term planning with families

#### Open-ended questions

- 13. What is the expectation of the shelter about working with young children?
- 14. The greatest enjoyment of working with children and families in the shelter is:
- 15. The greatest challenge of working with children and families in the shelter is:
- 16. The barriers to getting families into licensed child care in this community are:
- 17. Please provide any feedback you have on this questionnaire that would be helpful to improve our efforts to collect information about shelters and their work with young children.

## Acknowledgement

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Partners for Impact acknowledges and appreciates the support of Child Care Services Association in providing us the opportunity to lead this project. Child Care Services Association (CCSA) believes in a future where all children have equitable access to affordable, high quality early care and education to lay the foundation for successful life outcomes. This organization leads efforts to strengthen accessible and affordable quality early care and education by providing supports for families, communities, and the workforce. Specifically, CCSA provides free childcare referral services; financial assistance to low-income working families; technical assistance and training to childcare businesses; and meal services for children enrolled in participating childcare programs. CCSA also provides local, statewide, and national early childhood systems research, and educational scholarships and salary supplements to childcare professionals. CCSA is one of the three lead agencies of the NC Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Council. As such, CCSA provides management and oversight of five Regional Lead Agencies to ensure the delivery of high quality CCR&R services, and access to special statewide initiatives, including the Infant Toddler Quality Enhancement Project. CCSA also works with partners on early childhood homelessness and food insecurity at the local, state, and national level.

## About Partners for Impact, LLC



Partners for Impact, LLC is a North Carolina based consulting firm with over 60 years of combined experience working with a wide variety of nonprofit human services agencies. We believe that **existing systems do not provide all people with the same opportunities.**

**Reimagining and engaging** the systems and organizations that make people vulnerable can create more equitable opportunities, solve social problems, and strengthen the health and well-being of the whole. **Successful systems change can't be done alone**, so we partner with community collaboratives, agencies, and leaders to gain maximum impact.

Partners for Impact is a values-based company. This means we lead with our values in mind and seek projects that fit that value base. Our core values are **applying frameworks**, such as the collective impact framework, the social-ecological model, and more; being **data driven**; using an **equity lens**; being grounded in **human services systems**; engaging at the **systems level**; and being **nimble and accountable**.



## Project Consultants

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### Alma Davis

Alma is a longtime Community Advocate for people and families experiencing bouts of homelessness. For over 25 years, she has been on the forefront in galvanizing community partnerships, fundraising, and evaluations. Her career has been built on policy reform for Domestic and Sexual Violence— specifically, working in shelters across the state identifying, advocating, and developing trauma informed services, while victims are moving forward from the aftermath of violence and homelessness. Her span of work includes development, improvement, and implementation of programs that serve families and children that have been forced into homelessness. She is committed to empowering families in distress by coordinating tangible resources in the community.

### Beth Bordeaux, MSW

Beth cares about organizations-- their systems, metrics, budgets, and processes-- because she cares about people. She knows that to provide the support community members need to live and thrive, human service systems must be strong from the inside out. Beth is an executive leader with over 30 years of nonprofit and local government experience. She has worked in programs supporting individuals and families with many types of needs, including mental health, developmental disabilities, substance abuse, housing, childcare and childcare quality, early intervention, maternity care, domestic violence, faith support, education, and basic needs such as food and shelter.

### Charlene Reiss, Ph.D.

For nearly 30 years, Charlene has had a varied career in the public sector with experience in small nonprofits, major universities, and local government agencies. Her skillset includes evaluation, program planning, strategy development, and systems change. She combines her love of numbers and research with hands-on experience to help organizations explore creative, data-driven, realistic solutions to systemic challenges. She is always looking for new opportunities to learn and to make the world a better place.

### Fiona W. Dunn

Fiona serves as the design consultant for Partners for Impact and lends a digital native's technological expertise when needed. She graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in Sequential Art and a minor in Scientific Illustration, and she has since pursued an artistic career in addition to her work with Partners for Impact. Fiona has a longstanding interest in social systems and community-based problem solving, and she enjoys being able to bring her artistic skills to the team to create infographics and web, print, and graphic design that help enhance the work and message of Partners for Impact and their clients.