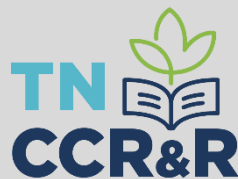




# Infant/Toddler Specialization Training Report - 2022



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Authored by:



**OchsCenter**

# Infant Toddler Specialization Training Report

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# Description of Infant Toddler Specialization Training

## Background and Methodology

Signal Centers, Inc., and the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network (CCR&R) are committed to meeting the needs of Infant Toddler Educators in Tennessee. In 2021, they contracted with the Ochs Center to conduct an independent needs assessment to better understand the needs of infant and toddler educators and how best to meet those needs. One of the findings from the needs assessment was that educators desired opportunities to further their education and training to stay abreast of new research about early child education and to expand their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. While not all considered it necessary for child care educators to earn a college degree, many welcomed the opportunity to attend conferences and in-service trainings; receive one-on-one coaching and mentoring from master teachers or directors; or participate in virtual learning.



Based upon these findings, the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network (CCR&R) designed and implemented an Infant Toddler Specialization Training program to meet the needs of Infant Toddler educators. CCR&R contracted with the Ochs Center to conduct a process evaluation to find out what is working well and what improvements are needed in their efforts.

Staff members at the Ochs Center conducted in-depth interviews with three program administrators, one partner, nine Infant Toddler Specialty Coaches, and ten early childhood educators who completed the Infant Toddler Specialization Training program. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the successes and challenges they experienced while designing and implementing the training program and to make recommendations for improvement for future trainings.

## Purpose of the Training Program

The Infant Toddler Specialization Training program was designed to fill the gap for early child educators who wanted more than training but were not necessarily interested or ready for higher education opportunities offered by TECTA or in pursuing a college degree. The program was created to offer a combination of training material and Targeted



Technical Assistance. The goals of the program were to raise awareness of the role Infant Toddler Educators play in the development of infants and toddlers, increase knowledge of early childhood

development, and expand understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. An increase in knowledge for the early child educators encourages confidence in their abilities and improves the quality of care and education in the classroom. The increased confidence and feeling of professionalism will lead to fewer turnovers in child care educators thereby offering a more stable environment for infants and toddlers.

“

*“Early childhood educators play a key role in the development of infant and toddlers.”*

”

“

*“I'm hoping to see that they [early childhood educators] have not just a basic knowledge of minimal quality care for infants and toddlers but they have a more intermediate knowledge of quality care, that their knowledge has increased, and that their quality has improved in the classroom in all of the areas that we train them in. And they feel more confident and feel more professional because they have completed a specialization. And I would hope that that would contribute to less turnover.”*

”

## Program Design

The program was designed to offer seven 2-hour trainings on relevant material for Infant Toddler educators. Because of the pandemic, the trainings were delivered virtually. Following the training, one hour of coaching and Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA) was scheduled to focus on the topic of the training most recently completed.

“

*“We left time in between each training for coaching to happen, and so it happened immediately while it was still fresh in the minds of the participants.”*

”

All training sessions were delivered virtually using the Zoom platform. The training was offered statewide – not regionally – so that all participants joined the same session. Infant Toddler Specialty coaches and program participants reported pros and cons for virtual training, statewide delivery, and

virtual TTA. Most coaches and program participants were in favor of the training being offered virtually. Virtual training was convenient, especially for educators and trainers who have families. It allowed them to stay at home and still participate in the training. Virtual training eliminated travel time for both the educators and trainers.

“

*“If we were doing it in person, I think that might have been harder for people to get to the meetings to do the trainings.”*

”

—Coach

“

*“So, it being like videos and being after work, really helped me be able to take those training courses because my son is a year old and it's hard for me to find somebody to watch him or just to get out in general.”*

”

“

*“Virtual was actually easier for me because I do have my own kids and plus, I'm in school too.”*

”

—Educator

“

*“The virtual made it easier so like I said if I was leaving work a little late then I could jump on without being late.”*

”



“

*“Zoom is really convenient and great for educators, and I think it opens up doors for people who might have a struggle ... with childcare or just you know like who it might be harder to motivate themselves to go somewhere.”*

”

“

*“It was helpful I would say for myself because having to work a full day and then being able to come home and set up virtually and train was really, really good.”*

”



Virtual training also allowed the training to easily be offered statewide. There were several advantages for the statewide training discussed. The first advantage was that all participants were exposed to the same training and material. It also facilitated good communication and connection between the trainers. Furthermore, many reported they felt that statewide training was enriched because it allowed different perspectives from educators working in other parts of the state to be shared.

“

*“It allows everyone to hear the exact same content.”*

”

—Coach

“

*“As an IT [Infant Toddler] team, I felt like that brought us closer together as well because we have that connection and we knew what was going on with each other and what was happening and we could talk about the training before and afterwards.”*

”

“

*“It was really interesting to hear how some of the other teachers handled behaviors or ideas that helped in their classroom. It was nice getting those ideas from someone, you know, out of Clarksville.”*

—Educator

”

“

*“And they can all collaborate and have their collaboration and see all the great things that all educators are doing across Tennessee and not just in their one area.”*

”



However, there were some disadvantages for offering the training statewide. One of the biggest disadvantages is time zone difference across the state. If the training was offered after most centers closed in Central time zone, the ending time was late for educators who live in the Eastern time zone. Another disadvantage was the volume of people on the zoom call at one time. Some reported that it could feel overwhelming for everyone to be on at the same time. Also, virtual training does not allow for the same types of “hands on” learning that some educators prefer. This was particularly true

for the TTA which will be discussed later in the report.



“

*“My girls would have to stay on till about 9:00 versus having let off at 8:00.”*

”

“

*“If we was [sic] broken down into smaller groups, like not in the breakout rooms, but less people be on the zoom at a time, it could have been a little better.”*

”

“

*“I always like doing hands-on stuff. That's always helped me.”*

”

## Opportunities for Improvement

Everyone who was included in this study reported the program was an overwhelming success. There was unanimous agreement that the program design, with training followed by TTA, was effective. However, two additions to the design were recommended.

### Recommendation One

The first recommended addition was to schedule a meeting with the coach, prior to the training to provide an opportunity for the participant and coach to get to know each other.

“

*“.. if we did something before, like meet your coach ... when they're accepted. We can like maybe go out and give them something or give them their material and get to meet them. I like to do a little “get to know you” form that I asked ... what's your favorite book or candy and then you know . . . I found their books and stuff in my stash and you know, brought them books and a little candy. A little pick me up.”*

”

During this visit, the coach could complete a needs assessment with the early childhood educator. The needs assessment would provide the educator and the Infant Toddler coach with a tool to not only identify topics the educator would like to learn more about but also topics the IT coach identifies that are needed. The educator may not be aware of the areas that would strengthen their ability to be more successful in their role. The needs assessment would inform TTA and guide the development of the goals for the educator.

“

*“I think it would have been helpful perhaps at the beginning ... to have a visit where we just need to .. get an idea from them about what it is they need and developing more specific goals.”*

”

“

*“... initially we kind of went into this with the thoughts of, you know, what can I do for you? What needs do you have? What would you like to learn more of? Some people would say a couple things and then we could address it and then we just built the rest of the coaching on that along with the trainings. But a lot of times they may not realize [what they need] unless there is a true needs assessment that identifies areas that they could really grow from.”*

— Infant Toddler Coach

”

The pre-training visit could also include a discussion about the training format for those who may be less comfortable with technology. A short session with the Infant Toddler coach prior to the training to demonstrate how the virtual training would look would improve the learning experience for those who are not as comfortable with virtual platforms, such as Zoom. The session could include a short tutorial on how to ensure the participant's camera is on, how to access the Chat feature, and other tips and tricks that would have increased comfort with the virtual platform.

“

*“I'm not very tech savvy, .... So for me, I've only done Zoom a few times, so I was uncomfortable with that in the beginning. I wasn't sure if my camera was on. I wasn't sure if I was muted. ... At least acclimate me with the system like if someone could tell me you're going to be using an iPhone, so here's what you'll do. You'll do this, this, and this.”*

—Educator

”

## Recommendation Two

The second recommendation for future programs is to design a hybrid model that incorporates virtual statewide training and in-person regional sessions. The in-person regional sessions could focus on the participants sharing with other educators how they are incorporating the training into their classrooms. The in-person regional sessions would also provide an opportunity to network with other educators in their region.



“

*“Maybe do a combination if we can so that regionally they could get together as a group and meet one another and have some face-to-face time and discussion time, and then also have that opportunity to do the virtual and Statewide.”*

”

“

*“We could meet every two or three months [to discuss the training]. How is that working for you? What are you doing in your classroom? Maybe even bring pictures. I know we talked about doing portfolios. So maybe they could bring their portfolios and just kind of show what they've been working on and show each other.”*

”

## Curriculum

The curriculum was designed by CCR&R’s Infant Toddler coaches, administrators, and staff from AIMHiTN to provide meaningful training for early childhood educators to help them improve the quality of care being offered in the infant and toddler classrooms. The training topics included in the program were:

- Brain Development
- ACES and Resilience
- Infant Toddler Mental Health
- Including Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
- Infant Toddler Oral Language and Literacy
- Protective Factors
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



The curriculum was built using an adult learning framework that included course content, activities to enforce learning, and opportunities for participants to be directly engaged in the training using the Chat box or breakout rooms.

“

*“I think all the virtual trainings were pretty good at being engaging - giving people different ways to be engaged without necessarily talking in front of people.”*

*—Infant Toddler Specialty Coach*

”

“

*“I do feel like that everyone really touched on that and made sure that everyone and their learning styles were sort of incorporated into their training.”*

*—Infant Toddler Specialty Coach*

”

“

*“For me one of the things I love to do is enter into all situations exploring their learning styles. So to have a small group and to really get an opportunity to get to know them, prior to us starting, I did like a little small group Zoom call, and we sort of introduce ourselves and talk about our different learning styles, talk about what we need and what would help us through this process.”*

*—Infant Toddler Specialty Coach*

”

Trainers also provided reference materials that were distributed to the educators for future use. Reference materials, according to one educator, are particularly useful when there is a lot of material to absorb. Also, some of the resource material may be less relevant currently but prove to be useful for future situations as new infants and toddlers are enrolled.

“

*“I made sure that they did have like a glossary that I put into their binder that they can, you know, go back and read over the words with the definitions.”*

”

“

*“I like that we ... get some good resources from the classes because I think .... you can take as many trainings as you want, but if you don't have the resources to refer back to, you know, you kind of forget. It's nice to have something to refer back to.”*

—Educator

”

## Opportunities for Change

### Recommendation One

Review of the training material to remove redundant material was recommended by the Infant Toddler Specialty coaches. Several participants and Infant Toddler Specialty Coaches shared that they felt some of the training content was redundant. While there was recognition that building on previous trainings to reinforce content is good, a balance should be found to avoid repeating the same content in multiple trainings. Also, the order of the training topics might be adjusted to provide coaches with the opportunity to work with educators to make changes in their classrooms. Special attention should also be given during this review to ensure that all the examples given are appropriate for infants and toddlers.

“

*“We all remember having learned about brain development, and I know I learned about ACES. They tied together ... it was nice that they tied in together, but then after a while, it's like, well, you're just sharing the same stuff.”*

”

“

*“ACES repeated a lot of brain development.”*

”

“

*“I really would have loved to focus more on their just bringing that diversity and cultural and inclusion into the classroom earlier. So, then I can see ... how their room is transformed by the end of the specialization, because that was our last one.”*

”

“

*“I think the struggle is when people attend trainings and we present these trainings, a lot of times we give the older kids examples, but we need to give them strategies and we need to train on ways that like you can use it in an infant toddler classroom, or improve your infant toddler specific atmospheres.”*

”

## Recommendation Two

Another recommendation for future training programs was to provide participants with handouts from training materials prior to the training. Having access to the material prior to the training would allow the participants to look over the material and to formulate more informed questions to be asked during the training. Moreover, it would provide the participants the opportunity to reflect on relevant situations or scenarios they could share with the group to make the training more meaningful.

“

*“I wish they would have had ... materials ahead of time and kind of know what the content is going to be about. So, if you wanted to read ahead, you can ask questions or just have a kind of better format to take notes kind of like maybe more formal handouts, I guess than just what we provided because some of the trainings we didn't get Like we didn't even get them until maybe a week before they were ready. Just because this year we were kind of, you know, building while driving it.”*

”

*—Infant Toddler Specialty Coach*



“

*“I went to a training not too long ago and they had kind of like a Fill in the Blank thing as you went along through the training. So, you're paying attention and like taking notes, but this makes it easier because the important stuff has been pulled out.”*

—Infant Toddler Specialty Coach

”

### Recommendation Three

Another suggestion for improvement was to allow time at the end of the training for smaller groups of participants to meet with the coaches to discuss or ask questions about the current training topic while the content is fresh.

“

*“Having breakout rooms, at the end of the sessions for our participants so that the information still, kind of fresh on my mind. And if they have questions or want to talk about something, then maybe for the last 15 or 20 minutes, we could do a breakout [for] our group and kind of discuss that, because it could be, you know, a week or two or three before actually did the coaching visit.”*

”

Adding topics or sessions to the training was also recommended. One educator recommended a session that allowed educators to ask questions to a panel of Infant Toddler Specialty Coaches. This session would allow educators to ask questions about specific situations they are dealing with in their classrooms and provide coaches with the opportunity to model appropriate responses.

“

*“We could ask questions just like a panel almost with teachers could just ask any random questions. ... Maybe we could talk about some personal situations without using names or issues that we've had maybe with families that have been challenging for us. Or even things that we've dealt with, with our own staffing issues that have been challenging for us. And them being able to give us some wisdom or some coaching tools - little nuggets on how we can handle certain situations that we feel we may be struggling with.”*

”

Another topic to consider for future trainings was Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP). According to the coaches, some of the participants did not have the level of experience that was assumed when the curriculum was designed. Several coaches felt that beginning with training on DAP would provide a solid foundation for all participants.

“

*“Some of the participants knew a lot about child development and developmentally appropriate practice but I think some of them didn't know as much. I think that could have been helpful as like a baseline kind of Child Development, Developmentally Appropriate Practice.”*

”

“

*“I thought we really needed to start from the beginning by going through like DAP and then basic, like safety practices and things like that.”*

”

“

*“I feel like developmentally appropriate practices is a big one that needs to be in there because I think it sets the time for expectations even as passionate as my educators were, there are still some that, you know, kind of felt like that children should be doing certain things that just really weren’t age appropriate and I was able, you know, through coaching to explain that you know that it is appropriate for them to dump toys.”*

”

Curriculum planning was another topic that might be considered for future training.

“

*“Intentional curriculum planning, intentional teaching for infants, especially and toddlers And I think that is because it's individualized. I think that is something that a lot of people don't know how to do.”*

”

Finally, it was recommended that two tracks of training be offered to accommodate educators’ different levels of experience. One track might focus on the basics beginning with a foundation of early childhood development for those who do not have as much experience. A second track could be offered for those with more years of experience to explore topics at a deeper level.

“

*“Looking at the groups, I think they were all at different levels. Because even within my small group, I realized that they were all at different levels. So, I think having the opportunity to sort of train them where they are would have been really effective.”*

”

“

*“I think even some of them just are relatively new. Some of them had moved into this age group when they applied and so they had been with other age groups before. And so, I mean just kind of really getting you know how to be with infants and toddlers.”*

”

“

*“For example, we did a language and literacy, and it was a lot of great information, but for some of them, they wanted it to be deeper and I'm quoting one of the educators. She felt like she wanted to receive a deeper understanding of why literacy was important like the why behind what we're doing.”*

”

## Targeted Technical Assistance

Targeted Technical Assistance was initially offered virtually because of the pandemic; however, as centers and homes began to allow Infant Toddler Specialty coaches into their facilities, TTA began to be offered in-person. Coaching through Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA) that focused on the training topic was intended to be completed within a 2-to-3-week period following the training. Each Infant Toddler Specialty Coach was supposed to provide TTA for 10 participants. Coaching was essential for the success of the program because it promoted real-world application of the material that was covered in the training. As one participant stated, *“The coach was the key”*.



“

*“So, it was like a three-fold, we've learned the material, we had small group discussion about the material and then we came out and we did modeling and practice. So that's sort of the format that I went with because it gave them an opportunity to really share with me and others their peers, what they gathered from the training, and it also gave me an opportunity to elaborate on some of those things that they feel they needed more information about.”*

”

“

*“Basically, what happened was the coach and the participant talked about the training just kind of reviewed some of the high points of the training, asked the participants, if they had any questions about the training? Is there anything that they still don't understand or wasn't clear? Was there something they really liked and then would talk a little bit about some of the strategies to take that information and apply it to the classroom.”*

”

— Coach

“

*“They got specialized attention and that makes me feel so good and validated in the work that you're doing.”*

”

“

*“You need somebody to push you but you don't need somebody that's pushy.”*

”

— Educator

While all agreed that coaching was essential, coaches did encounter challenges during the roll-out of the program. One of the biggest challenges was directly related to the pandemic and easing of restrictions for in-person Technical Assistance. An increased volume of requests for assistance from child care providers were being made at the same time TTA for program participants needed to be completed.

“

*“It was hard. I think sometimes because right as this was kind of getting going, we were coming back into the field pretty heavy with just the regular other part of our job. So, a lot of referrals were coming up and it did get hard because a lot of times you only had two or three weeks after a training to get the coaching visit done and you know with people scheduling or people sick or being out, sometimes it was really hard to get things scheduled even though participants were really wonderful about it. ... It's just a big-time crunching kind of feel like you didn't always have enough time to plan because you also had your other, you know, referrals and things that were coming up and other regular trainings that were on the calendar and things to do. So, it was the time - it felt overwhelming.”*

”

Another challenge, also because of the pandemic, was providing TTA virtually instead of in-person. Most coaches and educators indicated that they preferred TTA to be done in-person. In-person allows the coach to model techniques or strategies. However, there were some advantages for virtual coaching because it can be less disruptive to the classroom.

“

*“I personally prefer the in-person. I just learned better if I have someone there in the class. But there were definitely days where it was just easier to do virtual just because you know, when you have someone in the classroom, the kids get off their schedule and everything but I personally preferred the in-person.”*

”

Coaches also reported that some training topics proved to be more challenging than others to connect subject matter to the classroom.

“

*“Feeling also kind of like we had to ask them to connect things back to the trainings and that was kind of difficult sometimes.”*

”

“

*“I think ACES and Strengthening Families was probably the hardest for them to try to make a connection like in the classroom.”*

”

“

*“I think the ones that were easier to coach were ... the literacy one and the DEI one. I think the ones I had a harder time coaching, and people had a hard time coming up with goals, was protective factors and the ACES. Those are just a little bit more difficult to kind of think about things they could do in their classroom, but they still come up with ideas.”*

”



Additionally, linking coaching to some training topics proved to be challenging. The program was designed for coaches to provide one hour of TTA following the training. However, limiting the training to a one-hour session, especially in the beginning, was challenging. This was especially true for coaches who did not have a prior relationship with the educator. More time was needed in the beginning to become familiar with the educator's needs and to build rapport and trust.

“

*“Well, at the very beginning they were pretty long ... between 2 and 2 ½ hours per classroom to kind of get us to get in really talk about what was going on. Then you’ve got these little mountains that you have to climb over with the kids and they have to stop what they're doing and you know, everything all that stuff. But towards the end we got inside. Good Groove that, you know, I can come in for an hour and they could just kind of show me what they were working on. And normally it was just something that they had been building on from previous weeks. And so, our coaching visits weren't as long or as intense.”*

”

Another challenge that coaches faced was to balance how much they focused on providing TTA on the specific training topic and meeting the needs of the educator in real time. Coaches shared that educators often wanted assistance with challenges they were facing in the classroom that were not pertinent to the training topic. The coaches had to devise ways of talking about the training and talking about what the educator needed to talk about.

“

*“I can pull pieces [from brain development] into most anything that they're kind of struggling with. I think some of my teachers were really struggling with a lot of behavior issues, you know, I just talked to kind of more challenging behaviors and brought in like different pieces from the brain development training and talking to them about, you know, how we need to do things over and over again, to really get that connection to stick and things like that. So, I think, you know, you can definitely bring pieces from the trainings into your coaching even if it's not necessarily what they want to talk to you about.”*

”

“

*“So, I think that was the hardest part for me personally, was just trying to figure out the best way to support the educators on their own personal growth and goals. Also feeling kind of like we had to ask them to connect things back to the trainings and that was kind of difficult sometimes.”*

”

“

*“It's like children and how we teach the children based on what is happening in that moment or what their interests are .... and we need to let it [our coaching] be teacher-directed to be a meaningful experience because they're not choosing the training topics.”*

”

“

*“I have to learn to ask the right questions so that they could have the ownership and make it about them and their experience.”*

”

Finally, coaches reported that providing the necessary TTA to ten educators was challenging.

“

*“I feel like I was rushed trying to get to everybody while doing my normal job. ... I think I would love it to be more like seven or so I could really focus on them a little bit more.”*

”

“

*[Response to question of whether 10 educators was a realistic number to provide TTA] “I would say with our current workload, No, especially with everything that’s being added in reference to the new tool and some things coming out.”*

”

Those who were more comfortable with providing TTA to 10 participants were able to work with more than one educator at a center. This strategy provided a more efficient use of time for the coach by reducing the amount time needed for travel.

“

*“I think 10 is too many. I was lucky. I had nine, but I only had five programs.”*

”

## Recruitment

Recruitment for the first Infant Toddler Specialization Training program was not a formal process, Infant Toddler Specialty coaches shared information about the program with early childhood educators with whom they had a relationship. Some glitches in this process occurred that points to the need for a process moving forward to ensure that those who are interested in the program will better understand the necessary qualifications needed to be successful and the purpose of the program.

“

*“But everyone thought if you just applied, you automatically got it in. ... And you're like, oh no. Like we only chose 10. but that's not what it says. So maybe like make that a little bit more clear that it's like, Not everybody who applies gets in it because that did start, not drama, but I got a few angry phone calls.”*

”

A recommendation offered by the coaches is to develop a policy that clearly states the qualifications needed to be considered for the program. A marketing tool, such as a flyer, is needed to distribute to educators and directors.

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*“We don't really have a flyer or anything to hand out. I'd love to have something like...I'd love to have better ways of sharing when we have directors support groups.”*

”

A website is needed to provide information about the program, the application, and the selection process. A database or other accessible tool is also needed so that the selection committee or others making enrollment decisions will have the necessary information about the applicants. Finally, materials and a system are needed to inform applicants about whether or not they have been accepted.

Some coaches thought it would be advantageous to the program to require an in-person interview to be completed before the acceptance decision is made. This would allow the coaches an opportunity to have a more comprehensive understanding of the qualifications of the applicants.

“

*“I would like to do an in-person interview as far as recruiting. I felt like when we had our application process that a lot of people which when filling out the application, some people just literally just ran through it and didn't fully answer the questions.”*

”

## Program Successes

Participation in the Infant Toddler Specialization Training program facilitated professional growth for educators and Infant Toddler Specialty coaches and strengthened the relationship between them. Exposure to the curriculum presented in the program provided educators with a new lens for viewing their role in the development of infants and toddlers and empowered them to try new approaches or other changes in their classrooms. The program also afforded the educators an opportunity to be more comfortable with each other which opened their ability to ask more meaningful questions. Participation also helped educators to build a connection with other educators through shared experiences.

Educators gained an appreciation for the importance of the role they play in the healthy development of infants and toddlers. The educators reported they saw the infants and toddlers and their classrooms through a different lens because of the training.

Coaches reported that they saw growth in the educators' confidence and how they perceived themselves. Educators were more likely to see themselves as professionals by the end of the program. One Infant Toddler Coach shared that one educator had designed a t-shirt logo that depicted this new pride in what they are doing.



“

*“They (educators) felt more empowered through the trainings to be like, I’m not a babysitter ... I’m building brains. I want people to know that I’m not a babysitter, I am helping children. The t-shirt said ‘I’m not a babysitter, I’m a brain developer.’”*

”

“

*“I came back from the trainings telling my co-teacher stuff that before I would have never been conscious of. I wouldn’t have been drilling it home. I found myself sounding like Presenter Part 2 when I came back to work and that’s really not me. That’s huge. That’s just not me.”*

”

The training also fostered a sense of community with other educators. The pandemic has resulted in many feeling a sense of isolation and has been particularly difficult for early childhood educators. In-person technical assistance and targeted technical assistance had stopped because of safety and health concerns. Educators reported the training provided them with a sense of connection with other educators.

“

*“When this program came out, you know, we were all kind of searching for that networking.”*

”

“

*“Just kind of knowing that I wasn't out here by myself. Just feeling like there was someone else out there going through some of the same things.”*

”

During their interviews, educators shared that they look at the children and their families differently because of the training. Exposure to the curriculum has provided a new lens and approach in how they respond to the infants and toddlers.

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*“I liked how they brought it back down to mental health can be as simple as wondering if your needs are going to be met that day for the infant toddler, they can't say that. But that could be very well what their problem is for that day, being insecure. Fear of what was going to happen next you don't know what has happened at home all night. You don't know if they're living out of their cars, you know?”*

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Educators also reported they had made changes in their classrooms as a result of the training. The training provided the educators with new techniques and inspired them to try new ideas for improving their classroom environment. Educators felt the training helped them to better understand why infants

and toddlers behave the way they do and this helped the educators make adjustments in how they interact with the children.

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*“The stuff I've Incorporated I feel like has helped me be more patient with the kids or to help the kids with their behaviors.”*

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*“My classroom has changed, you know, just small things here and there that I said I can think back on. I was like I can do this better. I can you know make this a better environment for the kids.”*

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*“It helped with me thinking more along the lines of diversity. I didn't think much about how kids at this young of an age would be impacted by including diverse, like, toys, pictures, cultures, and food and stuff how it affects them and how they would learn and grow. And so, even though our classroom always had that stuff in here. I just didn't think about how I could personally implement it as a teacher. So, it broadened my horizon there.”*

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*“The disabilities training actually taught me how to not exclude them but include them more.”*

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*“It helped with a lot of like activities that we could do with the kids and like you said with different behaviors because as we go on in our Center, we have different kids that are coming in with different issues and different behavior issues.”*

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*“I’m all about family connection. So, hearing people and how they involve their families in their classroom. There’s always a big help because, you know, you always want to be able to make that connection. And sometimes, that is the hardest part, is building that bridge their connection.”*

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*“Just being reminded of what we’re actually here for and what we’re needed to do.”*

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The relationship that was built between the educator and the Infant Toddler Specialty Coach will have a long-term impact on the future professional development of the educator. A bond was formed, and the educators view the IT coach as a professional resource that is readily available.

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*“She actually made me want to reach out and get that help and get that resource.”*

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*“Yeah, I think I like the openness that I was doing it a little bit better. That each visit got a little better. I think it had a lot to do with me, knowing my participants more and kind of knowing how each of them like to do things and kind of getting a better idea of what the process looks like for them. And what kind of supports they needed from me. I felt by the end of that, I kind of knew them pretty well, didn't they? Meanwhile I'll make it kind of we work more as a team and at the beginning, like I said, I think I was more leading. Yeah. The way the process works. And then at the end of the process, I felt like I wasn't having to lead as much. They were able to kind of do that on their own.”*

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*“That's all coaching is honestly. It is, you know, building that rapport with your people you know. And making sure that they know that we're not judgmental on them. I'm not coming in to judge them but coming in to help them be better and to make their room the best that they can possibly be, because we want them to be the best educator that they can be. And yeah, I actually grew to be pretty close to a lot of my educators.”*

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Involvement in the Infant Toddler Specialization Training program offered opportunities for professional growth for the coaches. Developing the training curriculum required a deeper level of understanding about the training topic.

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*“I think for sure my comfortable level of being able to just kind of be thrown into something and just get it done and be able to, you know, make those connections with my educators. And it feels like I am kind of on a different, more advanced, level now.”*

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Linking the training to coaching also required creativity and willingness to try different approaches in an attempt to fill the varied needs of the educators.

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*“This really made me think outside of the box.”*

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Finally, recognizing that a training program was built from scratch and successfully implemented is a huge accomplishment that should be celebrated by all.

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*“I will say this, I was very reluctant, and did not know just how much I was going to end up enjoying this. So, I was very pleased with how it ended, and for us to kind of just been hitting the ground running, and not really in just working kinks out. I was really proud of our educators. I was proud of my supervisors and our team. So, I was, I was very, very pleased with how it ended up.”*

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## Conclusion

A needs assessment of early childhood educators conducted by the Ochs Center for Signal Centers, Inc., and the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network (CCR&R) revealed a need for specialized training targeted for Infant Toddler educators. Based on these findings, an Infant Toddler Specialization Training program was designed and implemented. The training program included seven training topics with follow-up Technical Training Assistance (TTA) from an Infant Toddler Specialty Coach. The training was offered statewide using a virtual platform. The follow-up TTA was conducted virtually, and in-person as pandemic restrictions and schedules allowed. The program, from all perspectives, was an overwhelming success.

Participation in the program provided educators with new information and tools for their classroom. However, it also provided them with the opportunity to gain a new appreciation for the important role they are playing in the development of infants and toddlers. Moreover, it fostered a sense of professionalism – seeing themselves as “brain developers” and not babysitters. It also empowered

them to be creative in their classrooms and to share what they were learning with their peer educators. The TTA reinforced information learned during the training sessions and facilitated a stronger bond between the coach and the educator. The educators became more comfortable with utilizing the expertise of the Infant Toddler coaches. The training program also provided the Infant Toddler Specialty coaches with the opportunity to strengthen their skills as a trainer and as a coach.

There was a widespread agreement that the benefits from offering statewide training utilizing a virtual platform far outweighed the challenges. Several recommendations were made for reducing some the challenges that were experienced. The first recommendation was for Infant Toddler Specialty coaches to conduct a “pre-training” on site visit to demonstrate the on-line training platform for those who are not as familiar with technology. A needs assessment would also be completed at this time to help the coaches better understand the needs of the educator and to measure progress during the training. Another recommendation was to incorporate local or regional meetings to provide networking opportunities for the educators. Finally, it was suggested that reducing the number of educators for the Infant Toddler coaches from ten to seven would allow more individualized attention and further strengthen the bond between the coaches and the educators.