



Erie Together Activity Update **March 31, 2015**

Prepared by:
Mary C. Bula, Facilitator
Nicole Wethli, Assistant Facilitator

The activity described in this report is aligned with Erie Together's priorities and desired outcomes as reflected in our "impact plans." These impact plans are the documents that guide all of Erie Together's work, and provide good context for understanding the overall movement. Each of the four Erie Together Action Teams has a specific impact plan. To access the impact plans, please visit <http://www.erietogether.org/impact-plans>. The below bullets highlight select Erie Together activity over the last month.

Action Team 1: Early Childhood Readiness and Success

- A significant push is underway to get Erie Together-developed early childhood readiness and success resources into the hands of individuals and organizations that have access to and/or work with children and families. These resources include the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist, Progress Chart, and Parent Training Kits. To that end, the "Kindergarten Readiness Resource Distribution" task team has developed a distribution strategy and is making the necessary contacts. Initial targets include the medical and faith-based communities, and childcare centers in high poverty areas.
- Kindergarten registration is an important focus of Erie Together, as local districts experience various rates of success in families registering their children on-time. To that end, Erie Together, for the third year in a row, has produced a "Kindergarten Registration flyer" that lists contact information and important registration dates for each Erie County school district, along with information families must provide to districts to register their children. Registration activities begin in some districts as early as March, so Erie Together had tens of thousands of flyers printed and has taken them to various distribution points across the county. Some sites include Little Caesars, Northwest Savings Bank branches, school districts, child and family care centers, churches, Country Fairs, and grocery stores, etc.
- One of Erie Together's priorities is to help raise awareness across the county of the importance of early childhood education and of reading proficiency by the end of third grade. The task team focusing on this priority began its work by doing a literature scan of research so their informational campaign will be well-grounded in factual information. Next steps will be to simplify the information into specific points, and then to deploy a communications campaign across Erie County. The task team has envisioned the

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campaign, which is planned to be a multi-week “road show”, and is now finalizing the budget and working to secure funds to launch the campaign.

- Another notable priority is to help connect families to resources that lead to early childhood readiness and success, with one of those resources being scholarships for quality early education through Erie’s Future Fund. To that end, Erie Together has formed a task team to help promote Erie’s Future Fund to raise additional money to support more children. The group is building a framework for outreach to organizations and businesses to secure additional funds through contributions, Educational Improvement Tax Credits, and cause marketing.

Action Team 2: Aligning Education to Careers

- Erie Together’s “Extended Time Programs” task team has been collaborating with United Way’s Education Impact Council and Unified Erie’s Family Committee to create professional development opportunities for staff at local nonprofits. The trainings are based on data from all three groups, including a survey created and deployed by Erie Together’s task team. Trainings began in November 2014 and are being held roughly quarterly. The next training will be held on April 8, and will focus on “strengths-based programming.” There are more than 100 people registered to attend this event. The goal of these trainings is to help build program capacity to effectively serve more children.
- Erie Together was instrumental in envisioning and launching “Career Street”, a countywide career exploration initiative for Erie County students in grades K-12. Career Street was launched in February 2014, and in just one year helped facilitate experiences for over 3,000 young people. In mid-February Career Street held a strategic planning session to evaluate its first year of operations and strengthen its work moving forward, including deepening usage within school districts and the business community. Erie Together has formed a task team to assist with the marketing of Career Street in an effort to increase connections between local employers, nonprofits and educators to provide quality career exploration experiences for students. Outcomes of the recent strategic planning session will help inform this team’s work.
- Erie Together recently formed a task team to help support youth civic engagement and/or volunteerism. At the last two countywide action team meetings, participants had very dynamic discussions about ways to help kids gain a more comprehensive understanding of their community, their government, and how they can play active roles and make a difference moving forward. Ideas include (1) a youth-centric “Erie Ambassadors Program” similar to the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership’s program of the same name focused on adults; (2) a “government day” for youth, where students would hear from local elected officials about how government works, what it is

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like to be an elected official, and why it is important for young people to be involved in their community and vote; and (3) a variety of others. Due diligence on these ideas continues.

- The “More Caps and Gown Project,” which arose out of our community’s participation in the national America’s Promise Alliance GradNation campaign, has now officially launched. This is a comprehensive three part strategy, including the following components: (1) Adopt-A-School (including mentoring), with the first pilot school being Rice Avenue Middle School in Girard; (2) community events bringing caring adults together with local youth; and (3) infusing the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets across the community. For more detail on the More Caps and Gowns Project, please visit <http://www.erietogether.org/more-caps-and-gowns>
- Another Erie Together task team is focused on ensuring students and parents have positive connections with post-secondary education and training institutions and transitions supports, so that youth can move seamlessly from their high school education into post-secondary education or training. This group is currently preparing to conduct focus groups with students and parents to gain feedback on what they wish they had known, or had access to, to make the transition from high school to post-secondary education or training smoother or more successful.
- Additionally, Erie Together has formed a task team to pilot our “Are You Ready for Life After High School” checklist with local students, and develop a distribution strategy to get this information into the hands of young people across Erie County. To access this resource, please visit <http://www.erietogether.org/Post-Secondary>

Action Team 3: Individual and Family Stability

- The Family Action Team (FACTs) process is being expanded through relationships with several local social service organizations and parishes. Erie Together task teams have been formed to assist with engaging target organizations and to recruit, train, and retain mentors to assist FACT families in the achievement of their goals. A new target, local high schools, is also a potential opportunity but is in the very early stages of exploration. This work is ongoing.
- Volunteers have developed a “Holistic Health Self-Assessment” and are now considering the best uses of this assessment, how it can complement the tools being used by local agencies measuring client self-sufficiency progress, and how it can best be distributed throughout the community.
- The Gannon Human Services Directory (hsd.gannon.edu) and a companion Veterans’ Portal (www.veteransportal.com) were launched in September. A task team has been convened to

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ensure community awareness and use of these resources. Gannon University mass produced a business card with information on how to access both resources, which are now being placed at strategic locations throughout the community. Other marketing strategies are currently under development.

- An additional task team has been formed to help reduce the stigma of accessing available social services so those who need help from the resources that exist in our community seek that help so they may move forward on their path to becoming more self-sufficient.

Action Team 4: Aligning Workforce and Economic Development

- The Erie County Reentry Services and Support Alliance (ECRSSA) Planning Group continues to meet once every two to three weeks to develop a strategy for "transitioning clients" returning to the Erie community. They are making great progress and will be releasing their recommendations later this year.
- Erie Together has been focused on helping employers connect with underemployed, unemployed, low income and minority individuals to help fill local jobs. An important piece of this is engaging the social service community early on to help identify and support candidates through the process. To that end, Erie Together has facilitated connections between multiple social service, criminal justice and faith-based organizations and several local employers looking for candidates to fill positions within their companies. These are connections that would not have happened without the assistance of Erie Together, and as a result of these efforts, companies are gaining access to candidates they may not have connected with otherwise.
- New task teams have been created to (1) measure employer and employee satisfaction with workforce development supports, (2) widely distribute Erie Together's Work Readiness checklist, and (3) identify best-practices for diversity trainings within the workplace to help support the local workforce. More information on their efforts will be forthcoming.

Miscellaneous:

- Nerthling's Heating and Air Conditioning awarded a free furnace and donated the installation to Mr. Joseph Blaede of Corry through the third annual "Nerthling's Warming Families Award." For more information on the award, please visit <http://www.erietogether.org/news/warming-families-2015>

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