



Overview Update - December 2020

Why is 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 have 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 child care exists, parents, in particular those with low incomes and low skills, have to deal with unpredictable situations (i.e. sick child, child care 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 child care 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 child care while pursuing these activities.¹

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 is 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 child care responsibilities. It also aims to address childcare needs for parents seeking education and training, increase access to child care resources and bridge the gap between the workforce and child care systems. Projects are funded that address both the individual job training needs and child care barriers of workers while developing or improving systems navigation services that will result in sustainable systemic changes in a community.²

What is Rochester Rehabilitation Center's SWFI program?

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

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (or SWFI) is a four-year (2016-2020) \$4M grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The grant for the initiative has been extended to June 2021. SWFI provides 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 child care responsibilities.

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) is a collaborative that includes 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 be a low- to middle- skilled parent with a child(ren) under the age of 13 (or with a child[ren] under age 18 with a disability). Additionally, participants must be enrolled in one of the following training program areas: health care, information technology (IT) or advanced manufacturing.

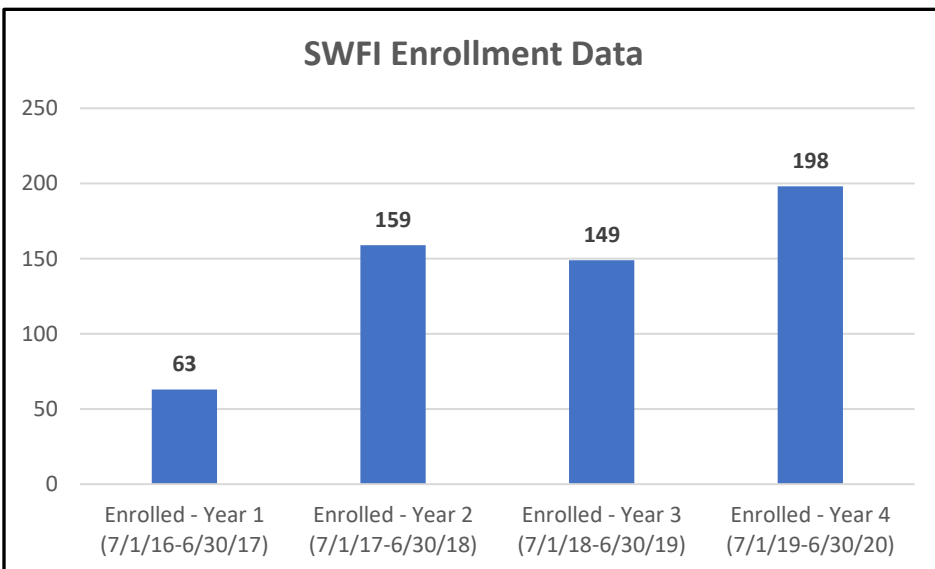
Rochester Rehabilitation Center (RRC), the lead agency, provides family and career navigation services. Its programming creates access to living wage jobs and supports career advancement in high-demand industries for parents with dependent children at home. Job training, job placement, career advancement,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

Keys to SWFI’s Success:

- ❖ Onsite recruitment at training sites
- ❖ Childcare Navigator to help parents navigate child care system and access child care 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 that lead 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 the recently formed, Trainers Network, were created to help carry out SWFI-related work

A SWFI participant wrote about their experience: **“It’s a great opportunity for you to go to school and work and not worry about daycare while trying to study and furthering education”.**

Results:



Family & Career Navigation Services Provided by Rochester Rehabilitation Center

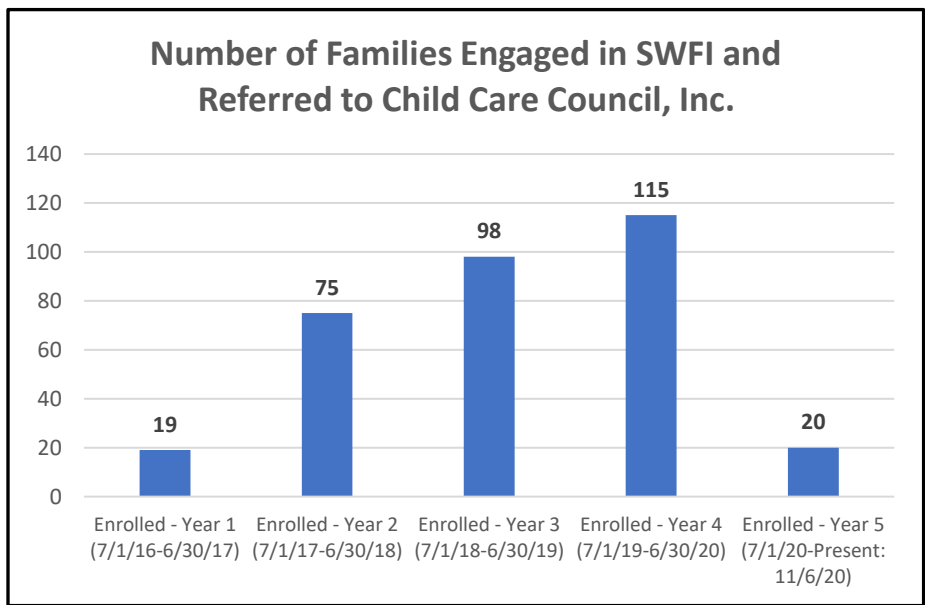
Overall total enrollment for SWFI was 569, as of 6/30/20. The graph shows the fiscal year breakdown.

- Nearly all of the participants were female (96%).
- About ninety percent of the participants were ages 17-39.

- The racial composition of participants are as follows: 74% were African American, 10% were Caucasian and 4% represented other racial groups. Twelve percent were Hispanic/Latinix.
- Nearly an even split, employed and unemployed participants made up 53% and 47%, respectively.
- Over four-fifth (82%) of the participants were receiving some form of public assistance.
- Among those enrolled: 89% were in the healthcare training field, 5% were in the IT training field and 6% were in the advanced manufacturing field.
- Seventy-seven percent of enrolled participants lived in the following ten zip codes (many of which made up the “poverty crescent”): 14605, 14606, 14608, 14609, 14611, 14613, 14615, 14619, 14620 and 14621.³

A SWFI participant wrote about the experience:
“Definitely seek assistance through the SWFI program if you planning on to further educate yourself or need assistance with child care. The process of enrollment was very easy and efficient. The counselor who you will work with is available to help support you along the way”.

Surveys indicate that the majority of SWFI participants were highly satisfied with the program and staff, the supportive services and their training experience. There were several comments recommending the program continue.



Child Care Navigation Support Provided by Child Care Council, Inc.

A total of 327 families were engaged in SWFI and referred to Childcare Council, Inc., as of 11/6/20. The graph shows the fiscal year breakdown.

- A total of 88 childcare programs were utilized over this period:
 - 29 center-based care
 - 15 family-based child care
 - 40 group family-based child care
 - 4 school age care

Systems Level Activities work has resulted in the following activities:

- **Provide funding to enable strategic, broad reaching promotion/marketing of available community child care resources to stakeholders.** Our findings indicate that many community members (including low-income and working parents, those working directly with the target population) are unaware of available funding to help parents pay for the cost of child care. Through partnering with staff representing local childcare funding resources (Monroe County Department of Human Services, Workforce Development Institute Child Care Subsidy, Crisis Nursery and Rochester Housing Authority), a child care resource fair is planned for March 2021. A one-page child care resource directory has been created (with ongoing updates) that continues to be disseminated community-wide.

³ The “crescent of poverty” is referred to as areas of the city of Rochester where poverty is among the highest. These areas consist of the following zip codes: 14605, 14608, 14611, 14613 and 14621.

- Explore ways to address, communitywide, parents' need for affordable, quality child care 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 child care may be \$10,000 or more per year. There are several ways to make cost of quality care more affordable for families. 1) Increase (and make permanent) the income eligibility level for subsidized child care from 275% to at least 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). During the COVID-19 pandemic, NYS is providing subsidized child care for essential workers at up to 300% FPL. This level needs to be made permanent. SWFI will continue to work with community members to seek this change. 2) Reduce parents' co-pay fee (percentage they pay towards receiving a subsidy) to a more affordable level. Through advocacy educational efforts by the Early Childhood Development Initiative (that includes SWFI staff), 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 its current level (20%) in the early part of 2020. During COVID-19 pandemic, the fee has been waived. SWFI will continue to monitor the issue and its impact on families.
- **Create and/or expand opportunities to provide parents with training navigational services and activities.** We learned through meetings with training entities that there is a need for hybrid-style instruction, which 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 has currently resulted in variant instructional styles (in person, hybrid, remote). 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. child care, transportation). SWFI will continue to expand its partnerships to those seeking to provide wrap-around services. An information sharing system will help connect training-employment-supportive services using technology. SWFI is exploring creating a system. A training fair to promote training resources and training opportunities, especially those leading to employment, is being explored in 2021 by the Trainers Network. The Network was recently created to bring training entities together across the community to work on activities collectively. Efforts to increase membership continues.
- Support the community driven pilot project, Benefits Project, that seeks to create an online, open source, planning 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". The Project will also learn about the lived experiences of individuals/families, including service providers' experience with navigating the public benefits system and efforts made to mitigate cliffs or if cliff happened, how it was addressed. SWFI will be one of the Project's pilot agencies.

SAVE THE DATE

The **Strengthening Working Families Initiative** (SWFI) will be holding an **end-of-the-year event in May/June 2021** to share a final report and future Initiative plans with the community.

For more information about SWFI and/or to enroll into the program, contact:

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