



**Partner • Plan • Act**  

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**illinois action for children**

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**Collaboration Institute**  
2020: YEAR IN REVIEW

# Our Mission



Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.



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# What is the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute?

The Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute (PPACI) is a year-long program of Illinois Action for Children's Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) project that provides in-depth support for early childhood collaborations to strengthen their early childhood systems. Launched in January 2019, the project is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood.

The Collaboration Institute ensures that communities are working to help children birth-through-five—especially those from low-income families or families with multiple needs—enter kindergarten healthy, safe, ready to succeed, and eager to learn. Depending on a collaboration's capacity and readiness to engage in systems-change work, one of three levels of targeted supports are offered—developing, advancing, or thriving.

There are three levels of supports available to collaborations in the Institute:

- **Level 1 Supports (Developing):** Collaboration receives at least 24 hours of monthly coaching around a menu of services including: facilitation skills, member roles and responsibilities, governance structures, engaging diverse stakeholders, understanding Priority Populations, fine-tuning a shared agenda, using data, and action learning.
- **Level 2 Supports (Advancing):** Collaboration progresses through four in-person trainings (24 hours) and receives a minimum of 24 hours of monthly coaching for the year. The training topics include: Community Assessment and Targeted Problem Identification, Systems Scan and Root Cause Analysis, Strategy Design, and Implementation and Action Learning.
- **Level 3 Supports (Thriving):** Collaboration receives at least 24 hours of monthly coaching focused on systems change and systems building strategies, including: increasing the supply and accessibility of quality early learning services, integrating and aligning practices across systems, and focusing on Priority Populations—all through an equity-embedded lens and family and community-centered practices.

## 2019-2020 Collaboration Institute Participants

The second Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute cohort consisted of five collaborations with different strengths, strategies, and stakeholders:

1. Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration
2. DeKalb County Coordinated Intake Collaborative
3. Glenbard Early Childhood Collaborative
4. North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration
5. St. Charles Early Learning Partnership



3 September 2020

It has been said that systems change is about shifting the conditions that are holding a problem in place. As a state, as organizations, and as individuals, it is essential that we recognize the persistent problems that result in particular children (most often children of color) getting left behind. Acknowledging how systems were created and continue to perpetuate inequities, is the first step in creating real and lasting systems change.

Only once we understand the issues we are facing are we then able to act. If we really want to improve outcomes for children and families, particularly those most marginalized, we must partner together across systems, plan strategically alongside those most impacted, and act with urgency and resolve.

Systems change work is not for the faint of heart. It is difficult work that requires fierce commitment and significant collaboration. It also requires individuals and organizations to prioritize the community's needs above their own. The Community Systems Statewide Supports team recognized this and intentionally created a framework that engages a diverse collaboration leadership team, rather than a single person. In addition, we were intentional about creating a program that empowers communities to continue this work, long after the Collaboration Institute is over.






It has been a profound pleasure watching collaborations and their leadership teams rise to the occasion and tackle tough community issues in innovative ways. I am thankful to everyone who committed themselves so fully to the second cohort of the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute. Thank you for your time, your tenacity, and your unwavering support for strengthening the Illinois early childhood system. Together, we can change outcomes for children and families.

In gratitude,

Grace Araya  
Director, Community Systems Statewide Supports



# Collaboration Strategy Snapshots

Collaboration / Level of Support	Goal(s) for Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute
<b>Carpentersville</b> Early Childhood Collaboration Support Level: Advancing	To increase capacity for systems change leadership to increase enrollments in early learning programs. 
<b>DeKalb County</b> Coordinated Intake Collaborative Support Level: Developing	To increase capacity for systems change leadership, build an effective governance structure, and create system-level change that increases enrollment in early learning programs. 
<b>Glenbard</b> Early Childhood Collaborative Support Level: Advancing	To ensure Glenbard children enter Kindergarten demonstrating readiness in all developmental areas. 
<b>North Lawndale</b> Early Learning Collaboration Support Level: Thriving	To create systems level change that increases enrollments in early learning programs and to build an effective governance structure. 
<b>St. Charles</b> Early Learning Partnership Support Level: Developing	To increase capacity for systems change leadership at the local level and build an effective governance structure, with an emphasis on diverse stakeholders. 

Community Systems Strategy and Approach	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented community needs assessment utilizing a racial equity approach</li> <li>Facilitated a consensus workshop, to identify factors that contributed to children being not on track developmentally when they entered kindergarten</li> <li>Initiated a community scan to identify root causes behind under enrollment of priority populations in early learning programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded knowledge of the Collaboration and increased engagement through the participation of more than 30 community members in the consensus workshop</li> <li>Developed and launched a survey to help identify trusted organizations and individuals</li> <li>Expanded connections with trusted sources in the community to promote enrollments in programs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilized team-building activities and professional learning to develop basic norms, roles, decision-making processes, for the Leadership Team and the full Collaborative</li> <li>Examined the current Coordinated Intake system and identified opportunities for improvement</li> <li>Initiated a DeKalb County stakeholder analysis to identify possible referral partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created a shared understanding about how to work together as a team</li> <li>Gained trust, enthusiasm, reciprocity, and efficient teamwork</li> <li>Understand and used consensus decision-making</li> <li>Created foundational Coordinated Intake guidance documents (Decision Tree, CI Referral Workflows)</li> <li>Secured the input and ownership of the full Collaborative through well-planned, purposeful monthly meetings</li> <li>Built knowledge about how to strategically recruit referral partners and stakeholders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed a community needs assessment</li> <li>Analyzed data and facilitated a consensus workshop with community stakeholders to identify a targeted problem.</li> <li>Completed a root cause analysis of their targeted problem</li> <li>Conducted a system scan through parent and provider surveys, as well as focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through their root cause analysis and system scan, the team learned that one factor affecting Kindergarten readiness is that not all Glenbard children who may need developmental screenings receive them.</li> <li>Before COVID-19, GECC was in the beginning stages of developing a strategy to address one of the root causes of their targeted problem. Unfortunately, their work was cut short due to the quick and sudden development of the pandemic. Instead, they focused on the developing needs of the community by leveraging relationships with new and existing partners to help support families.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a community needs assessment using a racial equity approach</li> <li>Produced point in time maps of open seats in early learning programs by census tract and demographic information</li> <li>Examined current governance practices</li> <li>Deepened leadership capacity by engaging a core team in coaching and PPACI activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refined vision and mission statements</li> <li>Developed a comprehensive charter</li> <li>Developed maps that showed open seats by census tract and key eligibility criteria</li> <li>Hosted a Data Equity Walk to gain insights into factors contributing to open seats in programs</li> <li>Honed facilitation skills and learned to craft open questions that elicit insights based on lived experiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilized team-building and professional learning to develop basic vision and mission, norms, roles, decision-making processes, and a collaboration-building plan</li> <li>Initiated a listening initiative with key stakeholders to share the vision, gain their perspective and to understand community dynamics and to inform planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created a shared vision to guide the collaboration building effort</li> <li>Built their community knowledge about individuals and organizations that might be engaged in the collaboration</li> <li>Secured the support of key partners and stakeholders (St. Charles Mayor, SD 303 officials and principals, the library director, and Family Focus)</li> <li>Expanded and diversified their leadership team</li> <li>Developed a year-long collaboration-building plan for FY 2020/21</li> </ul>

# Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration



The Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration (CECC) formed in fall 2018 with the mission “to cooperatively recruit and enroll unreached children (prenatal to age 5) across all programs and area agencies.” The group also focused on preventing duplication of services and reducing competition to best serve each family.

CECC focuses its efforts on Carpentersville, located at the northern tip of Kane County. It is home to 38,138 people of which 4,218 are children under age 5. Sixty-two percent of the children under five are Hispanic (or Latinx) and 11% of households in Carpentersville are Spanish speaking.

## APPROACH

The Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration (CECC) experienced early success in building trust between the three partners: Jerri Hoffmann Child and Family Center, Two Rivers Head Start and Community Unit School District 300. CECC engaged in PPACI to learn strategies to expand and diversify its membership, and identify new ways of working together in order to build a strong recruitment and centralized intake program.

With the support of the coach and PPACI training and resources, the CECC engaged in the following activities:

- Conducted a community needs assessment utilizing a racial equity approach;
- Hosted a consensus workshop with diverse stakeholders to analyze the data and obtain qualitative insights and responses based on lived experiences;
- Developed a survey to conduct a community scan to deepen their understanding of barriers to families accessing high quality early learning programs.



*Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:*

“The Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration members are thoughtful and sensitive to the spectrum of child and family needs in their community. They are rightly proud of the trusting relationships they have developed with each other. I valued their openness about their thoughts regarding the processes and work we undertook. Their commitment to the children they serve will see them through their changing context during Covid 19.”



## RESULTS

The Carpentersville Early Childhood Collaboration (CECC) increased partner understanding of the early childhood landscape and families with children under age five through the community needs assessment. The community meeting CECC hosted was a high point. More than 30 partners and parents participated and shared their insights to help frame a target problem. Disparities by race in early learning program enrollments and development based on KIDS engendered community wide concern and increased interest to address the problems.

CECC developed a thoughtful survey for parents, community members and professionals to gather additional insights about barriers families confront in enrolling their children in early learning programs. While a difficult influenza outbreak in January–February followed by the shutdown for Covid-19 in March hindered administration of these surveys, the team was able to obtain some responses. These responses helped CECC increase program visibility through Facebook posts and videos, unified messages, a single email address and online interest form. The group is committed to putting their learning to work as the environment continues to change in response to Covid-19.

# DeKalb County Coordinated Intake Collaborative



DeKalb County Coordinated Intake Collaborative was created in 2017 to engage families of young children 0-5 in intensive, long-term home visiting services and to do this through a single point of entry to avoid duplication of services and to encourage quick enrollment in services. The collaborative is currently composed of individuals from the Doula program (CH&A), HFI HV program (CH&A), Baby Talk HV program (4-C), DeKalb County Health Department, DCFS, and 4C's-- Community Coordinated Childcare's Child Care Assistance Program.

DeKalb County is in north-central Illinois. According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map, 7,202 people out of their total population of about 104,473 were children birth-through-five in 2017.

## APPROACH

The DeKalb County Coordinated Intake Collaborative applied to the PPACI as a collaboration organized to support coordinated intake.

Although the Collaborative had been meeting monthly, there was vagueness and confusion about what coordinated intake was supposed to do and a general lack of trust. The Collaboration had no formal mission statement, decision-making structure, and the roles of the different partners, including the Coordinated Intake staff, were not clear.

To address these issues and reach its potential as a systems change strategy, a new Leadership Team, including all three home visiting programs, was formed and the following scope of work was identified.

1. Establish basic norms, roles, decision-making processes, for the Leadership Team and the full Collaborative;
2. Examine the current Coordinated Intake system and identify opportunities for improvement;
3. Conduct a DeKalb County stakeholder analysis to identify possible referral partners.



*Kim Zalent, Coach:*

**“The DeKalb Coordinated Intake Collaborative’s Leadership Team thoughtfully and enthusiastically embraced teambuilding, honest communication, and professional learning about collaboration-building. Now that they have established clarity within the Collaborative about the purpose and functioning of Coordinated Intake, I look forward to their next ambitious project— a comprehensive campaign to serve more families, especially those most vulnerable, throughout DeKalb County.”**

## RESULTS

The Leadership Team is now a well-functioning group that lives out its team norms, is unafraid to examine issues, and uses a participatory consensus decision-making process. The Team ably managed the onboarding of a new Coordinated Intake staff person, recruited new members to the Leadership Team, and participation in the monthly, full Collaboration meetings has increased— even during the COVID crisis.

To address the confusion about the coordinated intake program, the Team created a Decision Tree, an agreed-upon, transparent process and framework that guides the decision-making about where to assign home visiting referrals. The team also created a CI Referral Workflows document to ensure that the recruitment and enrollment process for families is as smooth as possible. Thanks to the Ounce of Prevention for collaborating to support this foundational work.

Next year, as part of PPACI Cohort 3, the Collaborative will initiate a comprehensive campaign to serve more families throughout DeKalb County. This means recruiting more community partners/stakeholders and creatively messaging about home visiting through social media. They will continue to develop their governance structure and apply a rigorous equity lens to all their endeavors.

# Glenbard Early Childhood Collaborative



The Glenbard Early Childhood Collaborative (GECC) serves families with children age 0-5 within the school district areas of Marquardt D15, Queen Bee 16, Glen Ellyn D41, CCSD 89, Lombard SD 44 located in Glen Ellyn, Lombard, Glendale Heights, and Carol Stream. GECC was created in 2015 when the Cooperative Association for Special Education (CASE) observed need for local home visiting services. No single school district in the area had the capability to apply for and manage a Prevention Initiative grant, so CASE brought together five school districts and applied jointly on their behalf. Currently, their primary efforts revolve around increasing enrollment of children in early learning programs, serving priority populations, and implementing collaborative screenings. Their mission is: The Glenbard Early Childhood Collaborative in partnership with the community, works to increase access and awareness to quality learning experiences for all children birth to five and their families; their vision is: Empowering Glenbard Children and Families to reach their greatest potential.

## APPROACH

Initially, GECC applied to the PPACI in hopes of building a sustainable governance system. However, through participation in Level 2 Supports, their focus shifted. With the support of their coach, they engaged community stakeholders in identifying a targeted problem and exploring its root causes. To further understand their problem, they conducted a system scan by creating and distributing surveys to parents and providers. Through analysis of the 100 responses they received, they learned what parents and providers in the community know about developmental screenings.



*Ruby Flores, Coach:*

**"I was thoroughly impressed with the GECC team's willingness to ask tough questions of themselves and of each other. Because they care so much about their collaborative, they were able to examine it with a critical eye and identify ways in which it can be better and stronger. At the same time, they were able to celebrate wins and use that momentum to propel themselves forward. I look forward to working beside them and learning with them for another year!"**

## RESULTS

GECC believes their system scan was a significant accomplishment. It provided substantial data that helped them identify problems and needs, as well as assets. It was also the first step in meaningfully valuing parent voice. Moreover, the surveys they conducted raised GECC's level of recognition among community parents and early childhood providers.

Another result of GECC's participation in PPACI's Cohort 2 is their desire to continue into Cohort 3. They will use their coaching supports to create a governance structure for the collaborative.

# North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration



The North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration's (NLELCs) vision is that all North Lawndale families have access to high-quality early learning programs and supports. Its mission is to ensure that priority families with children birth to eight years old have the resources needed to engage, enroll and sustain involvement in high-quality early learning programs.

A broad range of stakeholders participates in the NLELC including parents and residents, health care providers, staff from community libraries, social service organizations, faculty from local elementary schools and early learning providers. These dedicated collaboration members are committed to serving the young children and their families living in North Lawndale.

Located in a well-defined and historically significant area on Chicago's west side, North Lawndale is home to just over 42,000 people of whom 88% are African American and 10% or 4,200 are children under age five.

## APPROACH

The North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration participated in the PPACI with the goal of identifying innovative methods for finding and engaging children from priority populations. After completing PPACI's assessments, the Core Team decided to conduct a community needs assessment to help identify barriers to participation. The team also determined that, while the NLELC was functioning well, a charter describing its governance structure, processes and practices would strengthen their collaboration.

With the support of the coach and PPACI resources, the Core Team undertook to:

- Conduct a community needs assessment including individual program enrollment information;
- Develop maps to provide a picture of program enrollment by census tract and key demographic information;
- Develop facilitation skills to conduct a Data Equity Walk to increase understanding about barriers to enrollment; and
- Review, revise and develop governance practices to strengthen the collaboration's functioning.



*Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:*

**"How exciting to see the passion and dedication of the North Lawndale team propel them to exceed their original goal! I experienced their warmth and commitment to the families and children of North Lawndale at every meeting and it added a special energy to their first and virtual Data Equity Walk. Through the charter they developed, the group strengthened the collaboration's foundation for its future work."**



## RESULTS

The Core Team of the North Lawndale Early Learning Partnership hosted a Data Equity Walk attended by more than 35 community members. The Team's innovative use of maps to show open seats in programs by site and census tract against a backdrop of key eligibility criteria such as poverty provoked robust conversations. Core Team members utilized newly learned facilitation skills to elicit actionable insights for their work. The NLELC now has a strong list of barriers and ideas to increase enrollment in early learning programs that they can refine into new strategies.

The Core Team developed a vision and mission statement, and identified guiding principles for their organization. They crafted values to inform decision-making, defined member's roles and a participatory, consensus-based decision-making process. These all contribute to a charter that assures responsibility and all NLELC members shoulder accountability. It provides a solid foundational structure and record for NLELC as it grows and changes through time.



# St. Charles Early Learning Partnership



The St. Charles Early Learning Partnership is a new collaboration that strives to engage community stakeholders to work together as one to assure that all children (prenatal to age 8) and their families – regardless of race, ethnicity, language or income – have access to the resources, services, and education they need so they are healthy and ready to learn. Service area: St. Charles Community Unit School District #303 (City of St. Charles and portions of the surrounding communities).

St Charles SD 303 is located in DuPage and Kane Counties (North-Central Illinois). 2017 Census data indicates: 4,102 total children ages 5 years and under with 380 limited English-speaking households (238 of these Spanish-speaking); 492 children ages 5 and under living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Only 25% of CUSD 303's kindergartners are judged as ready (KIDS).

## APPROACH

Inspired by other early learning collaborations in the Fox Valley area, the St. Charles Early Learning Partnership's Leadership Team applied to PPACI for help in realizing their vision of creating a broad-based early learning collaboration. Although members knew each other well though joint projects, they had never worked together as a team, nor were they sure about where to start on their ambitious goal.

They focused their approach in three areas:

- Team building and professional learning to establish basic vision and mission, and mental model for the collaboration, as well as norms, roles, decision-making processes. The PPACI Orientation was key to helping build a common mental model for the collaboration.
- Listening meetings with key stakeholders to share the Partnership's vision, gain their perspective, and understand community dynamics.
- Comprehensive planning to create a year-long collaboration-building plan for FY 2020/21.



*Kim Zalent, Coach:*

**"The St. Charles Early Learning Partnership's team is curious, thoughtful, and ambitious on behalf of young children and families. Some might be daunted by the challenge of creating a district-wide collaboration with a small team, but not this team. Comfortable with ambiguity, they can move from big-picture thinking to actionable plans—and to "go big or go home."**



## RESULTS

The St. Charles Early Learning Partnership Leadership Team is now an expanded, cohesive high-functioning team, with a shared passion and strong values rooted in equity and inclusiveness. They believe that families should play a central role in informing and building the emerging collaboration. The team showed flexibility and a drive to keep going despite obstacles, including COVID-19.

The team has completed extensive foundational work in identifying diverse stakeholders across the District and secured support (including in-kind support) from the key partners and stakeholders (St. Charles Mayor, SD 303 officials and principals, library director, and Family Focus-DuPage).

Going forward, the team will be implementing a detailed collaboration-building plan, participating in PPACI Cohort 3. First off, will be a months-long listening campaign, done virtually and in-person where possible, to uncover interested community members and parents and to learn what is working well for young children and where there may be gaps or opportunities to improve. Other planned components are community assemblies to further develop the shared vision and build a sustainable governance structure.

# Meet The Team

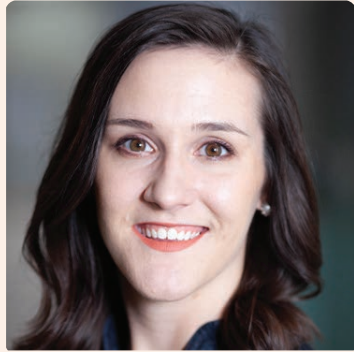
From all of us at CS3, we thank you for your passion and commitment to improving outcomes for children and families in Illinois!



**Choua Vue**  
Vice President of Community Impact  
Illinois Action for Children



**Grace Araya**  
Director of Community Systems  
Statewide Supports  
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**Kristina Rogers**  
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**Chris Foster**  
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**Trish Rooney**  
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**Carolyn Newberry Schwartz**  
Consultant

## Congratulations on completing the year!

As you continue on your community systems development journey with your early childhood community collaboration, please remember that Partner Plan Act still has supports to offer you.

### On-Demand Consultation

Take advantage of this support when your early childhood community collaboration needs to tackle a specific, short-term issue. A consultant will be matched with your community based on the topic area requested. Up to 20 hours will be provided over the course of the fiscal year.

On-Demand Consultation topics include:

- Collaboration Skills
- Governance
- Data
- Equity
- Systems Thinking
- Family Engagement
- Quality
- Enrollment
- Coordinated Intake
- Priority Populations
- Collaborative Developmental Screenings
- Birth-3rd Grade/PreK-Kindergarten Transitions
- Chronic Absenteeism

### On-Demand Learning

Take your community systems development learning into your own hands. CS3 is developing on-demand learning modules every year covering various topics such as data, community systems development strategies, and parent engagement..

Currently, there are four courses available that are accessible through your WeConnect account.

1. Early Childhood Collaboration Data Course
2. Shared Intake for Early Childhood Collaborations Course
3. Community Systems Development for Early Childhood Collaborations Course
4. Collaborative Developmental Screenings for Early Childhood Collaborations Course

[learn.actforchildren.org](http://learn.actforchildren.org)

To learn more about these opportunities and to stay abreast of current trainings offered near you, check out [www.PartnerPlanAct.org](http://www.PartnerPlanAct.org) and make sure you sign-up to receive our monthly e-newsletter.



# Take Your Collaboration to the Next Level.

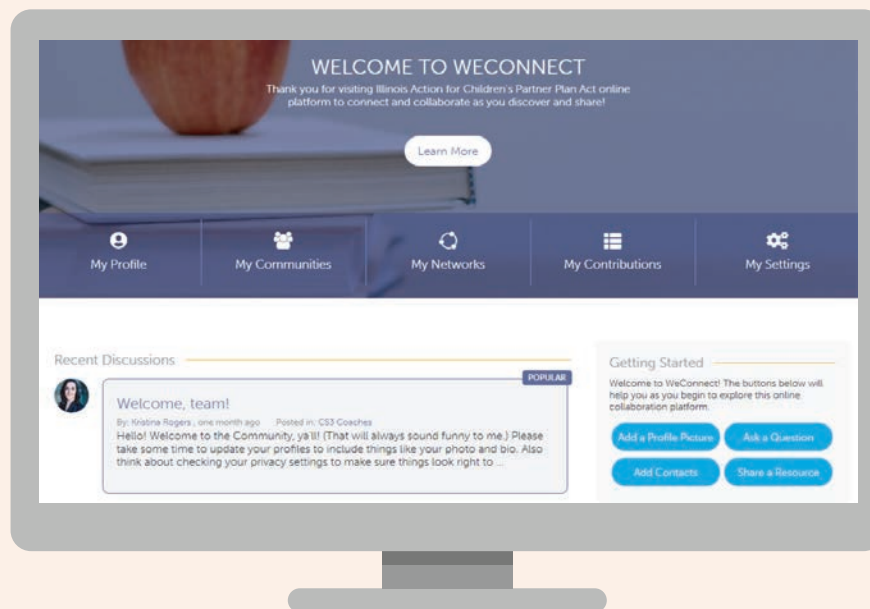
## Connect with your members online!

Illinois Action for Children is thrilled to support collaborations through our online collaboration platform, WeConnect! Get ready to take your community systems development work to a whole new level. Once you sign in, you'll have instant access to:

- **Online Communities:** Connect with members of your collaboration and others online.
- **Discussions:** Ask questions and share your knowledge and ideas.
- **Resource Libraries:** Share your documents and find resources you need.
- **Member Directory:** Connect with other collaboration members.

There is strength in numbers. Connect with other collaborations on WeConnect, today!

[weconnect.actforchildren.org](http://weconnect.actforchildren.org)



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