



Overview Update – July 2021

Why was there a need for a program like SWFI?

6 out of 10 households with children have all parents working (married working and single working parents), increasing the need for affordable, quality childcare.

On June 23, 2014, President Obama convened the *White House Summit on Working Families* to discuss necessary changes in society, business policies and in the laws to ensure that all Americans had the opportunity to have a job and family. Access to such care can be difficult due to costs and limited funding to cover costs. Additionally, when affordable childcare exists, parents, in particular those with low incomes and low

skills, have to deal with unpredictable situations (i.e. sick child, childcare provider closes, other emergencies) where an alternative solution is needed but care is unavailable. Compounding this matter is when these parents cannot afford to take unpaid leave and/or work in less flexible workplaces. Lack of access to affordable and consistent childcare can keep parents from participating in training and educational programs. Of the 21 million low-income parents, only one in 10 participate in education and training. Those who are in education and training programs, almost half were working, indicating an additional burden of arranging for and paying the cost of childcare while pursuing these activities.¹

What was the aim of SWFI?

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) was created to provide low- to middle- skilled parents with opportunities to advance in their careers in high growth or demand industries (health care, IT and advanced manufacturing), addressing barriers to accessing training and employment faced by those with childcare responsibilities. It also aimed to address childcare needs for parents seeking education and training, increase access to childcare resources and bridge the gap between the workforce and childcare systems. Projects were funded that addressed both the individual job training needs and childcare barriers of workers while developing or improving systems navigation services that resulted in sustainable systemic changes in a community.²

Training and education can help move parents into better paying jobs, however, **some employment barriers also serve as barriers to participating in training and educational programs.**

What was Rochester Rehabilitation Center's SWFI program?

Rochester Rehabilitation Center (RRC) was one of 14 SWFI grantees – and the only organization in New York State to receive the grant.

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (or SWFI) was a four-year (2016-2020) \$4M grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. **The SWFI grant was extended to June 2021, which ended 6/30/21.** SWFI provided low- to middle-skilled parents opportunities to advance in their careers in high-growth or in high-demand industries – including health care, advanced manufacturing, and information technology – while

addressing barriers related to accessing training and employment faced by those with childcare responsibilities.

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) was a collaborative that included the lead agency, Rochester Rehabilitation Center, two subcontracted agencies, Child Care Council, Inc. and Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) and several partners representing employers, businesses, education and training institutions, and community organizations.

¹ Paragraph is from excerpts of Strengthening Working Families Initiative RFP.

² Paragraph is from excerpts of Strengthening Working Families Initiative RFP.

Eligibility: Participants must have been a low- to middle- skilled parent with a child(ren) under age 13 (or with a child[ren] under age 18 with a disability). Additionally, participants must have been enrolled in one of the following training program areas: health care, information technology (IT) or advanced manufacturing.

Rochester Rehabilitation Center (RRC), the lead agency, provided family and career navigation services. Its programming created access to living wage jobs and supported career advancement in high-demand industries for parents with dependent children at home. Job training, job placement, career advancement, and benefits management were all a part of this initiative. Childcare navigation services were provided by **Child Care Council, Inc.**, which included assisting program participants with searching for quality childcare services while in training, navigating available funding sources, and providing access to SWFI childcare subsidies for those not qualifying for any other funding source. **Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC)** provided systems level activities to make systemic improvements in childcare provision and employment services that helped systems be more responsive and that resulted in positive outcomes for participants.

Keys to SWFI's Success:

- ❖ Onsite recruitment at training sites
- ❖ Child Care Navigator to help parents navigate the childcare system and access childcare resources
- ❖ Family and Career Navigators to provide encouragement and ongoing support to participants, as well as to help parents navigate various systems (e.g. linkage to supportive services, help with paying for the cost of books, uniforms, transportation-gas card/bus pass, and offering incentives for completing key milestones such as obtaining a certificate/certification)
- ❖ Partnerships with trainers, especially those that offer training leading directly to employment (training to employment pipeline)
- ❖ Partnerships with individuals/entities, many of whom are members of the SWFI PROGRESS Advisory Committee, that lend their expertise and support to the program. Additionally, forming/serving on coalitions/collaboratives to pursue a common vision or goal. For example, a Systems Level Activities Subcommittee and Trainers Network were created to help carry out SWFI-related work.

Results:

Family & Career Navigation Services provided by Rochester Rehabilitation Center: As of June 30, 2021, SWFI served a total of 591 people in Monroe County and the City of Rochester.

- Nearly all of the participants (562) were female and likely single mothers living in the City of Rochester.
- Racial/ethnic make-up was: 475 African American, 76 Hispanic/Latinx and 63 White.
- A total of 269 participants reported that they were unemployed when they enrolled in the program.
- There were 116 participants who shared that they were under-employed.
- Prior to entering SWFI, 169 participants reported that they were on long-term unemployment.
- A total of 254 participants completed education/job training program activities and obtained a credential.

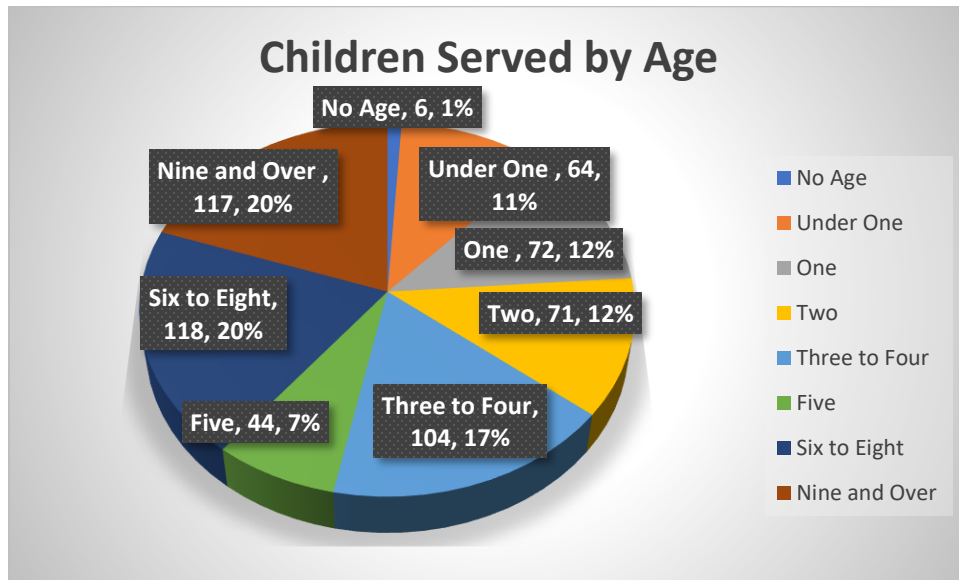
Success Story

Kenisha started with the SWFI program two years ago. She was referred to SWFI by her school, Finger Lakes Health College of Nursing. Kenisha attended this school, **pursuing her RN and AAS.**

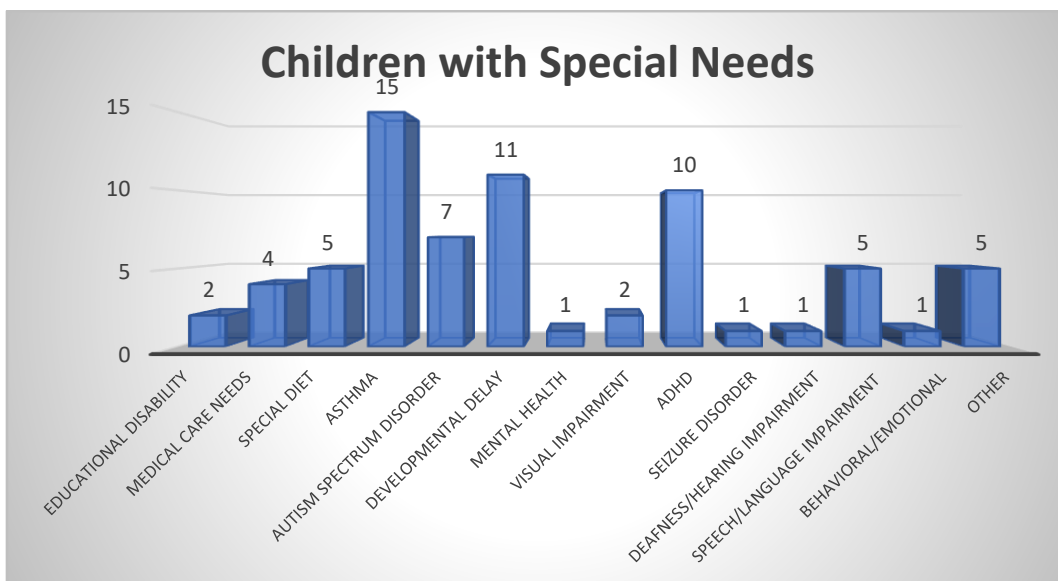
While going through school, she received these services from SWFI: childcare funds, assistance purchasing textbooks, transportation assistance, help paying for her board exam, and case management.

Kenisha graduated with her Associate degree this past May, and has signed up to take the RN-NCLEX exam. Once she passes that exam, she will be able to advance her position at the Monroe Community Hospital where she currently works as an LPN, making \$22.60/hr. She was very thankful of all of the services she had received through the SWFI program.

Childcare Navigation Support provided by Child Care Council, Inc.: Childcare navigation entailed meeting one-on-one with the parent to assess their needs and subsequently consult and support the parent as he/she identified the best program option for himself/herself. This support was provided to parents while they were in the program as well as upon completion of the program, if needed. Often, staff accompanied the parent on childcare program tours. Parents valued this approach. As of June 30, 2021, a total of 341 families who engaged in SWFI were referred to Childcare Council, Inc. for childcare related services. Most families lived in the 14609 zip code. The graph below shows the number of children served by age. There were slightly over 90 childcare providers a part of SWFI – 17 day care providers, 39 group family providers, 31 center-based care providers and 6 school-based providers.



Finding care for children with special needs can be challenging for parents. Child Care Council, Inc. helped these families find suitable care for their child(ren). The graph below shows the number of children with special needs served by types of special needs.



SWFI Childcare Providers Reflection on the Program

“...I have not experienced many challenges and the payment process worked well”.

“I have received two amazing families whom I’m blessed to be able to give them hope to graduate and to be able to provide care for their families. The payment is great and if I had any questions, they were answered quickly. So the accessibility and the staff at Rochester Rehabilitation Center was wonderful as well”.

SWFI childcare providers reflected on their experience with the program. One thing we found early in the program implementation was that **SWFI childcare providers were willing to make accommodations to serve families** needing various type of care – for example, transporting children to and from their program or accommodating variant schedules for care. **SWFI helped providers improve the quality of their services.** In the contract, it was noted that any violations found could result in families being removed from the care. There were no violations found with SWFI childcare providers. Providers took advantage of

professional development opportunities offered through Child Care Council, Inc. **Providers valued the accessibility of program staff.** Many providers liked the fact that if they had a question, they had a point person to go to, the Child Care Navigator. This was helpful for them. Providers were paid directly. **Providers shared that they experienced few challenges with the payment process.**

For many families, SWFI provided hope and a way out. There are many stories like this. For example, the Child Care Navigator reflected about a parent who was homeless that reached out to SWFI staff. The program was able to help the parent find housing, secure childcare and complete training through the SWFI grant, and obtain very good employment.

Overall, survey feedback from participants over the years noted that they were highly satisfied and appreciative of the staff and program – supportive services provided. Training programs were reflected positively as well. Additionally, there were several comments recommending the program continue. Recent feedback from partner respondents also reflected favorably about the program. Some comments from childcare providers:

- “SWFI paying for childcare was great assistance for parents while they trained”.
- “Transportation has been a major problem for parents, programs providing transportation support for parents was great”.
- “Childcare resources in the community should be advertised extensively, possibly reaching out to childcare providers”.
- “Work done by SWFI is great and helpful and should be continuous”.

Success Story

A parent who worked with the SWFI Child Care Navigator a few years ago shared the following: “When I was denied assistance to go back to school, it broke my spirit. All hope was gone. I felt defeated and was afraid I was going to lose my kids. Every door was closed and I had no options. You gave me hope to give to my kids. **You did what you said you were going to do and I am so grateful**”. Through the grant and support offered, the parent completed the program and left with a couple of job options.

SWFI Participant Reflection on the Program

“Before SWFI, my husband and I struggled to justify sending our children to daycare, because almost half of our income went directly to childcare costs. We regularly talked about one of us taking a few years off of our careers to stay home to take care of the kids. But now, because of SWFI’s support and assistance, we are both able to work and build our careers. Gratitude to SWFI program and the staff”.

Some comments from training providers:

- “SWFI helped participants attend training in relaxed state”.
- “Participants were pleased with wrap-around support services from SWFI”.
- “Training Network group is a great idea, bringing organizations together”.
- “Trainers Fair provided sharing of various trainings provided in the community”.

SWFI Accomplishments
(OR WHAT WE ARE PROUD OF)

- During a time when it was most needed, SWFI played a part in greatly adding to the healthcare field with CNAs, LPNs and RNs.
- SWFI was able to support and strengthen pipelines that existed.
- SWFI (Child Care Council, Inc. and Providers) was able to support and provide flexible childcare services for participants who had to quickly adjust to hybrid classes, due to COVID.
- SWFI was able to provide participants books, uniforms, shoes, cover exam fees and NCLEX fees, help with transportation, laptops and food --by way of Wegmans gift cards and Walmart.
 - Through Project Uplift and United Way, SWFI navigators were also able to help participants with rent, utility bills, etc...

For video testimonials of stakeholders sharing their experience with SWFI, go to <https://www.abcinfo.org/childcare-training-employment-and-benefits-project-toolkit/>

Systems Level Activities work has resulted in the following activities:

- Expanded partnerships to provide broad reaching promotion/marketing of available community childcare resources to stakeholders. Our findings indicated that many community members (including low-income and working parents, those working directly with the target population) were unaware of available childcare funding and other childcare resources, including the SWFI program. Over the years, SWFI partners held collaborative events to bring awareness of childcare resources and made one-on-one or

group presentations to promote resources. Most recently, through our partnering with staff representing local childcare resources, a virtual childcare resource fair occurred in March 2021. A one-page childcare resource directory (and other materials) was shared that will continue to be disseminated across the community. The fair also included a session by LawNY that provided an overview of legal rights of parents in the workplace and in rental housing. To increase awareness and access, the childcare fair will be an annual event for the community and will be expanded to possibly be in “expo” form. The fair will be coordinated with and include presentations by initiatives/work in the community around childcare. For more information and materials from the fair, go to: www.abcinfo.org/swfi-child-care-resource-page.

- Explored some ways to address, communitywide, parents’ need for affordable, quality childcare when they may work non-traditional hours, require care only for certain periods of time, or need care for other reasons. For Monroe County, the average cost of childcare may be \$10,000 or more per year. There are several ways to make the cost of quality care more affordable for families. **1. Increase awareness of available childcare resources – affordable, quality childcare – helps to address access.** Promotion of childcare resources, including the SWFI program, through one-on-one and group presentations was one of the ways SWFI helped address the need. SWFI representatives also served on local coalitions/collaboratives that sought to increase/expand funding and address the need, as well as address other childcare issues. **2. Increase (and make permanent) the income eligibility level for subsidized childcare from 275% to at least 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL).** During the COVID-19 pandemic, NYS is providing subsidized childcare for essential workers at up to 300% FPL. This level needs to be made permanent. SWFI has worked alongside community members such as the Monroe County Child Care Taskforce, led by the United Way, to seek this change. Some local subsidy programs have set eligibility below 200% FPL (e.g. income Eligible Day Care) while others are under 275% FPL (e.g. URI Child Care Subsidy and Workforce Development Institute Child Care Subsidy), To learn more about the various local childcare subsidies, see the childcare directory at <https://www.abcinfo.org/childcare-training-employment-and-benefits-project-toolkit/> . Recent legislation has been introduced at the state level to consider raising eligibility to 200% FPL statewide. **3. Reduce parents’ co-pay fee (percentage they pay towards receiving a childcare subsidy) to a more affordable level.** SWFI conducted a convenience sampling survey to learn whether an increase in co-pay fees for parents receiving a childcare subsidy/benefit is or has ever occurred and probable reasons for such an increase. Few saw an

increase. Increased income (e.g. child support, pay raise) were among the reasons mentioned. Other reasons were unrelated to the subsidy (e.g. fee added for weekly diaper program at childcare program). Through advocacy educational efforts by the Early Childhood Development Initiative (that included SWFI representatives), the County reduced the parent co-pay fee from the highest allowable fee of 35% to 25% in 2019. The new County Executive reduced the fee further to 20% in the early part of 2020. During COVID-19 pandemic, the fee has been waived, which will decline to (10% the lowest level possible) when the waiver ends. This area will continue to be monitored. NOTE: ECDI with Citizens Action and The Children’s Agenda have been instrumental in helping to bring childcare funding into this community. **4. One barrier SWFI identified and remedied early was to cover the cost of childcare while a parent waits 30-45 days to transition from one source of funding (paying for childcare) to another, after he/she completed training, without interruption in care.**

- **Created and/or supported linkages to provide stakeholders with opportunities to learn about and connect to training resources.** We learned through conversations with training and educational entities that community members (including low-income and working parents, those working directly with the target population) were unaware of available training/educational programs and related resources. We established a Trainers Network, primarily consisting of training and educational entities, but also government agencies and community-based organizations. It was created to bring training entities together across the community to work on activities collectively. The Network held a virtual trainers fair in March 2021. To increase awareness and access, the trainers fair will be an annual event for the community and will be expanded to possibly be in “expo” form to include local training, educational, and training-employment pipeline programs. For more information and materials from the fair, go to: www.abcinfo.org/swfi-trainers-fair-resource-page.

We learned through meetings with training entities that enrollment in traditional classroom settings were lower than desired and that introducing a hybrid-style may help to boost enrollment numbers.

SWFI Accomplishments
(OR WHAT WE ARE PROUD OF)

Immediately below are some stakeholder comments that highlight the success and importance of the program:

- *“SWFI is good program for **uplifting low to middle income population**”.*
- *“SWFI created an opportunity for organizations to **come together and learn about each other**”.*
- *“SWFI allowed **parents not to have to worry about childcare while in training and enabled them to fulfill their educational goals**”.*

From the SWFI work, we thank and note the partnerships made over the years that addressed the following points:

- ***Raising awareness of available resources & how to access them is essential.***
- ***Providing system navigational support is imperative to program participant retention and reaching the finish line.***

Hybrid-style instruction would enable students to obtain some of their training online and the remainder in a traditional classroom setting in order to accommodate students who cannot afford to spend full time in the classroom for a variety of reasons (e.g. inability to take time off work). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in variant instructional styles (in person, hybrid, remote). Some training and educational programs are or have returned to in-person instruction while others are offering classes partially or fully online. We also learned that

navigational services are needed that include: 1) developing a user-friendly training directory to help individuals identify training opportunities and 2) increasing student enrollment/retention by providing wrap-around services (e.g. childcare, transportation). The Trainers Network has begun working with Causewave to

explore how best to promote training opportunities to parents/working families. A brainstorming session was held on July 7, 2021.

The Network produced a training directory for health care, IT and advanced manufacturing fields. The directories identify training programs that offer classes partially or fully online to help individuals find programs that best meet their needs. The directories note where to go for information on childcare, training and transportation assistance. Through support of two SUNY Brockport students, the Network developed a training and education locator prototype, using information from the training directories and RTS. The locator will be unveiled later in 2021. To access the directories, go to: <https://www.abcinfo.org/childcare-training-employment-and-benefits-project-toolkit/>.

SWFI partners continue to meet to discuss ways to expand partnerships that will link childcare, training and employment, including submitting grant proposals that include SWFI. The Systems Level Activities Subcommittee held a “Childcare-Workforce Systems Integration: Working Retreat” in July 2021 to identify solutions, to be acted upon, that will further integrate the systems. The Subcommittee also produced a TOOLKIT that provides information and resources related to SWFI, childcare, training and employment. For more information, go to: . <https://www.abcinfo.org/childcare-training-employment-and-benefits-project-toolkit/> Some areas still in need of attention include: 1) inability to pass entrance exams as a possible training enrollment barrier and 2) providing more “earn to learn” opportunities.

- **Utilized and helped to expand membership of a platform that connects organizations, including SWFI, together in order to meet the needs of organizations and the target population.** A few years ago, SWFI connected to the 360 Collaborative Network’s *Unite Us* centralized care coordination referral platform. Recently, learning that the platform was available to organizations beyond nonprofits, SWFI convened several meetings with childcare and training organizational partners to introduce them to the platform, which resulted in a few organizations joining the Network thus far, namely Child Care Council, Inc. and Center for Youth/Crisis Nursery. Additionally, SWFI is undergoing an evaluative information sharing system pilot that enables some key partners to work more closely together around case management, communication and the transmission of documents/information.
- **Served on the Benefits Project stakeholder table — a community-driven project that seeks to create an open source, community web-based tool for frontline staff to use with individuals/families (or individuals/families can personally use on their own) to help them manage their resources, access available community resources and strategize ways to avoid “benefits cliffs”.** For more information about the Benefits Project, go to <https://www.abcinfo.org/childcare-training-employment-and-benefits-project-toolkit/>

SWFI Partners

We would like to thank the partners over the years for helping to make SWFI a success.

Partnership Roundtable of Greater Rochester for Employment and Self-Sufficiency (PROGRESS) Advisory Committee

Rochester Rehabilitation Center, lead agency

- ABVI-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes
- Access-VR
- Action for a Better Community
- Act Rochester
- CEO Works
- Child Care Council, Inc.
- City of Rochester
- Community Place of Greater Rochester
- Healthy Baby Network
- Ibero-American Action League
- Judicial Process Commission
- Monroe Community College
- Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES
- Monroe County Department of Human Services
- Monroe County Workforce Development
- NYS Department of Labor
- Office of Adult & Career Education Services
- Office of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
- Pathstone
- Rochester Business Alliance
- Rochester Housing Authority
- Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Rochester Works, Inc.
- SUNY Brockport
- YAMTEP
- Wegmans
- Wilson Foundation
- United Way of Greater Rochester

Systems Level Activities Subcommittee

- Action for a Better Community, Inc.
- Care-a-Lot Child Care
- Caring and Sharing Child Care Center
- Child Care Council, Inc.
- City of Rochester
- Early Childhood Development Initiative, Rep.
- Generations Child Care, Inc.
- GORBEL Industries
- Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce
- Imagination Childcare Academy, Inc
- Monroe County Child Care Taskforce, Rep.
- NYS Department of Labor
- Person Center Services
- ROC Acts
- Rochester Childfirst Network
- Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Rochester Regional Health
- Rochester Rehabilitation Center
- Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association
- Rochester Works, Inc.
- St. Ann's Community
- Sunshine Village Childcare Center

- Monroe County Department of Human Services The Childrens Agenda
- Monroe County Workforce Development The Gleason Works

SWFI Partners cont...

Childcare Resource Fair Planning Team

- Child Care Council, Inc. Monroe County Department of Human Services
- Crisis Nursery (Center for Youth) Rochester Housing Authority
- LawNY Workforce Development Institute Child Care Subsidy

Trainers Network

- Action for a Better Community, Inc. NYS Department of Labor
- Access-VR Rochester Institute of Technology
- Bryant & Stratton Rochester Rehabilitation Center
- Child Care Council, Inc. RochesterWorks, Inc.
- City of Rochester SUNY ATTAIN Lab @ Trenton & Pamela
- GORBEL Industries Jackson R-center
- Isabella Graham Hart University of Rochester
- ISSAC Heating YAMTEP
- Monroe Community College
- Multi-Craft Apprenticeship Preparation Program-Rochester
- The College at Brockport, Rochester Educational Opportunity Center

Other Partners

- Causewave RTS
- Creating Assets Savings & Hope (C.A.S.H.) SUNY Brockport students
- Local Childcare Providers 360 Collaborative Network
- Medical Billing & Consulting Solutions

SWFI served on the following Coalitions/Collaboratives:

- Citizens Action of New York Coalition Monroe County Child Care Taskforce
- Early Childhood Development Initiative Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Finger Lakes Youth Apprenticeship Program