

**MISSISSIPPI LOW-INCOME CHILD CARE INITIATIVE
(MLICCI)**

**AN EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL OF
EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOTHERS
YEAR 3 EVALUATION REPORT**



**EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOTHERS
(EESM)**

**A Project of the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative
Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation**

**EVALUATION REPORT
MARCH 2023**

**MISSISSIPPI LOW-INCOME CHILD CARE INITIATIVE
(MLICCI)**

**EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOTHERS
(EESM)**

**AN EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL OF
EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOTHERS
YEAR 3 EVALUATION REPORT**

Submitted To



Carol Burnett, Executive Director
Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative
Post Office Box 204
Biloxi, MS 39533
www.mschildcare.org

SUBMITTED BY



Professional Associates, Inc.
Post Office Box 5711
Brandon, Ms 39047
www.paionline.org

Prepared By
Bettye Ward Fletcher, PhD

March 2023

The Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI) is a statewide non-profit public policy advocacy organization. Advocacy is MLICCI's primary approach used in seeking a more equitable child care subsidy system in Mississippi. The focus is on systemic change. Through addressing access, quality and affordability, the organization has sought to strengthen the Mississippi subsidized child care infrastructure by advocating for changes in institutional policies and practices that make child care more accessible to low-income families.

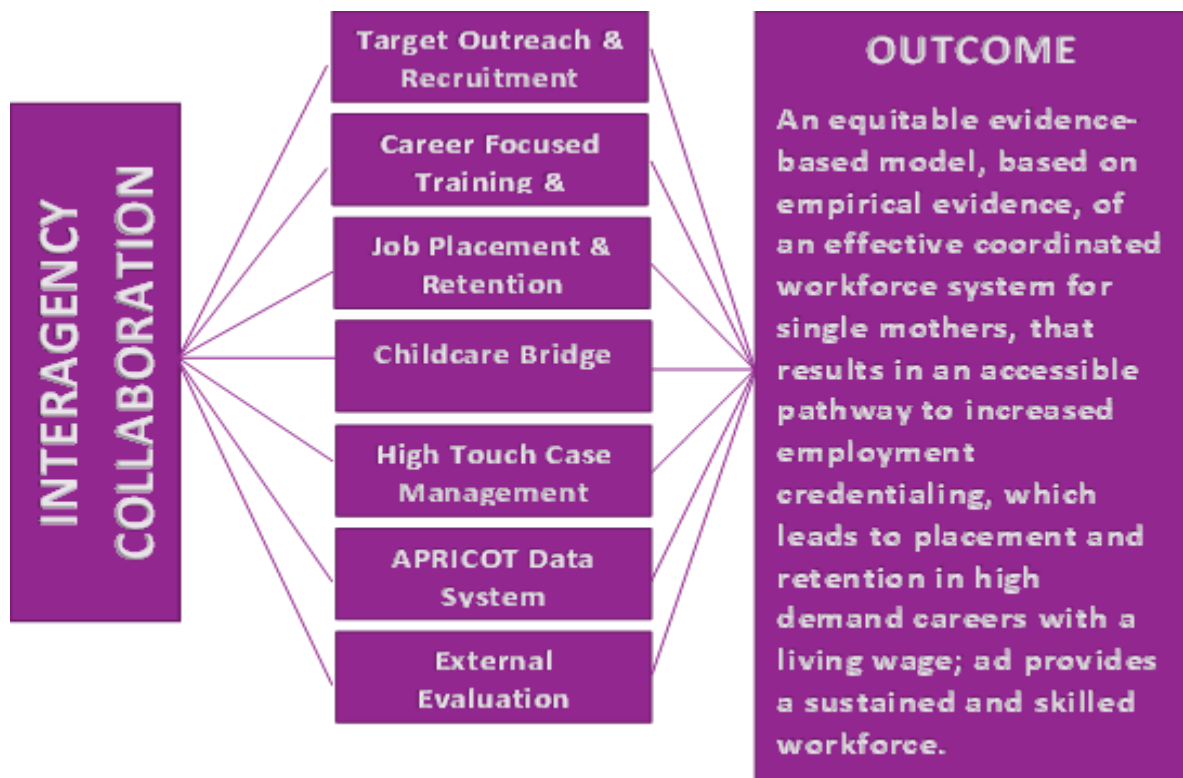
Employment Equity for Single Mothers

In furtherance of the organization's mission, MLICCI recognizes that child care is an essential work support for low-income families. To this end, the Employment Equity for Single Mothers (EESM) program was developed. Its explicit purpose is the pursuit of employment equity and economic security for low-income single mothers. More specifically, EESM has assisted low-income single mothers in preparing, securing and retaining high demand jobs with a livable wage. Emphasis is placed on the mitigation of systemic policies and practices which are barriers to unabridged access to eligible work supports.

The EESM Theory of Change and Logic Model were developed during year one of project implementation. These tools provide context and a broad view of the scope of the program, which recently completed its third year.

Schematic 1:

Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative
Employment Equity for Single Mothers
Theory of Change



MLICCI EMPLOYMENT EQUITY for SINGLE MOTHERS Logic Model				
Mission: Establishment of an evidence-based collaborative workforce system that prepares single mothers for high demand jobs that result in sustained systemic change, through targeted outreach and recruitment, training and credentialing, and job placement and retention, which is undergirded by interagency collaboration, leveraged and aligned resources, streamlined processes, child care vouchers, and intensive case management; all designed to mitigate barriers to employment in high demand careers.				
OBJECTIVES	OUTPUTS	INDICATORS	METHODS	OUTCOMES
INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION To develop an effective workforce coordinated system.	Workforce Advisory Group	Number, roles, type, and level of partner participation, Systems aligned, resources leveraged, policy changed, barriers mitigated, Advocacy outcomes	Partnership meetings, Reports, Key staff in-depth interviews	An equitable evidence-based model, based on empirical evidence, of an effective coordinated workforce system for single mothers, that results in an accessible pathway to increased employment credentialing, which leads to job placement and retention in high demand careers with a sufficient living wage; and provides a sustained skilled workforce.
TARGETED OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT To increase single mothers' awareness of and access to career information.	Cross Referral and Co-Enrollment Model	Aggregate Participant Data	Apricot EESM Entry Survey	
EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND CREDENTIALING To increase the number of single mothers completing job training.	Career Focused Training	Number enrolled, completed, credentialed	Apricot	
JOB PLACEMENT AND RETENTION To increase the number of single mothers with sustained career employment.	High-Touch Case Management Bridge Childcare (BCC)	Case Aggregate Data Number and type of placements, length of employment, Case Notes Number of CCB families and children	Apricot	
EVALUATION To conduct a rigorous evaluation which captures the quantitative and qualitative data.	External Evaluation	Evaluation Plan and Timeline	Periodic and Final Evaluation Report	

METHODOLOGY

This report focuses on the third year, 2022, of EESM. However, it also includes select cumulative findings from the prior years, as a means of capturing salient outcomes during this project demonstration period. The evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data source is Apricot Essentials Case Management and Reporting (AECMR) that offers case management, client tracking and outcomes management used by MLICCI.

In addition to Apricot, separate structured interviews were conducted with the EESM Case Managers and key staff. The following section captures findings for year three. As a means of providing a cumulative view of the program, select findings from years 1 and 2 are included in the discussion and summary.

Single mothers can access the services of EESM through the MLICCI website. During year three, services were provided through outreach and continuous program engagement. The following is a presentation of salient data from the MLICCI Apricot database.

- Approximately 800 mothers sought the services of EESM and received labor market information and outreach via email, phone and text. In follow-up EESM case managers are also providing Case Management, Career Action Planning, Child Care Payment Program and employment resources and to date have done so for 441 of those moms.
- Demographically, the mothers seeking services were very similar throughout the grant period. Approximately 75% were African American, and 15% white. The smallest group, 5%, were Hawaiian, Hispanics, and Native American; no ethnicity indicated for the remainder.

- Information and outreach are a significant part of the work of EESM. Outreach Services were provided in the area of employment engagement and training. This includes a range of information and tools, including MyNextMove.org, MIT Living Wage Calculator and Local Labor Market Tools.

During the third year MLICCI provided outreach via email, phone and text to a total of 779 women who had made contact via the website. Employment entry and retention was the primary area of need. These individuals received information on: EESM, CCPP, local employment and training services.

Table 1
EESM Outreach
Employment Engagement and Training Services

Employment Engagement and Training Information and Assistance	Number
Job Search and Career Coaching	332
Career Awareness Tools	232
Employment Entry and Retention Assistance	248

It is further noted that among the women receiving employment education and training, subsequently reported enrolling in academic and certification programs as well as an increase in wages and hours worked.

Table 2
Post Education/Training Status

Post Education and Training	#
Enrollment in Academic Education	34
Entered Certification of Vocational Program	26

Entered Adult Education Program	7
Reported increase in wages and/or Work Hours	92

The Child Care Payment Program (CCPP) is the State child care subsidy system. Women often come to EESM while awaiting the outcome of their state CCPP application. Considerable time is invested by Case Managers in helping mothers navigate this system. The following table reflects application status prior to and after becoming engaged with EESM. With EESM assistance, 65% of the CCPP applications were approved compared to 31% of those submitted prior to EESM engagement. Further, with EESM assistance no applications were closed by the state. These data affirm the significance of the Case Managers in helping mothers navigate this process.

**Table 2
CCPP Application Status**

Before and After Enrollment

CCPP Status	Prior EESM Application Status (N=264)		After EESM Application Status (N=96)		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Approved	83	31.0%	63	65.6%	146
Denied	9	3.4%	6	6.2%	15
App Submitted	23	8.7%	-	-	23
State Review Process	66	25.0%	26	27.1%	92
Closed	34	12.9%	-	-	34
Draft	47	17.8%	1	1.0%	48
Other	2	.8%			2
	264		96	96	360

Childcare is a significant part of the work of EESM. EESM Bridge Childcare (BCC) provides short-term child care assistance. During Year 3, 166 CCB participants

were approved and received short -term child care assistance, 139 had pending applications, and 10 were ineligible or services were suspended.

Childcare makes a difference. Among mothers who successfully completed BCC, 85% entered and/or retained employment, 39% had an increase in wages and/or hours worked. State subsidized child care was received by 57%. These data suggest that with child care, more single mothers can retain employment as well as receive needed academic and vocational training. This positions them for more jobs and better paying jobs.

Table 4
Bridge Childcare
Participant Outcomes

Bridge CC Participant	Outcomes (N=166)	
Retained/Entered Employment	141	85%
Unemployed	22	13%
Employment Status Unknown	3	1.8%
Enrolled in Academic Program	18	11%
Enrolled in GED/Vocational	21	12%
Increase in Wages/Hours	65	39%
Received CCPP Approval	95	57%

Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Qualitative Findings

In depth interviews were conducted with the EESM Case Managers who are strategically located throughout the State in regions geographical aligned with the four workforce regions. These women have both professional and life experiences which equip them to work effectively with low-income single mothers. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit their insights, observations, and experiences in working with single mothers seeking to gain meaningful employment. Salient issues highlighted by the CMs included:

- Since COVID the program has developed a cadence for providing assistance to single mothers.
- There has been a significant increase in single mothers seeking the services of EESM.

- Access to Employment information and technology continues to be a critical need among single mothers.(Many lack PCs, tablets, scanners; only cell phones for communication.)
- Mothers lack information regarding CCPP and need intense assistance in navigating the application process.
- Collaboration with jobs centers is a slowly and evolving process.

High touch case management is the central strategy of EESM which is threaded throughout the program. It is an intensive, collaborative social support process that assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet the client's human service needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and resource management targeted toward attainment of desired program outcomes.

The MLICCI high-touch case management approach has several nontraditional features. Different from the more traditional approach, high-touch case management is personal and highly relational. Rapport, trust and partnership are essential undergirding features. These individuals work in partnership with the mothers to develop strategies that will best suit their family. This includes setting goals, making decisions, navigating fragmented services, garnering resources, and accountability coaching. A written Career Action Plan (CAP) becomes the blueprint for achieving desired goals. Case managers also interact with the child care providers, workforce partners and other relevant service providers.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Information and Training –

Outcomes provide evidence of the efficacy of a program. To this end, EESM had evolved into a significant resource for single mothers needing assistance in securing employment. Low-income single mothers often do not have a network to draw upon when seeking employment. The lack of information on where and how to find a job-and other related supports is a critical barrier to employment. EESM addressed this void by providing employment information, educational and vocational training opportunities, job searches and child care assistance.

EESM was able to establish an ongoing connection with over half of these mothers and provide employment information. The women served are predominantly African American and employed. Despite their employment, they were in need of child care assistance in order to retain and/or improve their employment.

The volume of participants receiving job related information speaks to the need for low-income mothers to be empowered through access to job essential employment information in a user-friendly and affirming manner. Information is power. ESSM mothers lacked a network that could be used to secure information on employment and essential work supports. This was addressed through provision of a range of informational services; the most frequently needed information was on subsidized child care, followed by career action planning and job searches. Almost 800 mothers received employment information in year 3 .

Retention is a standard performance measure in the employment industry. At follow up, over 80% of the Bridge CC participants entered and/or retained employment. Also, 23% furthered themselves through education and vocational training. Forty percent experienced an increase in wages and/or hours worked.

Over half received CCPP approval and received state subsidized child care assistance.

Child Care Payment Program (CCPP)

Accessing subsidized child care in Mississippi can be a laborious, tedious and time-consuming process. Stated simply, it is a major barrier to poor mothers having access to quality and affordable child care. It is an accepted premise among low-income mothers that eligibility for subsidized child care does not always equate to timely access to child care. This is the undergirding premise for the High-Touch Case Managers system and Bridge Childcare.

Case Managers spend a considerable amount of time helping EESM participants move through the subsidy eligibility process. The significance of this Case Management service is reflected in the number of mothers approved through the CCPP process. Twice as many EESM-assisted women were able to get their CCPP applications approved, compared to those applying prior to EESM affiliation. These data affirm the efficacy of the Case Managers in navigating the state subsidy system.

Bridge Child Care (BRIDGE CC)

Although indicated in previous evaluations, in order to provide context and continuity, it is important to restate the framework for the EESM Bridge Childcare over the past three years. Childcare is the core of MLICCI's mission. In addition to advocating for equitable, accessible, quality and affordable child care, MLICCI understands that it is an essential work support.

Bridge CC is not an entitlement. Metaphorically, it is “a temporary detour around a structural barrier” which is often an elongated CCPP application process with disruptions that slow down and sometimes derail one’s pathway to employment, and thus their destination of economic security. Bridge Childcare bridges the gap.

This short-term intervention allows single mothers to receive a time-limited child care voucher to assist with child care costs for children birth through age 12, and for youth with exceptional needs up to age 21 after enrollment in an EESM activity. Approval for payment of child care services may be provided for up to three months or until the child is successfully enrolled into long-term, subsidized child care. Eligibility may be extended for a maximum of six-months, if the family is unable to secure long-term, subsidized child care during the initial period. During this timeframe, the case manager has the critical role of assisting the mother in navigating the pursuit of state subsidized child care through the Child Care Payment Program (CCPP). This pathway can sometime have unanticipated “bumps in the road”.

There were significant outcomes for EESM Bridge Childcare Program. Armed with quality, affordable and accessible child care, over eighty percent of these mothers were able to enter and/or retain employment; and over one-fourth enrolled in an educational and/or vocational program. Importantly, almost forty percent reported an increase in wages and/or work hours. These outcomes were enabled by over half of the mothers receiving approved subsidized child care. *Childcare makes a difference in the employment of single mothers.*

Advocacy of Policy Change

The Year 2 EESM evaluation report provided a detailed discussion of the Child Support Cooperation policy. This regulation requires child support cooperation with the child support enforcement unit by the custodial parent (usually single mother), as a condition of eligibility determination for a child care certificate and other public assistance. The mother must apply for and cooperate as specified in the application process. Stated succinctly, the mother is required to identify and provide extensive information regarding the father. This harmful rule has deterred single moms, who need child care assistance most, from applying. Single moms have many legitimate and compelling reasons to not comply - ranging from safety concerns related to domestic abuse to mistrust of the state to achieve better results than informal arrangements negotiated with the absent dad. Single moms shouldn't be punished for the absent dad's failure to comply with child support.

Further, given Mississippi's history of racism, and the emasculation and degradation of African Americans particularly African American men, fathers

are distrustful of state institutions and systems; and are not receptive to their personal information being entered into a state database. Regrettably, when the custodial parent has to disclose non-custodial parents' information, this frequently engenders misplaced distrust and conflict between the parents. Given that these are more often than not African American men, this practice is viewed by some as another mechanism to diminish the Black family structure.

The implication of the child support cooperation is that it often has an antithetical and counterproductive effect on families. In many cases, amenable family relations where two parents are engaged in co-parenting their child (including financially), the insertion of state *mandated* child support can be viewed as accusatorial by the non-custodial parent and disrupts voluntary support. More importantly, it can damage parental as well as father-child relationships. Damaged family relationship should not be a risk factor when seeking affordable child care.

Advocacy for Policy Change

Advocacy for policy change is an indispensable tool in dismantling institutional barriers. For several years MLICCI has been unrelenting in its advocacy for change in the child care eligibility process, and specifically child support cooperation. MLICCI has finally been successful.

Throughout this grant period, MLICCI has continued to advocate for elimination of the child support cooperation requirement. MLICCI's advocacy efforts have included research, op-eds, and meetings with SECAC and DHS leadership. The efforts have again proven to be effective.

In March 3, 2022, local and statewide print and television media announced that the governor's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) had unanimously recommended to the governor, with DHS concurrence, that the child support cooperation requirement be eliminated in the state of Mississippi. That was and still is a significant accomplishment toward increasing access to child care for eligible children and their families.

Recently, on March 16, 2023 MDHS finally proposed the elimination of the child support requirement in CCPP by filing the change for the removal of this requirement from their policy manual. A hearing will be held in April and the policy will go into effect on May 15th.

At the March 2nd, 2023 SECAC meeting, the Chair and Director of the MDHS division that oversees CCPP, announced:

“We did finally receive permission from the Governor's office to move forward with removing the child support cooperation requirement as a requirement to participate in the Child Care Payment Program.

I'll just take this moment to publicly thank SECAC but then, especially Carol, I want to thank you and MLICCI for the work that you all have done, the information that you all have provided, you all have been very instrumental in helping us get that change, so thank you so much.”

<https://mssecac.org/meetings/>

This is what effective and persistent advocacy for policy change looks like. This is what the removal of structural barriers allowing for unabridged access to child care looks like. This is what a forward step on the journey to equity looks like.

The first year of EESM was challenged by the pandemic, however the program has continued to evolve as an efficacious employment model for single mother. Advocacy for policy change, High touch Case Management and Bridge Childcare are innovative and essential features of this model to be strengthened, expanded and continued. The elimination of the child support cooperation requirement is unprecedented. Furthermore, the data suggest that EESM is efficacious and therefore positioned for scale up.

This is the external evaluation for year 3 of a four year grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative in support of the Employment Equity for Single Moms Program.