First 2000 Days Network:
Developmental Evaluation Report
Summer 2017

Prepared by: Samantha Berger, Evaluation Lead
First 2000 Days Network: Summary of Learning
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Throughout Spring/Summer 2017, the First 2000 Days Network (henceforth “Network”) collected additional, and summarized existing data on the Network’s current state. This report includes data from:

- 15 interviews with Backbone members
- 16 survey responses from Backbone members
- 9 survey responses from members of Coalitions Collaborating for Impact (CCI)
- Data collected throughout Phase 2 of the Strengthening Families Pilot
- Observations of key Network meetings by the Evaluation Lead

Detailed case studies of most key activities mentioned in this report (i.e. ‘CCI’, ‘Parental Resilience Pilot’, and ‘supporting a culture of adaptive learning’) are available upon request.

The evaluation was structured to continue to learn about the Network’s Theory of Change:

1 The First 2000 Days Network has a Backbone structure that performs the following key functions: Guides vision and strategy; Supports alignment and leveraging of activities; Establishes shared measurement practices; Facilitates communication and engagement.

2 The Strengthening Families Pilots use the Strengthening Families Framework, developed by the Centre for the Study of Social Policy, as a common quality standard to support capacity building and behavior change.
Summary of Key Learnings

- The Network is supporting processes that align with its guiding principles: both the CCI and Backbone members report that they experience high quality collaborative processes that are supported by a culture of adaptive learning.

- There is evidence of significant changes in Backbone members’ capacities on several levels. Through their participation in the Network, Backbone members have developed their:
  - Capacity to understand, articulate and support the Network’s strategy
  - Capacity to understand and articulate the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD). This understanding has translated into the ways Backbone members advocate for and speak to others about the importance of ECD in the sector
  - Confidence and levels of self-authorization around having conversations about “what needs to be done” in their own work and in the sector more generally

- Backbone members emphasized that the next step for the Network is to focus on advocacy and policy change. Many Backbone members focused on the potential for the Network to move towards advocating for change in the ECD system. There was a general sense that the Network has enough legitimacy, momentum, neutrality, and stability to be a collective voice for positive change in the sector.

- The dynamics previously described\(^3\) in how to support behavior change, capacity building and collective action reflect many of the experiences described in this data collection.

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\(^3\) For a more detailed account of patterns in the Network’s behavior change, capacity building and collective action efforts, request the “What have we Learned?” case study.
Contributions to Key Learnings

Key Activities
In interviews with Backbone team members, several key Network activities were highlighted, including:

- **Network Nights**: Network nights were consistently highlighted as opportunities for participants to make connections and links that have the potential to grow into meaningful relationships and/or future alignment or leveraging opportunities. They are also seen as opportunities to learn more about activities taking place throughout the system.

- **Coalitions Collaborating for Impact**: While CCI is an autonomous group of coalitions that are meeting for their own purpose, the Network has played a formal role in terms of supporting facilitation (and thus a broader vision) of CCI meetings. From the Network’s perspective, CCI is one of the Network’s key ‘nodes’. CCI was highlighted throughout the evaluation process as an example of supporting collective action and behavior change, and as an opportunity to learn about alignment around a common quality standard.

- **Capstone**: The experience with the Capstone students was highlighted as a positive opportunity to introduce the Network’s ideas to a cohort of students. Backbone members also highlighted how the students were assets within organizations and helped to support the building organizations’ internal capacities and/or behavior changes, especially within the context of the Strengthening Families Pilot.

- **Strengthening Families Pilot**: The Strengthening Families Pilot was consistently highlighted as an opportunity to support behavior change against a common quality standard, collective action, and capacity building amongst agencies in both the ECD sector and the Network’s internal team.

- **ELCC mapping process**: In addition to developing a more complete understanding of the system, some Backbone members felt the mapping process helped to expose new and different people to the Network (specifically individuals who work at the City of Calgary).

- Participation at certain activities or events were highlighted as opportunities for, or the result of, deliberate linking, including:
  - Facilitating meetings between the school boards
  - Participation at various conferences
  - Participation in city-wide initiatives such as YYC Plays
  - Participation at Backbone meetings where there is an opportunity to hear what’s going on, connect with people, and move efforts forward.

Generally, interviewees highlighted whichever activity they were most closely involved with as their example of the Network’s strategy. This indicates that individuals are making the connection between each activity and the broader strategy. It also suggests that Backbone members understand the Network’s strategy through the lens of their own experience. It may be beneficial to more deliberately share the details of each of these activities with one another so that there is a better general understanding of the activities that individuals are not directly involved with.
Focus on Process Quality

Overall, Backbone and CCI members reported that Backbone and CCI meetings feel authentic, transparent, and that participants feel ownership over advancing the work of each group. Newer members to the Backbone also noted that unlike their previous experience with collaborative groups, the Backbone was particularly collaborative, participatory, and transparent in nature. For example, one newer member noted that participants in the Backbone are willing to move beyond their individual and organizational mandates to work for the broader strategy and vision of the Network.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Quality</th>
<th>Backbone (n=16)</th>
<th>CCI (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Network’s Backbone/CCI, decisions are often made in advance and simply confirmed by the process**</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Network’s Backbone/CCI, some people’s merits are taken for granted while other people are asked to justify themselves.**</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Network’s Backbone/CCI, strings are being pulled from the outside, which influence important decisions**</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear understanding of how to meaningfully participate in the Network/CCI.</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is my responsibility to help move the Network/CCI’s work forward</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Together</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of participation in the CCI, my coalition has adopted shared goals developed by the group.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of participation in the CCI, my coalition has made changes or improved its programs or activities.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Backbone members highlighted the importance of having trusting relationships and a willingness to be transparent about challenges as key features that support the Backbone’s ability to have meaningful and difficult conversations (contributing to high scores on the process quality scale).

Backbone members were explicitly asked to provide examples of how they think the Network is living its guiding principles, and examples where the Network can improve how it models its guiding principles. This provides evidence of the Network’s capacity to model its stated values.

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4 Questions to measure the perceived authenticity of the collaborative process and quality of work together within the CCI were drawn from Darrin Hicks’ (University of Colorado, Denver) research which finds a correlation between the quality of a collaborative process and the collaboration’s stated outcomes. Questions about ownership over the process were developed by the evaluation lead at the First 2000 Days Network. Response categories for each question include: strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Each preferred response was calculated as 4 points, with following responses calculated as 3, 2, 1 point, respectively. The final score was divided by the number of respondents. Any score over 3 means that on average respondents agreed with the statement.

**These questions are “reverse coded”: “strongly disagree” is the preferred response.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Principle</th>
<th>Example of the Network living its guiding principle</th>
<th>How the Network can improve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>– Meetings are welcoming, open, and regular. They provide a way to build trusting relationships.</td>
<td>– Build trust with funders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Collaborative    | – Collaboration occurs at Backbone meetings.  
– Perspectives within the sector are valued at Backbone meetings.  
– Participants are consistently asked for feedback and assist in decision making.  
– Network nights provide an opportunity for collaboration and innovation. | |
| Participatory    | – Backbone members can step into different roles because the Network’s culture encourages self-authorization  
– Backbone meetings are open and everyone is welcome. Many people participate in the meetings and are engaged.  
– Everyone at the table has a chance to participate. | – Create clearer ways for people to participate in the Network.  
– Invite leaders within the system to join the Backbone.  
– Be clearer and explicit about expectations. Simultaneously, a recognition exists that “assigning” duties does not fit the Network model. |
| Authentic        | – The Backbone regularly refers to foundational documents | |
| Transparent      | – Information is clear and shared. | – Improve individuals’ transparency about what they want from the Network.  
– Be clearer about what the Network is |
| Adaptive         | – Learning and reflection is a part of almost every conversation  
– The Network can mobilize as opportunities arise.  
– People can choose to contribute to the Network based on their existing capacities.  
– The Backbone is willing to say when something has not worked and to be flexible in trying something new. | |
| Innovative       | – The Network pushes against the conventional barriers of the ECD sector.  
– People engage across sectors.  
– The Backbone responds to feedback | |
Supporting a Culture of Adaptive Learning

Overall, survey results indicate that the Backbone and CCI processes support a culture of adaptive learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture of Learning³</th>
<th>Backbone (n=16)</th>
<th>CCI (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI is open to explore new ideas and approaches</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI makes an effort to learn from others</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI is open to trying new things</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regularly make time for reflection and discussion within the Backbone/CCI</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI regularly shares learning with each other</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI regularly shares successes and challenges with each other</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI encourages questions that clarify our assumptions and beliefs</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbone/CCI members seek advice from one another</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel included in the Backbone/CCI’s decision making structure</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone/CCI acts on feedback from other Backbone/CCI members.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backbone acts on feedback from Network participants</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with Backbone members also suggest that they have internalized the importance of supporting learning within the Network. Multiple individuals spoke about the importance of critical reflection and learning in making decisions about the Network’s strategy, as well as in informing their decisions outside of the Network. Some Backbone members were also acutely aware of their own and others’ biases and highlighted the importance of understanding how these impact decision-making.

Capacity Building

By investing in explicit capacity building opportunities, the Network has learned about the dynamics involved in supporting meaningful capacity building. These patterns can be seen unambiguously within specific capacity building activities (i.e. Strengthening Families pilots or CCI), but also in how individual capacity is being built within the Backbone in four clear ways:

Firstly, the importance of repeating information is consistently reported as a key supporting element of capacity building. One of the clearest examples of this is how the Strengthening Families Pilot participants’ understanding of the Strengthening Families Framework changes as they repeat the process. It’s also very clear among Backbone team members’ understanding of the Network’s strategy. However, it is important to note that repetition does not only refer to

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³ Questions are based on a description of a healthy culture of adaptive learning in Preskill, Splansky and Juster’s 2014 article entitled “Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact. Supplement Sample Questions, Outcomes and Indicators” published by FSG. Response categories for each question include: strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Each preferred response was calculated as 4 points, with following responses calculated as 3, 2, 1 point, respectively. The final score was divided by the number of respondents. Any score over 3 means that on average respondents agreed with the statement.
hearing the same things over and over, but overtly practicing and integrating new capacities and understanding into existing thinking and behavior.

This repetition is tied to the second trend; the importance of experiential learning in building capacity. The Strengthening Families Pilots and CCI have highlighted the importance of having people work through the information or approaches, rather than passively listening to information. One concern related to scaling capacity building opportunities is the question of how to provide that same experiential learning to participants’ co-workers that are not directly involved in the pilot, and therefore do not have the benefit of first hand, intentional, capacity building processes.

Some Backbone members also noted a third trend in the importance of understanding peoples’ starting points before effectively building capacity. What is their training? What are some habits in their thinking? This has emerged as an important part of the strategy as people recognize how easy it is to revert to old patterns in thinking and acting. As such, some of the main pre-conditions for a successful capacity building experience are an openness to the process, a desire to learn, and a willingness to shift practice based on experience.

Finally, Backbone members are operating with the assumption that capacity building is an unending process. A large investment in time and resources has been required to design, support, and participate in intentional capacity building opportunities. One Backbone member spoke about the challenge of perpetually needing more time to continue to build the capacities required. They suggested advocating for a shift in organization’s mindset that capacity building doesn’t occur over the course of a ‘pilot’ or as a bound activity, but that time needs to be set aside as part of an individual’s role.

Behavior Change

One of the most evident changes in thinking and behavior in the Network is visible among Backbone members. Backbone members reported significant changes to their own thinking and behavior caused by their participation on the Backbone. Trends in how participation in the Backbone has impacted participants include:

- **Knowledge and Caring**: Developing a deeper knowledge and expertise around the topic of Early Childhood Development. This knowledge has supported individuals’ confidence to advocate for and integrate more robust approaches to ECD in their own work and personal lives. Participants also report having a better understanding of the system and the gaps within it. This understanding has helped support individuals’ abilities to ask helpful questions.

- **Confidence and Authorization**: Giving participants the confidence and ability to self-authorize to talk about the importance of ECD and systems change in their own work. Backbone members felt like the Network’s approach has legitimated their own thinking and caring about systems change. This has resulted in concrete behavior changes like a willingness to get in touch with their MLAs. CCI is a powerful example of this, because the group decided to have meaningful conversations about quality standards for their work without waiting for their funder to tell them how to do it.

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6 There is also evidence of behavior change among participants of the Parental Resilience Pilot. See details in Parental Resilience Pilot case study (available upon request).
“I feel like I’m part of a movement and it’s my responsibility to spread the movement. I’m not doing it alone. It elevates everything to a higher level of importance [...] Now it’s real and there is a chance to make a real difference. It's very inspirational.”

- **Meaning, Hope, and Disillusionment**: Being part of the Network has given more meaning to people’s work. At the same time, some Backbone members are challenged by their growing understanding of the challenges within the system: it can easily feel like a hopeless situation that is too big and complex to have a positive impact on.

- **Process Tolerance**: A few Backbone and CCI members mentioned that they have become more tolerant of the time and patience that is required for creating systems change, supporting collective action, or behavior change. There is also more of a tolerance for moving forward without having a clear direction or set of steps. People report being more comfortable in ambiguity and recognize the importance of process quality rather than ‘efficiency’.

- **Intentional, critical thinking**: Backbone members report thinking more critically about their work, asking more questions, and thinking about challenges and opportunities at a systems level than they previously had before.

Several Backbone members also described that participating on the Backbone felt like “coming home”, something they were looking for throughout their entire career; providing an opportunity for fulfillment, or their only hopeful opportunity to explore a passion for understanding the ECD system and what it will take to improve it. This highlights the lack of opportunity to think in this way, and the importance of cultivating a space for people to be able to have these conversations. The Network has also acted as a neutral reification for some individuals to act who cannot do so publicly due to their connections to or positions within certain organizations.

The Network is also beginning to collect evidence of behavior change among participants. Most CCI members reported that because of their participation in the CCI, their individual coalitions have adopted shared goals developed by the CCI group and made changes to or improved programs or activities accordingly. Specific examples include:

- **Collaboration**: CCI members report working more collaboratively with other coalitions because of their participation on the CCI. It provides them with the opportunity to learn from successes and challenges of others, engage in collaborative planning, use activities and ideas from other coalitions members, be aware of other coalition’s initiatives and goals, and align activities more intentionally.

- **Reflection**: CCI members report that working with the CCI has supported more reflective practice and critical thinking. Specifically, coalition members have reported using the quality standard tools that they developed, evaluating their coalition’s work, that participation has supported critical reflection about the coalition’s approach, vision, mission, goals, culture, values, quality standards, recruitment, collaboration, etc., and that it has supported reflection on how to support alignment within their coalition contexts.
• **Citywide Perspective and Influence:** The CCI is an opportunity for individual coalitions to gain a better understanding of the dynamics across the city: as one member has stated, “as a result of coming together we've been able to capitalize and expand on initiatives”. Furthermore, while having a local coalition remains important for the individuals that sit on them, the CCI provides the opportunity to develop a “strong city-wide voice”. Collaborating at the city-wide level also reduces the workload by distributing responsibility across multiple coalitions.

**Supporting Collective Action**

Generally, there was not a lot of emphasis on collective action as gathered in this last evaluation process. In interviews, Backbone members mentioned the CCI, Strengthening Families Pilots, and participation on the Backbone as evidence of collective action, but did not elaborate on the perceived significance of the work. This may be due to several factors, including: the Network’s more explicit, recent focus on capacity building and behavior change, uncertainty around the definition of collective action, and/or a lack of capacity to elaborate on the concept of collective action.

**Systems Change**

Overall, the biggest sense of uncertainty emerged from understanding how the Network is supporting systems change. This may be partly attributed to variation in the ways that Backbone members define systems change. The most common definition of systems change was as policy or legislative changes. Several people mentioned focusing on curriculum development or quality, accessible, affordable child care as areas with existing momentum.

However, Backbone members also defined indicators of systems change as:

- Coordination and integration within and across systems: an alignment between the strategies of individuals at the top of systems and operations of frontline workers
- Seeing the core story of child development embedded in different settings
- Investment in Early Childhood Development (through the coalitions, EDI)
- Having higher quality programs available to support parents
- A changed relationship with families across all systems
- The valuing of parents and children; if we valued ECD as a society
- Giving voice and power to people in the “middle” of the system
- Empowering people within the system to act when they need to

**Considerations**

- Despite the emphasis on advocacy, there was uncertainty about what the Network would advocate for and how it could be the most effective. A considered approach to leveraging existing advocacy work and internal capacity building will be required.

- Policy change (through advocacy) was also the most common definition of ‘systems change’. It may be beneficial to explore conceptualizing systems change beyond advocacy efforts.

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7 The Network’s strategic development around Collective Action has been documented in detail in both the Parental Resilience and Coalitions Collaborative for Impact case studies (available upon request).

8 This refers to resources and messaging developed by the Palix Foundation and the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative which puts “key scientific concepts about brain development into a narrative” intended to bridge scientific and public understanding of child development.
Most of the Backbone’s activities focus on engaging and building relationships with individuals. This includes capacity building opportunities like the CCI and the Strengthening Families Pilots. While there is the expectation that coalition leaders and Pilot participants can integrate what they learn in their everyday work, many Backbone members were unsure how to best support this integration. Participants in the Pilot also expressed concern in feeling unequipped to integrate their learning within the organization (this has been tied to capacity to share, time to integrate, and receiving buy-in from other staff members/leadership). This dynamic may be an important focus moving forward.

Several Backbone members mentioned the importance of engaging new people within the Backbone. Health was consistently mentioned as a missing key player around the table. There were some concerns about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining new individuals on the Backbone. Some people mentioned the persisting challenge of explaining the Network’s nebulous work to new people well enough to support engagement. Backbone members mentioned the benefits of the existing practice of repeating the Network’s core strategy to help integrate newer members onto the Backbone. A new suggestion was to pair new attendees up with a ‘mentor’ on the Backbone who can check in with them, provide one-on-one guidance, and build a relationship.

It is important to intentionally track, record, and share what is happening throughout the Network to expand the number of people who are involved with, or understand different elements of, the Network’s strategy. This was highlighted in comments about how an understanding of and ownership over some of the Network’s key activities (Network Nights, the CCI, the Strengthening Families Pilot) is confined to a limited number of people. Moreover, the dependence on individual relationships ties the Network’s engagement strategy to the involvement of individual people.

There has been a marked increase in Backbone members’ capacity to articulate and integrate the Network’s strategy into their thinking. This capacity development supports broad strategic thinking but it has also created a wider gulf between older and newer members of the Backbone. A few Backbone members noted this division around the table and were concerned about how it would impact relationships, the ability to have conversations, and the ease with which newer people could integrate and participate on the Backbone team.