

Home Visiting Systems Coordination in rural, southern Oregon and northern California communities

Lessons learned in Year 4 of the Home Visiting Systems
Coordination Project

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Thank you to the home visiting workforce, who brings vital skills, experience, and expertise to support families with young children through home-based early childhood services.

The Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services at Portland State University integrates research, education and training to advance the delivery of services to children and families. The CCF research team engages in equity-driven research, evaluation and consultation to promote social justice for children, youth, families and communities.

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Introduction

The Home Visiting Systems Coordination (HVSC) project aims to create coordinated home visiting systems that strengthens and benefit all home visiting models as part of regional birth-to-five early childhood systems in southern Oregon and northern California.

The Ford Family Foundation has made HVSC project investments in three regions including counties served by First 5 Siskiyou, California; the South Central Early Learning Hub in Douglas, Klamath, and Lake Counties in Oregon; and the South Coast Regional Early Learning Hub in Coos, Curry, and coastal Douglas Counties in Oregon.

The long-term goal for the project is to improve outcomes for families and expand each region's capacity to serve more families through early childhood home-based supports.

As part of the HVSC project evaluation, members of the Portland State University (PSU) evaluation team at the Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services (CCF) collaborate with coordinators in each of the project's regions.

At project start in 2016 and annually thereafter, the CCF evaluation team has worked with regional coordinators to administer a "systems survey" to understand how key stakeholders involved in the project view their collaborative work and impacts. Each year, a small number of stakeholders are also invited to participate in an interview. This is to better understand the changing conditions and context of their work, as well as highlight the main successes and challenges they have faced during the year.



This report summarizes lessons learned in 2020 that stakeholders and coordinators identified during the fourth year of the HVSC project, drawing from systems survey results and interviews with the evaluation team. We organize this report around the strategies outlined in the HVSC theory of action:

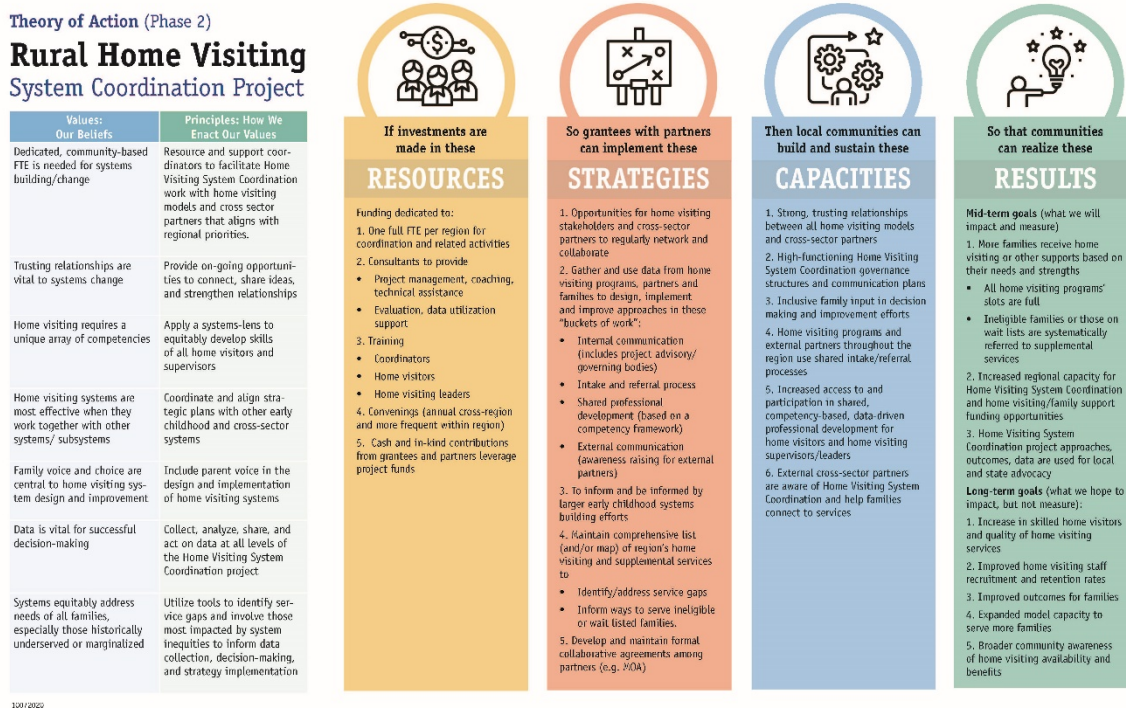
- Improving communication among early childhood home visiting programs and partners,
- Coordinating intake and referral of families to connect with desired services,
- Coordinating shared professional development among early childhood home visiting and partner programs, and
- Strengthening community awareness of the availability and benefits of early childhood home visiting supports.

A total of 25 stakeholders participated in interviews with the evaluation team in 2020: 6 from the South Coast Oregon region, 10 from the South Central Oregon region, and 9 from the Siskiyou California region.

A total of 66 respondents participated in the systems survey in 2020: 14 from the South Coast Oregon region, 33 from the South Central Oregon region, and 19 from the Siskiyou California region.

Figure 1. The project began in 2016 with a theory of action to guide early implementation. This was updated in collaboration with regional coordinators and community partners in 2020 to guide the next phase of work to sustain strategies and continue building local capacities.

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Through the strategies outlined in the theory of action, the project aims to build and sustain community capacity in several areas:

- Strong, trusting relationships between home visiting programs and cross-sector partners
- High-functioning governance structures and communication plans
- Inclusive family input in decision making and improvement efforts
- Shared intake and referral processes for home visiting programs and partners throughout the region
- Increased access to and participation in shared, competency-based professional development for home visiting workforce

- Cross-sector partners' awareness of Home Visiting System Coordination work and support for families connecting to services.

Notable Accomplishments

The biggest accomplishment noted by stakeholders involved in the HVSC project was programs' ability to adapt and respond to changing conditions due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

These conditions impacted employment status of families, the ability of the home visiting and family support workforce to meet family needs, and the collective mental and physical health of communities as they navigated the stressors brought on by the pandemic.

South Coast Oregon Region

Stakeholders interviewed from the South Coast Oregon region emphasized shared professional development opportunities as an area of greatest strength during 2020. Prior to and after COVID-19 health and safety restrictions went into effect, several shared professional development strategies were implemented. It was the mix of pre-COVID-19 in-person and pre-/post-COVID-19 online opportunities that stakeholders appreciated. These opportunities fostered deeper learning, typically were designed to span months, and had goals to promote practice change among participants.

The professional learning cohort group. We did Achieve on Demand. It's brought different home visiting agencies together, but with the flexibility of being able to do trainings at your own time, your own pace. We would come back and meet together and really dive deeper into the information, the learning, and putting them into practice, and just checking back as a group of people to share our takeaways. – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

Stakeholders also saw great value in and benefit to collaboratively offering monthly pre-COVID-19 Group Connections parent-child socialization groups. Although these have been on pause since COVID-19, there is also currently discussion about resuming these in a virtual format until in-person gatherings are again possible.

South Central Oregon Region

Stakeholders interviewed from the South Central Oregon region emphasized the importance of the continued use and expansion of the Community UpLift coordinated referral system utilized across the region.

The number of referrals that we have received to the universal referral system with Community UpLift. We have around 34 referral partners. And then developing the portal and ways that people can be referred multiple pathways, either through paper, text, website. – South Central Oregon key stakeholder

Shared professional development opportunities were also mentioned by several stakeholders. Pre-COVID-19 Lunch & Learns were described as an effective way for providers to get together and participate in shared learning over lunch. Additional professional development since COVID-19 has also included opportunities open to South Central region providers to participate in Siskiyou-sponsored events online.

Siskiyou California Region

Stakeholders interviewed from the Siskiyou California region highlighted the work done on a drafting a coordinated referral form, outlining a process, and piloting the form with community partners.

We've been working out a whole coordinated referral approach for the home visiting systems inside our county. So that we have a solidified way to refer families to what's the best fit for their needs in terms of home visiting services. – Siskiyou California key stakeholder

Stakeholders also commented on the continued relationship-building that happens through Advisory and Network meetings, so that providers understand each other's services, and know who to reach out to if they or families they work with, have questions about available supports.



Lessons Learned During 2020

In addition to notable accomplishments, stakeholders described progress made in each of the four strategy areas of the project, as well as lessons learned over the course of the year.

Effective communication among home visiting programs and partners using new tools

The COVID-19 pandemic required home visiting program leaders and direct service staff to deliver most services remotely. Stakeholders interviewed across the three HVSC regions described how their governance, steering, and advisory committees switched to remote-only meetings.

By utilizing video and phone call options, this had the unanticipated impact of some members being able to attend more regularly, due to elimination of travel time. Regular communication about changing conditions and availability of services was an important way that stakeholders were able to respond during the pandemic.

The meetings provide us with a lot of community resources. We've been able to strengthen and really make some good partnerships with other service providers in our community. – Siskiyou California key stakeholder

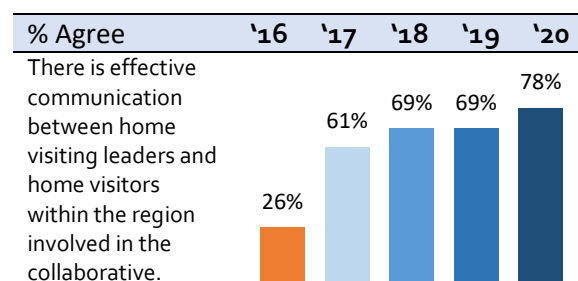
However, stakeholders also spoke to the challenges for some members to participate, due to their responsibilities in managing pandemic responses through public health departments, for example.

We've learned how to do things in a virtual forum for people, so maybe more people can attend and listen. That would be a challenge, just making sure the right people are at the table during busy work schedules. – South Central Oregon key stakeholder

Stakeholders also noted that their ability to respond quickly and effectively during the pandemic was largely a result of the foundational work they had been doing and sustaining through the HVSC project during the three years prior.

HVSC has changed the way our program has been able to respond in COVID. The fact that we're in the middle of COVID-19 and we're all working together and we're hearing from each program what it's been like for them, and problem solving. It's helpful because it keeps us on the same path. – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

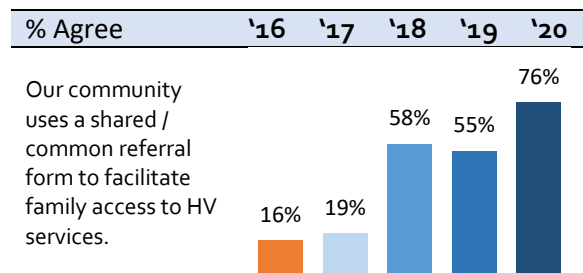
The HVSC systems survey results also reflected an overall increase in survey participants' perception that communication among home visiting leaders and direct service staff within their region was effective in 2020.



Sustained efforts to coordinate intake and referral of families to connect with services

Although each region was in different stages of work related to coordinated intake and referral of families to connect them with services, stakeholders interviewed also spoke to how the work had advanced during 2020.

The systems survey results also reflected an overall increase in survey participants' perception that coordinated intake and referral processes improved in 2020.



Stakeholders interviewed from the South Coast Oregon region shared a mix of experiences using the referral form that had been developed during the prior year. Most were not currently using the form, because they saw it coming out of a process that was intended to meet the specific needs of health care providers. They viewed that form as being less useful in a process to connect families with early childhood, learning, and other family support resources.

Not everyone in the community was using the form or wasn't able to use it. So we definitely need to go back to it. We just need to relook at it and see how can we utilize this tool? – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

However, stakeholders expressed appreciation for that process, because it helped them learn more about each other's programs, to be better able to refer families directly to each other, and be able to say that they know the person they are referring families to.

We still have those connections with other programs that we know who to call and talk to families. So families don't have to do all the legwork. – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

Stakeholders interviewed from the South Central Oregon region talked about the continued and expanded use of the UpLift referral system by community partners, and the fact that health providers, in particular, are also now utilizing the system.

Stakeholders described several improvements in developing the UpLift system, such as:

- Families' expanded ability to access the referral process through multiple pathways such as text, phone, web, or with a referral agency;
- Improved ease of access for providers to enter referral information;
- Increased ability of providers to view the status and outcome of a referral at any point in the process;
- Trusted knowledgeable resource facilitators who are responsible for following-up with families to offer referrals and connect them with identified resources; and
- Regular review of referral data to understand how to continually improve follow-up process and linkages for families, as well as how to prioritize services under COVID-19 for families most negatively impacted.

There has been a huge shift and progress just in referrals and the way that happens and how quickly we're able to respond. In the past, we would have to go back and call the referring agency, wait for them to contact us. And now with UpLift, I just go into the database, make notes, and then those touch points are there. The referring partners have that information. – South Central Oregon key stakeholder



Stakeholders interviewed from the South Central Oregon region also spoke to progress made for UpLift to offer additional translation and interpretation services over the past year. Although still wanting to have staff who speak languages other than and in addition to English, connecting with interpretation services was seen as an important step to providing services in users' preferred language.

Stakeholders interviewed from the Siskiyou California region, especially those who had been involved in the HVSC project for multiple years, were excited and proud of the work that went in to getting a referral form ready for piloting, and testing it out during the year. Many noted that the process not only helped them deepen their understanding of available resources, but also to feel more

confident that they understood the process for connecting families with these other needed supports.

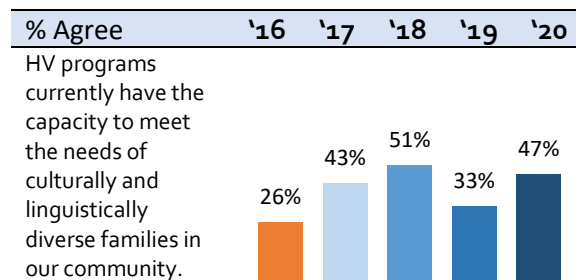
In addition to starting a pilot process with a smaller set of programs in the region, stakeholders in Siskiyou were eager and excited about the possibilities of expanding the scope of potential referral partners. They noted that health care providers make up a group of additional referral partners they wanted to include in the next round of outreach and engagement in work to expand utilization of the referral form and process.

If one home visiting program is full or at capacity then we refer to somebody else. But then, it's not just home visiting, but if a family requests other resources. That universal referral relates to getting to Dolly Parton library, WIC, or another provider. – Siskiyou California key stakeholder

Stakeholders interviewed from all three regions also spoke to the need for program staff to increasingly reflect the racial/ethnic and language communities served.

Primarily, stakeholders noted the need for additional staff who speak Spanish and those who identify as Latinx. If programs are better able to reflect the communities in the region, families might increasingly be able to access available supports.

The systems survey results in 2020 also reflected this as an area for ongoing work.



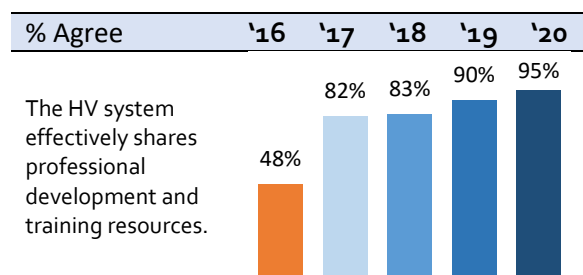
Coordinated shared professional development among home visiting programs and partners

Stakeholders interviewed across the three regions emphasized the continued importance of sharing information about professional development opportunities that are available to providers across agencies and throughout their region.

Lunch & Learns and trainings for the home visiting community has created a networking piece. Having that common ground where we can come together and network and meet one another. It's all about developing relationships so that we can work and collaborate together. – South Central Oregon key stakeholder

Stakeholders felt that they were able to give input on the selection of topics that they wanted to see prioritized for themselves or their staff, based on the needs of families they are working with.

The systems survey results also reflected a continued overall increase in survey participants' perception that the home visiting system effectively shares professional development and training resources.



Due to long distances and travel times in each of the regions, one of the unanticipated consequences of offering professional development opportunities virtually during 2020 was that participants living far from the location that trainings would have been provided, were able to attend.

We've leaned into learning Zoom and FaceTime. We were forced to do online trainings, figured out how to do breakout sessions, polls, registration. More people in Curry might be able to attend now. – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

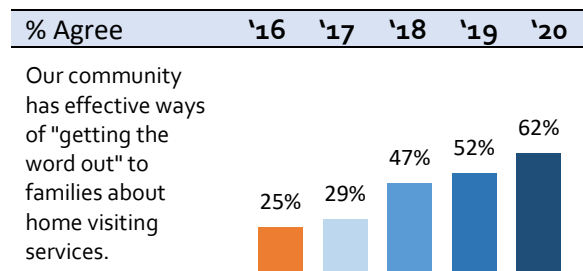
At the same time, stakeholders described a mix of challenges around professional development over the past year. Some felt overwhelmed with the volume of opportunities being offered, especially after COVID-19 shelter-in-place guidance had been issued. Many of these stakeholders expressed feeling burned out on virtual/online training opportunities. Other stakeholders described feeling so overwhelmed with the intensified needs of families and adapting to delivering services virtually that they were unable to participate in trainings offered.

Stakeholders also described the need for professional development and training opportunities to be delivered in Spanish as well as English, and for materials to be translated.

Ongoing work to raise community awareness of early childhood home visiting supports

Although stakeholders who were interviewed from each region spoke to progress made during 2020 to promote community awareness of the availability and benefits of home visiting, it was clear that the priority focus this year was on ongoing challenges that were exacerbated by COVID-19 conditions to get the word out.

The systems survey results reflected the perception that the effectiveness of community awareness-raising work was improving, but that this remains an area for ongoing work.



The primary challenge for community awareness that stakeholders raised was the need for repeated, ongoing and regular communication with community partners to ensure that they remember that home visiting supports are available in their community, and can be an effective support for families. Additionally, for some remote rural communities, online communication strategies might not work well, due to limits on Internet access.

I think it's just hitting it from so many ways, between social media, flyers, we do those tear-off flyers at the post office and the bank. Word of mouth, just whatever way we can get information out. – Siskiyou California key stakeholder

Stakeholders also raised the ongoing issue of working to combat stigma or fear that families attach to home-based services. According to these stakeholders, some families worry that they will be perceived as deficient parents, and some may also worry about home-based services leading to child welfare involvement.

It's a barrier that people don't want strangers in their home or people who begin as strangers. Some people consider it a gift, some people consider it an intrusion or are afraid of what someone will see. – South Coast Oregon key stakeholder

Ways that regions were able to continue promoting community awareness of home visiting services during COVID-19 was through:

- Materials describing available home visiting services, that could be dropped off to families with other supplies such as diapers and books;
- Increased utilization of social media platforms to share information about available services; and
- Including information-sharing as part of virtual professional development opportunities.



Summary & Recommendations

Stakeholders who shared their insights through interviews and surveys in 2020 as part of the HVSC project evaluation, largely recognized the ability of home visiting and family support program staff to adapt to emergent needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

They attributed part of this to the foundations laid through the HVSC project to build trusting relationships, create structures for communication and

decision-making, and establish processes for coordinated referral of families to needed supports.

As a result, continuing to sustain or deepen work in several ways, may be important for regions to focus on during the coming year:

- Communication among home visiting program leadership and direct service staff can be facilitated through regular structured meetings that include a mix of information-sharing, as well as focused areas of work where group members can contribute their skills and expertise.
- Convening these governance, leadership, and advisory structures play an important role in the ability of home visiting systems providers to respond and adapt to changing community challenges. Cultivating trusting relationships among members is foundational to ongoing work and sustaining accomplishments over time.
- Coordinated referral processes requires ongoing maintenance to sustain relationships with community partners. This is to address their questions or concerns about using a referral form and process, as well as to close the feedback loop among referral partners to ensure that families are able to access services they are seeking.
- Ongoing work among home visiting programs to increasingly reflect the communities served, through their workforce in terms of cultural backgrounds and languages spoken, could improve access for Latinx and



Spanish-speaking families in particular.

- Continuing to address technology barriers to participation in professional development opportunities will remain an ongoing area for work to ensure participants have reliable Internet service, the tools they need, and the support they need to navigate online learning platforms.
- Professional development opportunities can be made even more effective when they include coaching or other supports to help participants implement and sustain practice or policy changes.
- Addressing families' concerns about home visiting, including real and perceived stigma will continue to need to be part of communication and outreach strategies.

We have adapted to meet family needs during this challenging time due to COVID concerns. The HVSC project provided vital support and information to home visitors that continued to serve families this year. – South Coast Oregon survey respondent