



NEKCA'S *Whole Family Approach*

Through intentional, family-driven, and integrated services, families will achieve economic self-sufficiency and prosper from one generation to the next.

Development and Planning

The journey for NEKCA to embrace a holistic service delivery model began in 2019 with an introduction to the Prosperity Agenda, aligning this approach with the agency's mission across all departments. Although the implementation of this new strategy understandably paused during the COVID-19 pandemic as programs adapted to evolving needs, NEKCA utilized this period to establish a robust cultural foundation grounded in our mission and values. This groundwork was essential for integration and fostering the shared values necessary to effectively implement the Whole Family Approach (WFA) and the Whole Family Coaching (WFC) strategy.

Since NEKCA's WFA revitalization efforts began in 2023, NEKCA's Whole Family Approach Team of cross-department Agency Leaders and Senior Management has been actively collaborating to:

- **Learn from other agencies who have adopted the WFA** by visiting Aroostook County Action Program in Maine and convening with others on a national scale
- **Develop and transform agency systems** to blend and braid our services, funding streams, and data collection
- **Provide staff training** to prepare, equip, and support staff in making the mental and logistical changes needed to adopt this approach in strategic phases

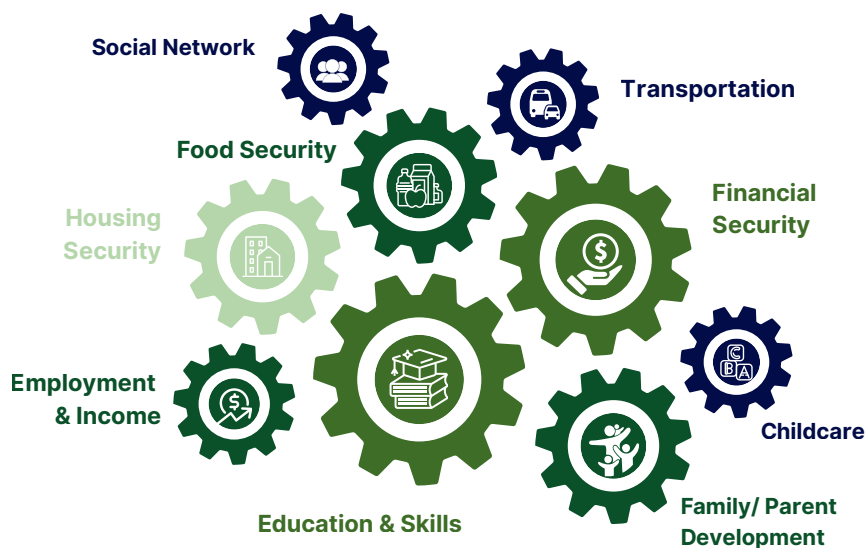
...all in preparation for the comprehensive service delivery approach set to launch in summer of 2025.

Our Approach

A shift in mindset

By definition, an approach is a mindset or way we go about offering our services at NEKCA regardless of which door a participant entered or what their definition of family is.

They likely have a variety of needs outside of any single program. We can improve our support if we simply ask about their needs, navigate options, and let them identify the goals they have for security and wellbeing.



Agency Overview

NEKCA's Mission:

Empowering all generations in the Northeast Kingdom to grow, prosper, and thrive.

NEKCA serves the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont including Caledonia, Orleans, and Essex Counties.

This rural region, with a population of 62,000 across just over 2,000 square miles, includes the counties with the highest and 3rd highest rates of poverty in the state.

Vermonters Served Annually 3,469

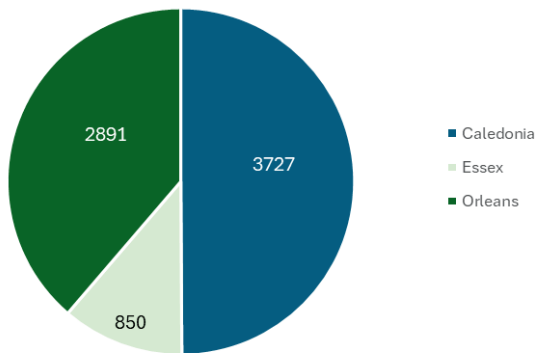
Annual Budget \$14.9 Million

Staff 150

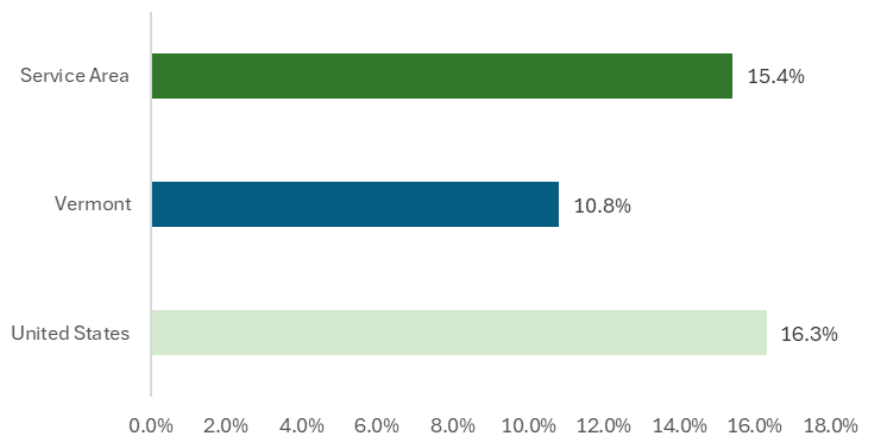
Programs: Head Start/Early Head Start, Parent-Child Center Services, Children's Integrated Services, Economic Access, Food Shelves, Housing and Homelessness, Heat and Utility Assistance, Community and Restorative Justice, and Youth Services.

Population In Poverty By County

(Total Service Area Population Approx. 62,000)



Percentage of Children In Poverty



Successes

- **Learning from others:** Hearing the bright spots and pain points from other agencies helped us in our planning for smoother implementation.
- **Core Team:** Uplifting a unified core cross-agency WFA Team that meets regularly ensures a collaborative process.
- **Mission Alignment:** Agency mission and values are the grounding for staff to shift mindsets and workflow processes.
- **Enhancing Outcomes:** Staff understands this is not just another thing to add onto their work, but a way to do it better.
- **Planful Timeline:** Intentionally phased integrations followed by logistical roll outs help staff adjust to each change.
- **Strong Base:** Establishing the staff who would implement WFC by building off Head Start Program.

Challenges

- **Fixing the plane while flying:** Keeping operations going as normal while also preparing for what is coming next can be clunky or confusing for some departments.
- **Flexible funding:** Convincing funders to allow blending of positions and maintaining a steady stream of discretionary funds takes continued effort.
- **Integrated Data:** Data collection methods as well as the data system itself have been difficult to align in order to get the streamlined and integrated reporting we would like.
- **External Partnerships:** Some of the WFA domains we do not have programs for and will need to partner closely with others to advance (mental health, workforce, etc.)

Timeline

2019

Introduction

- Agency Introduction to Prosperity Agenda and Family-Centered Coaching
- On-site weeklong training for a group of 10 staff from across the agency; forming a Professional Learning Community (PLC)
- All NEKCA staff trained on Family-Centered Coaching at NEKCA Day

2021

Foundation

- Solidified Agency's commitment to DEI, Agency-wide DEI trainings, and DEI Team that began in 2020
- Began Agency Leadership Team monthly meetings for managers across the agency
- Agency-wide exercise to define NEKCA's 5 Core Values

2023

Investigation

- Whole Family Approach Team and attend the NCAP/WFA Convening in DC to learn more about WFA and how various agencies implemented it
- Held two WFA informational meetings with an expanded group of agency staff; started Home Visiting best practices group with consultant.

2024

Integration

- Early Childhood Chat launched bringing together all EC Program Managers
- Economic Equity department started EmPath training
- Members of WFA team attend Region 1 – WFA to Jobs Convening in Boston
- WFA Team, including fiscal, visit ACAP
- Launched Family Resource Centers (Lakemont & LI) that regionally co-locate all early childhood programs. Restructured staffing include Family Partners with a blended funding stream. Expand Early Childhood Team to include Family Partners/Coaches. Launch WFA PLC for Family Partners.
- Held an agency training on WFA and the restructuring
- NEKCA Day focus on WFA – ACAP staff and family attend
- Expand WFA team to include Data Analysis

2025

Implementation

- Hired WFA Coach in the Economic Equity department
- Held WFA Q & A, addressing unanswered questions from NEKCA Day
- GoEngage mapped to the Matrix and Family Assessment
- Comprehensive Intake including Comprehensive Services Matrix Road Show
- Family Partners in PLC trained to navigate multiple services
- Develop Integrated Agency Directory
- September 2025 – NEKCA wide (families with a child under 6) rollout

Thoughtful Considerations

- **Intentional De-Siloing:** We developed a year-long series of professional development for our agency leadership team to move away from competition and towards integration based on the Tamarack Institute's Collaboration Spectrum model.
- **Fostered Relationships Across Departments:** We built intentional time to connect and problem-solve together across departments so that this team sees one other as their greatest resource to support participants bridging the service gaps.
- **Sharing Ownership of the Work:** Staff from every department needed support to connect to the *why* of the approach, but also to see *how* they were an essential part of the system that makes it more successful for *all* NEKCA participants.
- **Keeping Family Voice at the Center:** Stories from families and staff who have experienced the difference were kept at the heart of the process.
- **Communication:** From timing announcements to rolling out major changes, we made the effort to get all staff the same information from the same source to reduce the potential for any confusion or miscommunications.

Rebecca's Story



*"I was a new mother with a month old son that was trying to figure out everything on my own. I reached out and my coach helped me get signed up for college classes and get a new computer so I could take them online. She also helped connect me to a new career path that I never thought was possible, and that I was able to **SUCCESSFULLY** do! I now have a job and I am signed up for fall classes into early childhood education."*

"She also helped me get the help that I needed for my son as well. She connected me with WIC and helped me fill out applications for Reach Up, and so much more. I would highly recommend Whole Family Coaching to anybody that was in my shoes because without my coach I probably wouldn't have made it this far."

Comprehensive Intake

Every participant that engages with NEKCA services will complete a **Matrix** upon intake that asks them to self-assess their security in each of the domains shown in the gears above.

Then, a **Navigator** or **Family Partner** will use the Matrix to assist the participant in accessing all of the relevant services they need through application support or warm hand-offs to programs when needed.

The goal here is to have services coordinated to wrap participants with the least amount of contact points.

Our Strategies

Whole Family Coaching

When a two-generation family is out of crisis and ready to engage in long-term goal setting outside of any one program, they are paired with a family partner/coach to set **goals that support long term stability for their whole family and measure those goals utilizing the Family Assessment.**

Family Assessments

These are just like the Matrix, but include even more self-assessment categories specific to supporting young children's developmental needs that families fill out when enrolled in an EC program.

WFC
ALL
EC Families

All Participants

Next Steps

- **Start Data Reviews** of families who are in Whole Family Coaching
- **Building Referral Partners** with external agencies for wrap around supports
- **Intentional Partnerships** with domains that we do not serve: Workforce Development and Mental Health