



## **2022 Self-Assessment Analysis & Program Improvement**

Thirty-four participants assisted with 4C's 2022 formal self-assessment process and the teams included community partners, staff and parents. This summary will address the issues that were deemed to be most critical. The protocol used was the *Self-Assessment CATscan: Comprehensive Approach & Tool* from Western Kentucky University, Training and Technical Assistance organization. Information and over 200 pages of original documents for the entire process from assessment team recruitment, training, observations, exit meeting and follow-up are available for review at the Central Texas 4C administrative office. Examples of the many pages of self-assessment data include the team reports, the original observation booklets and how we then have "follow-up" meetings to inform our progress as we work to incorporate new information during the self-assessment. We understand that although we have a week dedicated to self-assessment, it is our insistence on being a continuous learning community that helps us achieve excellence.

There are concrete plans for improvements—many already addressed by the time reports were written—others ongoing. Even though we have different Head Start and Early Head Start requirements, processes and procedures, we still assess as a Head Start program for children 0-5. Head Start parents help in the self-assessment of Early Head Start and vice versa. We believe that this process indicates our commitment to continuity of care (and quality) since many of our parents have children in both programs. We also look for our program strengths which continue to be the foundation for doing things "the 4C way."

## **Strengths**

**Tradition of Excellence:** Central Texas 4C, Inc. has an outstanding reputation on the local, state and national levels and has been recognized for program excellence and innovation in research based practice. Central Texas 4C has not had a deficiency on a Federal Review for at least the last twenty years and we have received comments from reviewers that our educational approach surpasses Head Start Program Performance Standards. 4C's forty-seven years of experience, coupled with the knowledge capital of our incredible staff (999.6 combined years of early childhood and family services experience) ensures that the agency has a very strong foundation for building excellence into all areas of its programming. The tradition of excellence is certainly enhanced by the fact that our staff, 160 strong, is knowledgeable and compassionate in bringing services to low-income children and their families, partly because 33% of them are current or former Head Start parents. There is also great emphasis placed on confidentiality. The agency is fiscally sound as evidenced by over 21 years of clean audits and no debt. ERSEA regulations are carefully observed and our HR Department does an excellent job of completing all background check requirements prior to hire. It also works hard on retention of staff with finding innovative benefits that the agency can afford and the employee can enjoy.

**Team Centered Planning that is Evident on All Levels:** At the administrative level, whether using one of the systems such as PROMIS database, Teaching Strategies Gold ongoing assessment tool, or the MIP fund accounting system software, staff is proficient in being able to produce reports that guide activity and lead to innovation. The Self-Assessment process itself encompasses several different phases of planning: 1) education about the process and recruitment of parents, staff and community leaders to participate; 2) planning teams to cover all aspects of programming; 3) scheduling of team activities; 4) assigning staff mentors to teams; 5) producing team reports; 6) Strategy team analysis; 7) final report and strategic plan result with long and short range goals. Another evidence of careful planning is that our policies and procedures are

reviewed and revised as needed. Our documents, such as the Head Start Service Plan, Procedure Manual, 4C Policy Manual, Financial Policies, Community Assessment, School Readiness Plan, and T&TA plan are also updated annually, based on what we have learned during the year. This year's contribution has centered around the incredible job staff did to adjust to new Pandemic Procedures and keep children at the focus of all the changes required by COVID-19.

**Safe, Secure, Clean, Organized environments:** Even though this Self-Assessment process noted our environments as strength, we understand that this will always have to be in our “top five needs” to be observed. Only continuous monitoring will assure that this area remains strong since cleanliness, health and safety are so basic to excellence in programming. We are strong now because of the competency of our training methods for *all* staff, not just classroom staff. This is especially obvious in our Education component because it is so consistently measured. But it is also very evident in our Nutrition program, where inventory is dated and cleanliness is paramount. (You had better not walk into our kitchens without a hairnet!) And it is certainly reflected in the fact that our Worker's Comp insurance rates will again be low with the coming new fiscal year. However, we will truly be safe only when *every* employee takes safety of facilities and playgrounds personally and takes responsibility for “see something, do something.”

**Strong program components because of strong, knowledgeable, caring staff:** When 4C talks about components, they include the following areas of major focus for our children and families: education, health, mental health, dental health, nutrition, disabilities, recruitment, selection, enrollment, attendance, family services and community partnerships. For example, when 4C submits the large Program Information Report (PIR) to the Federal government, we are consistently high in the percentages of recommended health requirements for children: medical homes, immunizations, follow-through on medical services for children diagnosed as needing help. Educational outcomes for our children consistently show that 4C's School Readiness Goals

are being met by a very high percentage (consistently over 90%) of children entering kindergarten and that our infants and toddlers are progressing in their emerging skill sets. None of those marks of excellence would happen without educated and dedicated staff. Leadership is evident at all levels of the organization and there are many opportunities for staff to increase their knowledge base during the year. Each employee has a personal professional development plan which is reviewed annually. A well-planned pre-service is available for staff every summer and there are national and regional conferences that keep the agency abreast of new and developing ideas in the care of young children. An example of this is that our centers are accredited by NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children), and also meet Rising Star status with QRIS.

**Parents as Partners:** We know we are doing a good job with our families when a Federal Review Team Leader states, “Do you know what your greatest strength is? You take care of your parents! Oh, sure, you take care of the children, BUT YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR PARENTS.” There are many documented cases of families/parents being helped by the programs: services for pregnant women, emergency services such as food, clothing or shelter, housing assistance, ESL and GED services, job training, substance abuse prevention, child abuse and neglect services, domestic abuse, child support assistance, family goal setting, health education, assistance to families of incarcerated individuals, parenting education including how to engage with their child to maximize his/her learning. This year, 95.45% of our homeless families acquired housing. Since our PIR report which reports our success with homeless families is not due until later this year, we expect our percentage to become 100% because we are still working with the one family that is in a partner agency’s shelter. Our community assessment noticed an increase in homelessness and we are doing a better job of identifying and addressing the problem. We have parents in many leadership positions in the agency on center committees, advisory groups, the Board of Directors and the Parent Policy Council. We believe

that the strength of our parents as partners, especially in governance, stems from the fact that the agency practices the following message of Dr. Gerald Newmark on five critical needs of humans:

*Every person needs to feel respected, accepted, included, important and safe.*

**Community Partners:** There is certainly evidence that 4C's community partners are responsible for much of the agency's success. When, for instance, we do not have to pay rent for facilities to operate our program in any of our communities because of donated space, the children win! When we get services for our children with disabilities from six school districts and two early intervention agencies at no charge to the program, the children win! And 4C has over one hundred documented agreements with providers of everything from cash and donated space to services for families. Did you know our agreement with Furniture for Families provides homeless families with furnishings at no charge as soon as they get into a home? There are agreements for medical services for children without insurance, adult education, discounts on eyeglasses, mental health services, donated storage facilities, shelters for the homeless, clothing, food, utility assistance, transportation, college interns and many, many more. Our community partners are simply one of the main reasons we love Central Texas!

**Nutrition Program:** For many years, our nutrition program has produced nutritious meals and snacks for children as well as finding ways to engage parents in good nutrition at home. Having a knowledgeable director and a Certified and Licensed Pediatric Dietician keeps 4C in compliance with all USDA requirements.

### **Areas to Improve**

**Mental Health Awareness:** Everyone is very weary from the residual effects of the pandemic. Wellness Wednesdays for staff and for parents are the first major building block in our program to address mental health concerns in our staff and in our families. We also need to be mindful that if staff and parents are having trouble emotionally, that will also greatly impact the child. Staff needs first to know that we are at some point, as an agency, be able to hire and

retain enough qualified staff so that employees will not be under so much individual and collective stress. Besides Wellness Wednesday, we are working to create a small “calming center” in every Head Start center so that staff can have a place to gather themselves if it has been a hard morning before returning to their classrooms and kitchens. These are small steps, but we intend to be very intentional in realizing how much stress is caused by not being fully staffed. We are planning for restructuring this agency to make a more productive work site for all our dedicated field staff and hopefully they will remain with the Head Start program.

**Attendance and Recruitment:** This past year (2021-2022), the pandemic was still throwing a curve in attendance. We had increased our percentage of average daily attendance (ADA) the year before the pandemic to 90%. But we had to work hard to continue virtual services until we could re-open our centers. We have set a goal for the coming year to be fully enrolled by January of 2023 and to maintain an attendance rate of 87%.in Head Start and 86% in Early Head Start. Working on increasing our ADA continues as a priority. For one thing, when children are attending every day, the research shows that obvious educational achievements will be greater. Superior attendance is also part of the transition work preparing families for public school enrollment. If habits of good attendance are set early, the child has a much better chance of doing well in school and getting that important diploma. This is another facet of our family engagement in school readiness. Maybe if the pandemic does not rear its ugly head again, we will reach our goals

We are also working to enhance our visibility in our communities so that we can be more successful in recruitment. We continually update our website for family information and notifications. We have begun a Facebook page and we have invested in mobile phone apps to stay engaged with our parents and children if they cannot make it to our in-person centers.

**Need more inkind and volunteerism, especially men, to be involved at the center level:** We did show some improvement in our male involvement this past year. Our parent

Policy Council had fathers participating this past year. We hope that leadership translates into further advocacy with fathers and father figures. There are two very distinct reasons that we need to improve volunteerism in our classrooms: we need to increase the number of caregivers in our classrooms who are trained to provide some help to children and staff and we need to increase the dollar amount of allowable in-kind match so that we can continue to apply for increased funding when we have an opportunity to do so. The pandemic essentially wiped out this valuable resource since our parents were not allowed to enter our facilities. We intend to keep “growing” our Foster Grandparents Program if the pandemic allows. We have also added interns from colleges and universities who are working toward Master’s Degrees in Social Work.

**Improve safety:** It seems that, even though we are very good at providing safe environments for children, families and staff, we can still improve. Because safety is such a comprehensive issue, it can touch every area of what we do. The monthly facility checklist and the daily “walk-through” will continue to be used for the facilities and emphasis will be placed on administrators, coordinators, FCAs and mentor coaches to be intentional about monitoring for classroom safety—especially when looking at supplies and furnishings inside the classrooms. The only classroom item mentioned in our Health and Safety review several years ago from sixteen centers was that one piece in a puzzle was too small to be in an Early Head Start setting. It was in our home-based socialization location—not in a regular classroom—but it should not have been there. We are also looking at training so our parents can help us monitor safety. We plan center meeting topics on facility and home safety that would encourage parents to look at things on a child’s level. We also are enlisting the support of our Foster Grandparent Program participants to be in charge of checking classroom safety.

**Additional facility in Killeen:** Because we have had to move one of our Killeen centers twice in the last four years, and because our communities have given us all the space currently available for donation to Head Start, we are building a permanent facility to serve an extremely

low-income neighborhood so that we can focus on the work we do with children and families rather than working to secure the next location. In Killeen, Federal funds were finally released so that we can build a facility to house at least three Early Head Start classrooms, two Head Start classrooms, a central kitchen and a meeting area for parents and staff training. Goal will be to have facility completed by October of this year.

### **ACTIONS NEEDED FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

- ◆ Continue prioritizing future funding for salaries and safety measures at our facilities. Certainly we are in preliminary stages of restructuring our program to see what impact we can make on field staff salaries. We have children but can't hire or keep qualified staff. More than ever, work on hiring and retention of staff. It is a huge area of challenge.
- ◆ Emphasize to parents from the enrollment process forward how important attendance is to the child, family and agency.
- ◆ Continue to focus on math/science competencies as primary focus on school readiness for 3-5 year olds and on language for infants and toddlers since research teaches us that increased vocabulary is one of the best predictors of future success in school.
- ◆ Continue training/implementation of Practice Based Coaching. We need time to “regroup” because of COVID-19, but we must work back to the excellence we had prior to the pandemic. Some steps have been taken, but it will be a priority for this coming year.
- ◆ Continue the collaborations with the public schools in serving our targeted pregnant teens/teen parents in order to keep them in school. Continue to support our locally designed option to do a better job of serving the teen parents during the time school is not in session. 4C helped 5 student parents graduate this year.
- ◆ Continue learning how to get better data on the progress of our children. We know we do a reasonably good job and we do get data, but often when we get “the numbers,” we stop there.



We must add the anecdotal information that gives our data meaning. Learn from the NHSA Innovation Lab how to move from data statements to impact statements. Since Teaching Strategies GOLD is a web-based assessment, we will look at classroom data often and work to make sure that our family information is integrated with our child information. Program wide (aggregate) data is important because it exhibits trends and certainly individual child data is critical to make sure that EACH child is meeting expectations. Teachers will continue to focus on each child's strengths and areas for improvement, especially by engaging the family in the school readiness journey as we assess family outcomes as well. FCAs will continue to focus on family services and outcomes, especially in encouraging greater participation in our parent surveys. We can always improve on our CLASS scores and TSGold assessments. Center Directors can monitor more frequently on Teaching Strategies outcomes.

- ◆ Maintain our record of no deficiencies on Federal Monitoring Reviews and clean audits.
- ◆ Maintain NAEYC accreditation for our centers as well.
- ◆ Make sure that our Community Assessment continues to be a source of continually updated information about our communities as we look at new ways of distributing resources in a 0-5 program. It was hard to close a rural center, but currently, there are just not enough young children in Holland to make that center meet full enrollment requirements. We will stay in touch with our ISD partners to see if and when changes in the community assessment would make that center viable again in the future.

- ◆ Keep looking for gaps in services to our families and work to develop resources for them—especially in the areas of serving special needs children, special needs parents, dual language learners, homeless and foster children and teen parents. Measure by case notes in MyHeadStart and PIR data.

- ◆ Maintain our excellent record in fiscal responsibility, school readiness for children, family focus and community engagement.

- ◆ Although we have bilingual staff in most of our centers, because of increasing Hispanic population, we need to recruit with a specific purpose in languages. Invest in more bilingual books for the classrooms. (And our multicultural dolls sometimes look a little frayed around the edges.)

- ◆ Goals will be reviewed every year during the Self-Assessment analysis period. Progress will be documented and avenues for improvement will be embraced.

- ◆ More than ever, work on retention of staff. It is a huge area of challenge.