



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taking Charge of Change™

A 20-year review of empowering early childhood administrators through leadership training

Leadership Matters

While there is consensus among policymakers and practitioners about the importance of strong leadership in early childhood, few states have made leadership training a high priority in the implementation of their career development systems. Illinois stands out as a notable exception. For the past twenty years, the state has served as a shining example of a focused investment in the professional development of administrators of early childhood programs. The most well known is Taking Charge of Change (TCC).

Funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Taking Charge of Change is a 10-month leadership training program that focuses on the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change and the program director's role as a change agent. A comprehensive, integrated model for improving the quality of early childhood programs is presented during the training cycle and participants implement a program improvement plan to enhance the quality of their centers.

To date, 502 Illinois early childhood administrators have completed Taking Charge of Change. In addition, through a national TCC Train-the-Trainer initiative, the model is being disseminated and implemented in other states.

502

Illinois early childhood administrators
have completed **Taking Charge of Change**



TCC changed my life as a director! It gave me the tools to be a leader in the field. Although I am no longer a director of a center, I use those tools in helping other directors.

Missy Brown, Cohort #12

A comprehensive, integrated model for improving the quality of early childhood programs



I have served in a leadership role for several early childhood organizations in the community and state. I am not sure all of this would have been possible if I had not participated in the first cohort of TCC.

Cindy Mahr, Cohort #1

The Study

This study focused on three areas of inquiry:

1. Participants' current job status and career decisions since completing TCC.
2. The impact of training on directors' perceptions of competence and on the quality of organizational practices at their centers.
3. The potential of leadership training for strengthening the early childhood profession by promoting ongoing professional development, strengthening commitment to the field, and mentoring other practitioners.

Archived data from the twenty cohorts who had completed **Taking Charge of Change** included several measures:

- A Training Needs Assessment Survey (TNAS) was used to assess participants' level of perceived competence in 18 different knowledge and skill areas.
- The Program Administration Scale (PAS) was used to measure the quality of administrative practices at participants' programs.
- The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) was used to assess the organizational climate of participants' programs.

In addition, archived data were supplemented with the responses of 138 TCC alumni who completed an online survey about their current job status, career decisions, continuing professional development, commitment, and professional achievements.

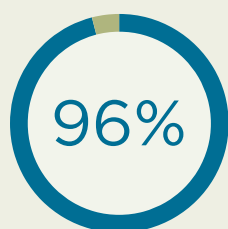
I still have a photo of my TCC cohort on my desk and look to it to remind myself of the phenomenal experiences I had with that wonderful group of people. That experience positively impacted my leadership abilities and how I perceive myself as an early childhood professional. Taking Charge of Change was a life-changing event for me!



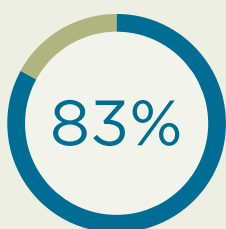


Taking Charge of Change | At a Glance

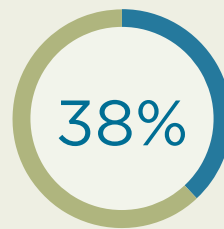
Participants:



Female



Held a Baccalaureate
or Graduate Degree



African-American,
Asian, or Hispanic

The Typical Participant:

- had 12 years experience in the early childhood field
- had 7 years experience as a director

Participants represented **nonprofit** and **for-profit**, **part-day** and **full-day**, **Head Start**, **faith-based**, **privately owned** and **publicly funded** programs.

The 502 participants served **61,850** children during the year in which they participated in training.

Design Features:

- Evidence-based content that challenges but does not overwhelm the learner
- A clear and understandable framework for presenting key concepts and ideas
- Structured opportunities for community building, peer learning, and collegial support
- A comfortable learning environment that enhances focus
- Practical tools for creating data-driven program improvement plans
- Experiential learning that reinforces important concepts
- Recurring loops of data gathering, reflection, and action
- Field assignments that have direct application in the workplace
- Mentor support that helps ensure follow-up and bridges theory to practice

The Findings

Job Status and Career Decisions

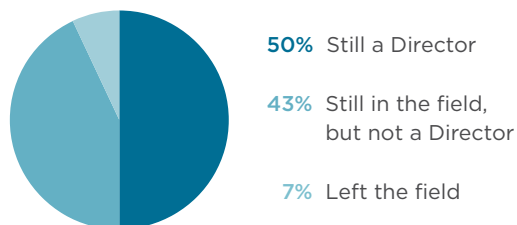
Of the 138 TCC alumni who completed the online survey, 50% indicated they were still directors of center-based programs.

Another 43% remained in the field but not in a directorship role. They held positions such as college instructor, technical assistance specialist, regional manager, and independent consultant.

The remaining 7% left the field because of retirement, health issues, parenthood, or to teach in higher education in another discipline.

Sixty-three alumni reported they had made at least one job change since completing TCC. Of this group, 28% indicated their decision was prompted by a need for greater influence or a need for greater challenge.

TCC Alumni Job Status



502

- Who speak the same leadership language
- Are committed to continuous improvement
- Are knowledgeable advocates

The Impact of Training

The results of the TNAS data analyses across the twenty cohorts revealed a statistically significant increase in participants' knowledge and skill in all 18 areas assessed. The two areas in which participants reported experiencing the greatest growth were:

- knowledge of how systems theory applies to early childhood organizations
- how to implement an individualized model of staff development

In addition to specific skill building, virtually all individuals commented on a heightened sense of self-esteem, greater confidence, and a stronger sense of self-efficacy as a result of participating in the training.

The 69 alumni who were still directors were asked to indicate their current level of role competency—novice, capable, or master director. Sixty-one percent reported that they now perceive themselves as master directors. Only 5% viewed themselves as master directors when they enrolled in the training.

In addition to self-reports of program improvements, the study verified organizational outcomes with independent observations and assessments. Results of the pre- and post-PAS assessments revealed an increase in all items assessed with statistically significant increases in three items: staff orientation, staff development, and family communications.

TCC and Accreditation



13% of programs in Illinois are accredited.



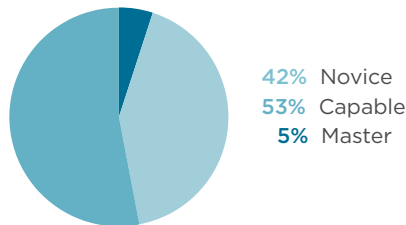
42% of programs of TCC alumni are accredited.

Additional evidence of improved program practices can be seen in the percentage of TCC alumni programs that are accredited by NAEYC or NAC. Forty-two percent of alumni reported their programs were accredited. This contrasts with the overall 13% percent of accredited programs in Illinois. In addition, 58% of the alumni reported that their centers participate in Illinois Quality Counts–Quality Rating System. This is more than three times the state average of 17%.

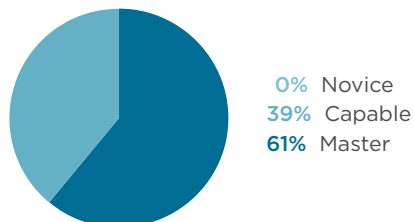
Perceptions of the work environment in participants’ programs also improved from the pre- and post-administration of the ECWES in all ten dimensions of organizational climate. In three dimensions (decision making, goal consensus, and innovativeness) these differences were statistically significant. There were also positive changes in staff’s level of commitment to their organizations. The ECWES data represented more than 3,000 employees who worked at TCC participants’ programs.

Directors’ Perceived Level of Competency

Prior to TCC Training



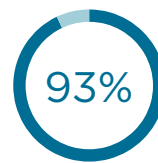
After completing TCC Training



Strengthening the Early Childhood Profession

Perhaps the most encouraging data regarding TCC alumni relates to their level of commitment to the early childhood field.

Of the 138 alumni responding to the online survey, 128 (93%) continue to work in the field either as a director of a center-based program or in a related position supporting children and families. Fully 89% see themselves as continuing to work in the field five years from now.



Continue to work in the field



See themselves working in the field five years from now



65% of alumni indicated they had mentored other directors, thus multiplying the effects of their initial training.



64% of alumni indicated that they went on to pursue formal college coursework since completing TCC.



44% indicated that they had completed an undergraduate or graduate degree.



46% reported having attained a credential since completing TCC.



Statewide, 23% of all practitioners holding an Illinois Director Credential (IDC) have participated in TCC.

Lessons Learned

From our work over the past two decades, we have learned some important lessons about the change process. We have learned that personal change usually precedes organizational change and that organizational change is best achieved when it is implemented in small, incremental steps.

We have seen firsthand how well-designed training can serve as a catalyst for change, providing the tools that individuals need to make program improvements.

The rich empirical and anecdotal evidence received from TCC participants provides compelling evidence of how leadership training can help change the early childhood profession from the inside out and from the bottom up, through changes in early childhood administrators themselves. The results of this study underscore the need for systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood directors. It also provides a better understanding of what structural supports are needed to improve the stability of the workforce and maintain the quality improvements to programs that benefit from leadership training.

Download the full report at:

McCormickCenter.nl.edu/taking-charge-of-change-report/

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About the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University:

At the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, we empower individuals to build the leadership and management skills they need to create and sustain exemplary programs for young children. Through professional development, evaluation, research, and public awareness, we promote best practice in program administration. By working with states, professional organizations, and directly with early childhood practitioners, we raise the bar on program quality. Because, when it comes to early childhood education, leadership really does matter.