

# Sixpence



## Biennial Report to the Legislature: 2015–2016

**Independent evaluation confirms that investments in Sixpence continue to narrow the achievement gap facing Nebraska's infants and toddlers at risk**

### Landmark legislation

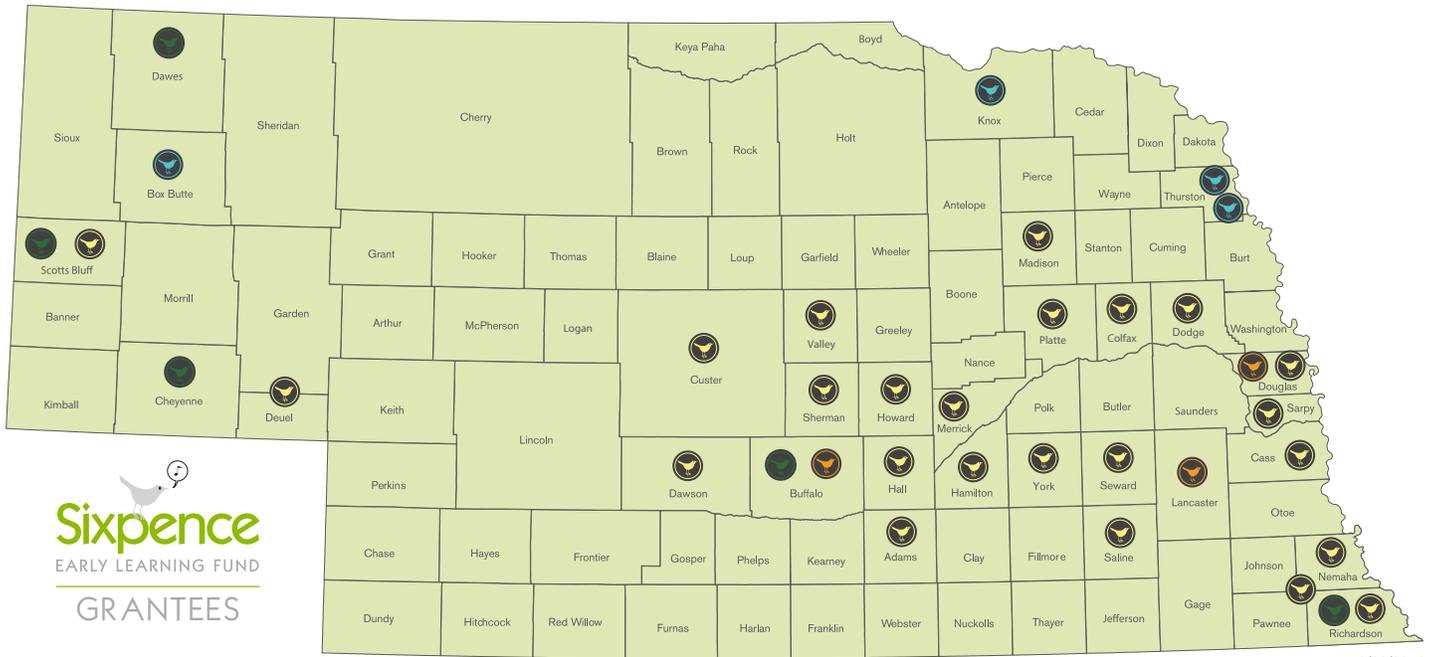
Since 1990, Nebraska has pursued strategic investments in the early development and school readiness of young children at risk from birth through the age of kindergarten entry. These grants were awarded to school districts statewide and were designed to advance high-quality environments, promote partnerships between public schools and community-based providers, and integrate and maximize existing resources more effectively.

For decades, economists, educators, law enforcement officials and public officials have expressed the growing conviction that the first three years are a critical time to invest in the skill development of young children. Based on a credible and diverse body of evidence, Nebraska lawmakers passed landmark legislation in 2006 to establish a dedicated funding source to serve infants and toddlers through high-quality early learning experiences and environments—one of only a handful of states to do so. The architects of this legislation designed it to express and expand upon the same principles of its existing early childhood investments—a commitment to high quality standards, strong public-private partnerships, fiscal efficiency and accountability, and the prioritization as parents as a key factor in the school preparedness of young children at risk.

This legislation resulted in the establishment of the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund in state statute. The Fund represented a \$60 million

Today in Nebraska, over 30,000 infants and toddlers face challenges that can severely undermine their chances of arriving at kindergarten ready to learn, and their potential of growing into skilled workers and responsible citizens.

For 10 years, Sixpence has stood as an example of how informed, fiscally responsible policies, public-private collaboration, and high-quality early learning practices can change the odds in favor of Nebraska's youngest children at risk. Through its steadfast support for Sixpence, Nebraska's Legislature has set a useful precedent for future generations of lawmakers that promises to keep our state and its citizens strong and growing.



9/20/2016



GRANTEES TYPE

 Home-based	 Combination Home-/Center-based
 Center-based	 Child Care Partnership

statewide partnership consisting of a \$20 million commitment from private sector donors, matched by a \$40 million public investment from the Educational Lands and Trust Fund. The legislation directed that the public and private dollars would be invested separately and the combined earnings placed into a common cash fund held by the Nebraska Department of Education.

By statutory requirement, a governor-appointed Board of Trustees representing public and private interests was created to oversee the competitive grant process through which funds are awarded to community partnerships to promote high-quality early learning services for infants and toddlers at risk. Each partnership is anchored by its local school district, which acts as the fiscal agent for the grant award and collaborates with other community organizations and service providers to deliver early learning programs to qualifying children and families.

The Trustees manage the grant process through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the private Endowment Provider selected by the Nebraska Department of Education. Expert technical

staff employed by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation also deliver dedicated, intensive and individualized support to grantees to help them achieve and maintain high quality standards in teaching practice and program management. In addition, every funded program is required to participate in a rigorous annual evaluation conducted by an independent research team who measure children’s developmental gains, parent and family outcomes, and overall program quality.

## Sustainable funding through a constitutional amendment

The legislation that ultimately led to Sixpence grew out of a shared conviction among policymakers that quality early learning opportunities for children at risk played an important role in our state’s ongoing growth, prosperity and quality of life. However, it would require a source of sustainable funding to make that conviction truly practicable.

To create an endowment capable of generating enough income to establish and grow quality early learning programs, policymakers looked to the

Nebraska Educational Lands and Trust Fund to provide the 2:1 public match for the initial private sector investment. However, because the state constitution specifically reserved these resources “for use by the common school,” it would be necessary to amend that definition to include early learning services for children from birth to kindergarten entry.

State senators, business leaders, educators and other proponents led a concerted effort to revise this section of the Nebraska constitution accordingly. Proposition 5 appeared on the state ballot in November 2006 and Nebraska voters passed it by a 55% to 45% margin.

## Raising the private dollars under the Sixpence brand

### The fundraising challenge

Under the terms of the original legislation, private sector interests were required to commit \$20 million within five years in order to secure the \$40 million match in public dollars, thereby reaching the Endowment Fund’s \$60 million principal. While this represented an ambitious fundraising goal even in a good fiscal environment, the economic downturn beginning in 2007 amplified that challenge dramatically. Even though Nebraska evaded some of the worst fallout of the recession, private sector confidence in the market had dropped to a nearly unprecedented low, indicating a decidedly unfavorable outlook for fundraising.

Yet, it soon became apparent that these anxieties were counterbalanced by a growing understanding of the value of early learning investments as a fiscally responsible strategy for long-term social and economic growth. Both public and private sector interests began to focus greater attention on early childhood development, seeing in it a promising opportunity to invest in the state’s fund of human capital and future workforce.

Private sector confidence in Sixpence held firm. In 2011, the full \$20 million private commitment was met, fulfilling the legislative requirements that this goal be achieved within five years of the creation of the Endowment.

## Establishing the Sixpence brand

The success in raising the private \$20 million commitment owed much to strategic marketing and communications efforts carried out by the endowment provider. While the funding structure is technically identified as the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund in statute, it was immediately clear that a rebrand engage prospective donors and other key audiences more effectively.

In 2007, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, proposed rebranding the Endowment under the name “Sixpence.” The proposal served two purposes. First, using the name of a traditional nursery rhyme (“Sing a Song of Sixpence”) evoked the role of song, patterned rhyme and wordplay in promoting young children’s emerging language skills.

“Sixpence” (i.e. six pennies) also suggested the fund’s ability to multiply the initial private investment through matching contributions. Each dollar invested by private donors triggers a \$2 match from the public sector. Investment earnings from the combined \$3 are then granted out to community partnerships, who provide their own 100% match from existing funds and local, in-kind resources. The entire process suggests a symbolic sixfold multiplier for each dollar initially committed—hence the name “Sixpence.”

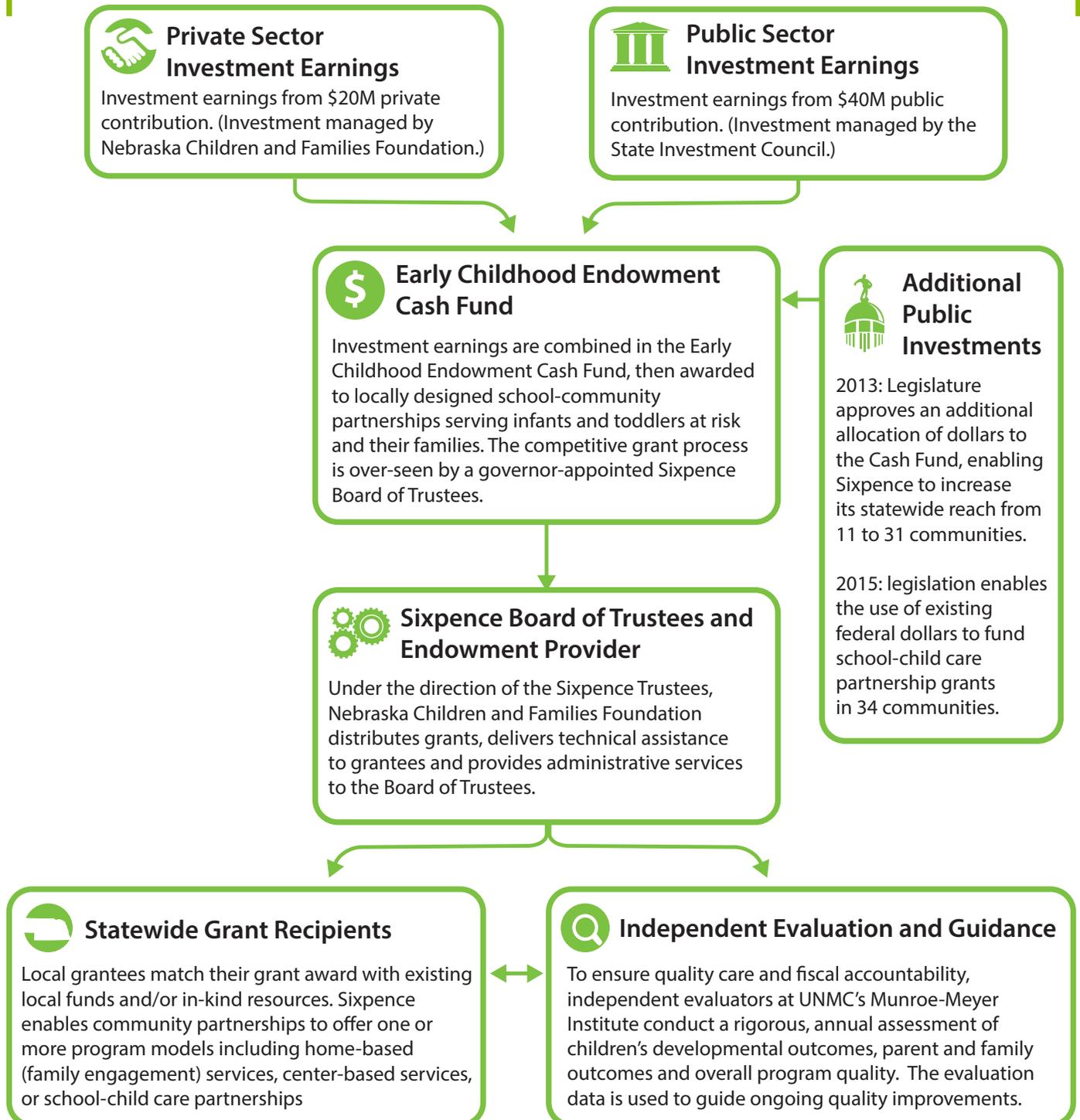
## Ongoing legislative and public support

### Legislature extends Sixpence’s reach: 2008-2013

The confidence and foresight Nebraska lawmakers showed at the birth of Sixpence in 2006 held firm in the succeeding years. Following the first grant awards to 11 communities in 2008, Sixpence delivered measurable evidence of developmental gains in hundreds of infants and toddlers facing severe challenges capable of undermining their potential for success in kindergarten and beyond. Further, Sixpence’s steadfast commitment to fiscal accountability and enhancing locally controlled early learning efforts earned it a reputation among legislators as an economically prudent, flexible and effective investment in the next generation of Nebraskans.

# How Sixpence Works: Partnership at Multiple Levels

## Early Childhood Endowment Funding Structure





In 2013, policymakers once again demonstrated their confidence in Sixpence by introducing legislation that would extend its reach to more children at risk statewide. Although Sixpence was designed to provide funding and support through the Endowment's public and private investment earnings, this new legislation called for direct infusions of new dollars directly to the Cash Fund. The increase in readily available funds would enable Sixpence to cultivate new or enhance existing programs much more quickly without compromising the Endowment's ability to continue generating income through its ongoing investments. The legislation advanced, enabling Sixpence to grow partnerships in 14 new communities, bringing the number of grantees from 11 to 25.

### **Senators approve new Sixpence program model: 2014-Present**

Despite the continued success of Sixpence-funded partnerships, many Nebraska communities faced growing difficulties in finding the resources, facilities, and skilled professionals necessary to deliver high-quality early learning services urgently needed by local families. Once again, Nebraska senators looked to Sixpence as an innovative, effective and flexible mechanism to address this challenge without putting additional stress on an already over-burdened state budget.

In 2015, lawmakers introduced new legislation that would allow child care providers to participate in Sixpence for the first time through direct partnerships with their local school districts. This new model was designed to enable communities to make better use of existing early childhood resources and personnel, while helping providers live up to Sixpence's high expectations for child outcomes, professionalism and financial responsibility. The legislation offered an efficient, creative answer to a complex challenge, and solidified support in the Unicameral by capitalizing on existing federal dollars already earmarked for quality early education, effectively neutralizing the impact on Nebraska taxpayers.

Senators rallied to advance the legislation and, in 2016, the Sixpence Board of Trustees distributed the first round new grant award to school-child care partnerships serving children at risk in 5 communities throughout the state.

## **Guiding principles: quality, accountability, partnership**

### **High-quality standards deliver outcomes and drive accountability**

Since its inception, Sixpence has stood for two key ideas. First, parents are the key figures in ensuring their youngest children receive the high-quality early developmental experiences that will prepare them for school success. Secondly, holding early care and education services accountable for the dollars we invest in them drives quality improvement.

Abundant evidence shows that children's earliest experiences directly influences—for good or ill—their early neural development and skill formation. Absent stimulating, emotionally supportive and healthy environments and interactions with capable, responsive parents and other adults, children are less likely to arrive at kindergarten developmentally ready to learn and thrive. This is particularly true for infants and toddlers facing one or more risk factors known to compromise school readiness. Whether they are cared for in a center-based environment, or at home with parents or a family member, the quality of children's experiences in the first three years can shape their lifelong trajectories.

Sixpence invests in quality opportunities for children's early development through services that are held to high standards in educational practice, curriculum design, parent coaching, budget management, program administration and professional development. Sixpence enables these programs to achieve and maintain these levels of quality by offering targeted, individualized advisement and support from an experienced team of technical advisors. Sixpence technical staff analyzes evaluation data collected by independent researchers, and works directly with program administrators and personnel to improve the caliber of their services on a case-by-case basis. Sixpence staff visits partnerships and programs across the state to ensure that they meet the administrative requirements set by the Nebraska Legislature, state agency partners and private investors. This ensures that Sixpence-funded programs are continually improving

## Public-private partnership

The Sixpence model succeeds because it is built upon effective, results-driven collaborations between public and private funders, the Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and an array of other agencies and organizations at the state and local levels.

-  **Funding Level:** \$20 million from the private sector and \$40 million from the state are invested separately. Earnings from the investments are combined in a shared pool of funds that are then distributed through grants to public schools in partnership with at least one community provider.
-  **Oversight Level:** The Sixpence Board of Trustees, representing both public and private interests, oversees the administration of the grants. To ensure accountability, dedicated one-on-one technical assistance is provided to programs so high-quality standards are maintained. This technical assistance is jointly provided by the public and private sector. Grantees work with an outside evaluator to measure outcomes using the most comprehensive tracking processes of their kind in the state.
-  **Community Level:** Grants are awarded to school districts in partnership with community-based programs who meet the Sixpence quality standards established by the Board of Trustees. Grant recipients match 100% of the total program costs through existing state and federal funds or other in-kind resources.

## Who Sixpence Serves

### Families and children at risk

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund currently supports 34 communities throughout Nebraska to provide evidence-based services to children birth to three and their families who face an array of risk factors. These risk factors include premature birth and low birth weight, teenage and single parenthood, low levels of parental education, low family income and homes where English is spoken as a second language. According to the most recent independent evaluation data, 61% of all children served by Sixpence were subject to 3 or more risk factors, while 41% had experienced one or more incidences of serious trauma. Risk factors in this severity and concentration represent serious, cumulative liabilities to children's healthy development and prospects for kindergarten readiness.

Sixpence helps offset these risk factors by supporting an array of parent coaching/family engagement programs, center-based early childhood services, and child care environments. These services vary according to the nature of each community's needs. For example, Sixpence programs serving the children of teenage parents provide high-quality child care, allowing young parents to pursue and complete their high school education. These programs also deliver individualized instruction in child development and effective caregiving, so the parents are better prepared to guide their children's early learning and growth.

Other Sixpence-funded programs are located in urban and rural communities statewide, including Native American communities. One innovative Sixpence program focuses specifically on incarcerated parents to help them improve their skills as caregivers and educators of their youngest children.

### Distribution of Sixpence investments

As of the most recent program evaluation, most children participating in Sixpence (70%) did so through family engagement services. Sixpence-funded partnerships and programs are located in more than 26 counties statewide, with the majority (68%) serving rural communities.

# Early Learning in Lexington:

Views from a Sixpence Family Educator

## A little about me.

As a graduate from Lexington Public Schools, I've watched the increase and expansion of school programs to help at-risk students succeed. And now that I work for LPS, it's been incredible to see up-close how these programs can help the families and children in our community.

As the Coordinator for the Lexington Family Engagement Program I can say first-hand that it's an amazing program and has changed the mindset of the families and children involved. The program uses the Early Steps to School Success curriculum. I'm grateful to report that we've seen increased parent knowledge and awareness of the importance of school readiness starting at birth and how it can make a difference in their children's educations.

As a Family Engagement Coordinator, I help teen parents find resources in the community that can help them further their education and gain experience to become successful adults and parents. We are always reminding our parents that they are the most important teachers in their child's life!

## The Early Steps program.

The Sixpence-funded program in Lexington — we call it Early Steps for short — offers services to parents who are still high school students. The program teaches them about healthy child development, how to nurture and care for their babies, and how to prepare their child for school success.

Student parents participating in Early Steps can earn up to 5 course credits per semester — up to 20 credits during their high school career. In order to earn the credits, students need to complete program requirements in addition to weekly journals and a presentation at the end of the semester. The credit program has been a new



*One of the young mothers Nancy works with reading to her toddler.*

addition to our program and so far, it's going great!

One of my main goals as an educator is to help the parents succeed in school, too. Early Steps not only offers educational services to parents and children, but also provides other opportunities to build social connections and find community support. We also run a support group open to all teen parents regardless if they are in Early Steps or not. The group focuses on topics such as the importance to further their education and how this not only benefits them but their children as well.

From my experience working with teen parents can be difficult but at the same time very rewarding.

Teens need as much support as they can get. I feel that Early Steps and the credit program is giving parents extra support in taking care of their child and their education.

## How I can relate.

Coming from a Spanish-speaking family and being a single parent, I can relate to many of the families that I work with. Growing up in a home where your parents only spoke Spanish was difficult at times — especially in my education. It was difficult for my own parents to help my siblings and I with assignments because of the language barrier. Although my parents didn't know the language, they always encouraged us to do well in school and to think about our future.

After graduation, I attended the University of Nebraska at Kearney where I graduated with my bachelor's degree in social work. Being the first generation to attend college has been a major accomplishment in my life.

As a single parent, I've been able to relate to many of my student parents and the difficulties they face. Having support from my parents has definitely played a major part in my success and accomplishments. My

parents and family have always been my support system. Unfortunately, many of the families that I work with don't have that support, which is why I feel it's so important for our teen parents to have a steady support network in the Early Steps program.

#### **What I'm always telling young parents.**

Education is extremely important, and I always share this belief with the teen parents. I enjoy sharing my personal experiences in hopes of motivating parents to pursue higher education. Having my degree has been a huge help — it has made it so much easier to find employment and to support my child. Understanding how important education is inspires me to keep pushing my student parents to further their own education . . . for themselves and their children.

One thing I share with my teens is this: "There is no excuse for not graduating from High School." I've gained as much knowledge as they have from Early Steps.

#### **Why I love my work.**

Working with teen parents has been a great learning experience. Early Steps gives me the opportunity to encourage, model parent-child interaction and educate on school readiness. I enjoy working with children and families, and strongly believe that our program has been making a difference in the lives of Lexington's children.

–Nancy Pinedo, *Family Engagement Coordinator for Lexington Public Schools*

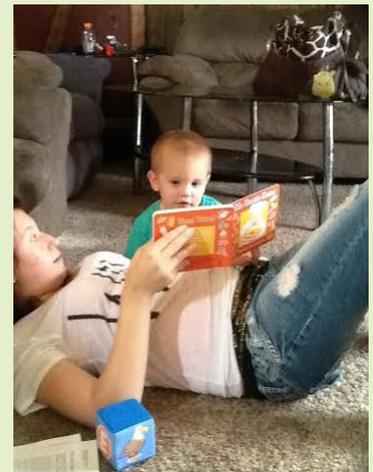


*Teenage parents engage their toddlers in some kitchen fun.*

## Sixpence in Aurora

Lindsey is a senior at Aurora Public Schools and when she entered the Sixpence program, her little boy Terron was 15 months old. Terron was highly active with few communication skills, and challenge to parent. Terron was referred for speech assistance at 17 months old and now receives speech therapy. Without Sixpence, Terron may still be waiting for these services. A couple of weeks ago, Terron shared his first "clear" word. He said it loud and clear and Lindsey was extremely proud in that moment.

Prior to entering the program, Terron had not been exposed to many books. Now reading is his favorite thing to do with his mom! (pictured below)



# Impact

The Board of Trustees believes measuring the impact of the blended public and private Sixpence funds is critical to closing the achievement gap, ensuring the integrity of the investment, and preparing for the sustainability of funds. A thorough evaluation of all Sixpence programs is conducted by the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s Munroe-Meyer Institute.

## Center-based services:

94% of infant and toddler groups served in center-based programs met the quality benchmarks that reflect high levels of responsiveness, positive emotional reinforcement and behavioral support on the part of the professionals who worked with the children—a 9% gain over 2014-15 evaluation results. [Instrument: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)]

Programs new to Sixpence in the evaluation period were also assessed on a series of subscales reflecting the quality of adult-child and peer-to-peer interactions, language development practices, and physical environment, among other measurements. Overall, the majority (64%) of new services exceeded program benchmarks for high quality. [Instrument: Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale—Revised Edition (ITERS-R)]

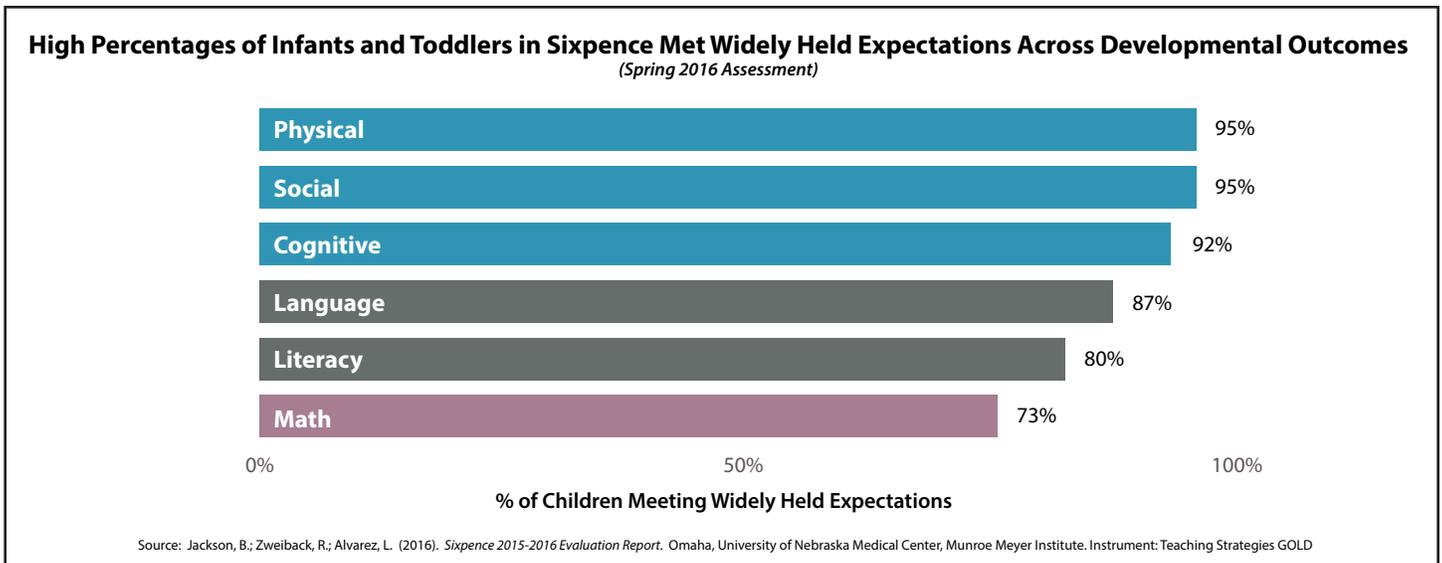
## Family engagement services:

82% of the program specialists who worked directly with families exceeded high-quality standards of professionalism in their understanding of families’ circumstances, responsiveness to their needs and the ability to encourage positive parent-child interactions.

Nearly all (94%) of the families who participated in home-based services demonstrated strong motivation and interest in the skills and practices being modeled during visits with family engagement professionals. Parent-child interactions exceeded the high-quality benchmarks associated with strong developmental outcomes in young children. [Instrument: Home Visit Rating Scales—Adaptive and Extended (HOVRS-A+ v.2.1)]

## Children’s social-emotional outcomes:

76% of children served by Sixpence-funded programs met the target benchmarks for social-emotional development by end of the evaluation year. For each subscale, the children showed statistically significant competency gains over the course of the evaluation year. Overall, evaluators find that Sixpence-funded programs are indeed closing the achievement gap and improving parents’ abilities to monitor and guide their children’s early development.



- ☉ Sixpence children's average scores on social-emotional measurement scales were as much as 9 points above national averages. [Instrument: Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)]

### Children's language development:

- ☉ **Language Production:** 30% met or exceeded program goal.
- ☉ **Vocabulary:** 35% met or exceeded program goal
- ☉ **Language Comprehension:** 46% met or exceeded program goal

[Instruments: McArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDI), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-IV (PPVT-IV)]

### Parent-child interactions:

- ☉ **Where parents succeeded or struggled:** On average, Sixpence families approached the overall target goals set by the evaluation team to measure the quality of parenting practices. The majority of parents (72%) exceeded expectations in their ability to build emotionally supportive relationships with children. However, fewer demonstrated a full mastery of the skills that specifically encourage early learning (43%) and the growth of self-confidence (33%) in their infants and toddlers. [Instrument: Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS)].
- ☉ **Factors affecting parenting skills:** Not unlike the developmental patterns of children at high risk, the evaluation team found that parents in families subject to multiple risk factors struggled most to acquire the skills that promote early learning, confidence and attachment in infants and toddlers. Parents whose primary language was not English experienced particular challenges in demonstrating strong parent-child interaction skills. [As determined by analysis of statistical variance (ANOVA) tests]

- ☉ **Time in Sixpence matters:** A single year of quality preschool or kindergarten cannot realistically resolve the accumulated developmental setbacks experienced by children who have been at risk since birth. Similarly, when families face ongoing challenges like depression, social isolation or household instability, it is improbable that most interventions will produce substantial gains in parenting skills within a very short period of time. Even so, the evaluation team found that parents who participated in Sixpence-funded programs for one year or more showed statistically significant higher skill levels in parenting practice than those who participated for less than a year..

### Family protective factors:

- ☉ During the 2015-16 evaluation year, families participating in Sixpence-funded programs demonstrated strong protective factors in all areas relevant to child outcomes - nurturing and attachment, child development knowledge, social supports, concrete supports, and family resiliency. [Instrument: FRIENDS Protective Factors Survey (FRIENDS PFS)]

### Health outcomes:

- ☉ Parents participating in a Sixpence-funded program met or exceeded program goals for nearly every rating scale measuring access to a medical home, appropriate car seat usage, regular check-ups and healthy prenatal habits. Sixpence immunization rates exceeded Nebraska's statewide average by 12 percentage points.

**Overall, evaluators find that Sixpence-funded programs are indeed closing the achievement gap and improving parents' abilities to monitor and guide their children's early development.**

# Sixpence Board of Trustees

## **Public Sector Representatives**

Dr. Matthew Blomstedt, PhD  
*Commissioner of Education  
Nebraska Department of  
Education*

Courtney N. Phillips, MPA  
*Chief Executive Officer  
Nebraska Department of  
Health and Human Services*

## **Private Sector Representatives**

Dr. Helen Raikes, PhD  
*Professor of Child, Youth and  
Family Studies  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

Jessie Rasmussen  
*President  
Buffett Early Childhood Fund*

## **Early Childhood Specialists**

Sofia Kock, M. Ed.  
*PreK-8 Administrator  
Retired*

Cara Small, M. Ed.  
*Early Learning Connections  
Coordinator  
ESU 6*



For more information contact

Amy Bornemeier

Associate Vice President of Early Childhood Programs

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

(402)476-9401

[abornemeier@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:abornemeier@nebraskachildren.org)

[www.singasongofsixpence.org](http://www.singasongofsixpence.org)