How might we as a community of parents, family, neighbors, and service providers better monitor our children’s development so that early, regular screening leads to better service referrals and thus better long-term outcomes?
What did we do?
Five 3-hour sessions every three months between September 2016 and February 2018

Planning Sessions: 8
On-site meetings: 6
Meals Shared: 100+

For photos taken throughout the process, click here.
What did we do?
Facilitated six 3-hour sessions every three months, December 2016 to February 2018
What did we do?

Provided a hands-on introduction to Human-Centered Design in the context of the group’s mission.

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What did we do?
Created prototypes for real solutions to problems identified throughout the process

**Culturally-relevant, positively-oriented ways to engage/inform about existing services and resources.**

1. A better way to reach/engage parents and community members
2. A better way to improve service provider campaigns
3. A better way to build awareness/connections among service providers about resources
Meeting summaries
Planning – September to December 2016
Our facilitator, T.J. Cook, Nancy Lewis, and Michael Weinberg set the stage

Prior to the first meeting facilitated in the spirit of Human-Centered Design, T.J. Cook met with Nancy Lewis and Michael Weinberg to discuss goals for the engagement and how best to infuse design thinking in the meeting format. T.J. also spoke with 5 members of the team who made themselves available by phone, and received email replies to the same questions from 5 others.

All indicated positive trust in the motives of everyone else on the team as being passionate for improving the lives of children and their families in NM.

Many talked about specific initiatives already underway that they see making progress toward the problem of parent engagement in monitoring.

Many shared strong views about the need to approach the problem of “parent engagement” in a fundamentally more inclusive way.
Meeting 1 - December 14, 2016
Exploring the problem statement and taking a crash course in Human-Centered Design

We unveiled and iterated the problem statement through discussion as a group:

How might we as a community of parents, family, neighbors, and service providers better monitor our children’s development so that early, regular screening leads to better service referrals and thus better long-term outcomes?

We also went hands-on with human-centered design by redesigning our partners’ wallets, starting with empathy and using real materials to build and test prototypes.

Full meeting notes here.
We discussed times we have been engaged deeply on an issue as a way to pave the way for brainstorming ways we might brainstorm engagement around our problem statement.

We role-played common roles and how they felt about the issues facing children in their lives and how they experienced providers.

Finally, we debriefed all this in the form of a brainstorm where we asked, “Based on what we know leads to real engagement, and what came out in the fishbowl, what activities might we use to empathize directly with stakeholders of our problem statement?

Full meeting notes here.
Meeting 3 – June 14, 2017
Exploring the Problem Statement, Fishbowl Exercise, and Activity Brainstorm

Meeting 3 did not go as planned. We had a lower number of attendees, and faced obstacles in thinking about how to practically organize into teams to conduct field work to gather empathy around the problem statement.

We regrouped with the video linked on the right, which was an 18-minute review of what we had done to date and how we wanted to collect empathy. It provided new energy going into Meeting #4 where we would attempt to bring stories of empathy into the room.

Watch the video here.
In meeting we broke into small groups to discuss the stories we were able to collect through interviews, observation, or scenarios. Many shared personal stories and stories of friends and family.

From these stories we gathered a list of ideas around which we could prototype solutions. Between the 4th and 5th meeting, a sub-group met to refine the list of ideas into 3 categories, and 1 category was selected for the group to work on based on feasibility and impact given the group’s time constraints.

Full meeting notes here.
Meeting 5 – December 13, 2017
Connecting to Empathy, Creating Prototypes

We took the idea of a Campaign chosen from the list of ideas from the previous meeting and broke into three groups to try to build prototypes. One group storyboarded a video concept that would improve providers’ outreach efforts. Another acted out a scenario in which diverse people came to a community event to connect with providers. A third group imagined a campaign around #maketheconnectionNM whereby anyone anywhere would have one place to go to get connected to the right early childhood development resource.

The prototypes were captured on video and can be seen here.
In our last meeting we reviewed the prototypes, brainstormed ways we could test them with real people in a limited fashion, and then enlisted those interested in being part of continuing the work.

The full list of testing ideas and other notes from the meeting can be found here.
What did we accomplish?

Over 30 people educated about human-centered design and its usefulness for eliciting collaboration and new solutions for early childhood development.

Before the process, 30% reported familiarity with human-centered design. Afterwards, 90% reported familiarity.

6/9 survey respondents reported plans to use the tools introduced throughout the process in their work.

Three prototypes were developed that hold new promise for solutions to the problem statement.

(Note: Statistics derived from a survey of 9 participants present at the final meeting)
What did we learn?

1. Human-Centered Design is best done with a core team who has the capacity and resources to truly immerse in the process. Our format of 3-hour meetings in an office setting spread out over three months was nearly antithetical to a true HCD process.

2. Consistency in participants is key. We spent a lot of time reviewing previous meetings not only because of time between them but because different organizations were often represented by different people across meetings. This change made it difficult to achieve continuity of momentum.

3. Human-Centered Design is a powerful tool in increasing collaboration and eliciting new ideas. With a strong problem statement, great ideas can be generated, prototyped, and tested in a short amount of time at relatively low expense in order to effective positive, potentially high-impact, change.
What’s next?

Many people raised their hand to carry the baton of this group’s labors into its next phase of testing and validation. NM Pediatrics Society has volunteered to play a lead role organizing this group’s actions and pursuing financing to enable them to get to a level of validation for one of the strong prototyping concepts the Act Early group developed.

We strongly encourage this work to continue, not only for the advancement of the specific prototype that merits testing, but for the quality and caliber of interactions that the process enabled between various stakeholders in New Mexico’s early childhood development ecosystem.