

READY KIDS, RESILIENT FAMILIES



Transforming the early education system of care to support the resiliency of kids and their families

OPPORTUNITY

Help children be ready for kindergarten through a stronger, interconnected early education and child care system that builds family resiliency and economic well-being.

CHALLENGE

COVID-19 revealed the importance of an accessible and affordable early education and child care sector for families of all incomes. Without early education and child care providers, families may not be able to maintain employment and young children miss out on stimulation and support during the most critical years of brain development. Additionally, some families, such as those experiencing homelessness or housing instability, have challenges accessing child care and education that meet their family's needs. COVID-19 surfaced the deep relationships providers have with families, as they are often the first to know about a job loss, housing challenge or family health issue. It is critical for the sector to leverage these relationships in new ways, ensuring children are offered the best early education possible while supporting the resiliency of the whole family.

PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION

Investment of
\$2,385,000
in 11 partners



SYSTEMS CHANGE PARTNERS

- 4C for Children
- Bethany House Services Inc.
- Best Point Behavioral Health (formerly The Children's Home of Cincinnati)
- Child Focus Inc.
- Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development
- Every Child Succeeds
- Found House Interfaith Housing Network (formerly Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati Inc.)
- Learning Grove
- Redwood
- Seedsowers Inc. (In GOD'S Hands Christian Youth Center)
- YWCA of Greater Cincinnati

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Childhood development during the first five years of life is important for later well-being and economic mobility

Ninety percent of brain development takes place during the first five years of life. During these years, foundational emotional, cognitive and behavioral skills are built that are important to successfully transition into school and later into life and work.^{i ii} United Way's Success By 6[®] research has shown that entering kindergarten ready to learn, assessed as being "on-track" by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy tool, had long-term positive effects throughout a child's academic career compared to their peers who were not. These students were more likely to meet other important academic benchmarks, graduate on time and score higher on ACT scores.ⁱⁱⁱ Many factors contribute to strong early childhood development – including creating safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments for all children. Supportive communities where families have equitable access to quality early education and care options are critical to support families and ensure all children thrive.^{iv}



"It's hard to find quality child care near my home and we need child care services near or at our employers so we can spend time at lunch or breaks."

– Community member and parent

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE:

High-quality preschool and early child care can help prepare children for school by supporting their physical, social-emotional and early academic development. Yet, young children from families living with low incomes face a range of challenges that affect their ability to access quality early education and care, including financial obstacles, logistical issues due to location and work schedules, housing insecurity and more. For families that can overcome these challenges and enroll their children in an early education and care option, the children may also arrive with their own set of challenges, especially children with differing abilities and those that have faced negative experiences early in life. Adverse Childhood Experiences ("ACEs"), such as seeing violence in your community, can cause high levels of chronic stress that rewire the brain's developing architecture. This can impact early development of self-control and regulation, important behaviors that help children succeed in structured environments.^v

Quality early education and care settings can provide safe, stable and nurturing environments and relationships that reduce the negative effects of ACEs.^{vi vii} And early education opportunities connect children with early behavioral interventions that help them succeed as they grow into adults. Yet, due to funding structures and challenges presented by COVID-19, accessing quality early education and care options has become more difficult for families to access – especially families with children with disabilities and those experiencing financial and housing instability.

NATIONALLY

- **Mothers experiencing homelessness are less likely to receive child care subsidies than poor housed mothers.**^{viii} Without access to child care, parents face challenges as they seek to secure stable housing and work.
- **Across the United States, 8,899 child care centers were closed between 2019-2021 and 6,957 family child care centers were closed** due to challenges with enrollment rates, staffing and financial sustainability.^{ix}
- COVID-19 disproportionately affected women's participation in the labor market. **Nearly 3 million women left the labor force in the last year.** Lack of access to reliable child care has been a key factor in inhibiting women's return to work.

continued

LOCALLY

- Ohio is one of five states with the highest prevalence of children (as many as one in seven) who experienced three or more ACEs, placing them in a category of especially high risk.^{xi}
- It is estimated nearly 167,500 children under 5 years old live in our region and nearly 18% of them live below the federal poverty line. While estimated disability rates for young children are very low, 6.4% of youth between the ages of 5-17 in our region identify as having a disability, according to 2020 Census data.^{xii}
- The median annual wage for child care workers in our region is \$25,330 and \$29,210 for preschool teachers, according to May 2021 data.^{xiii} For a family of four, the federal poverty guideline that same year was \$26,500.^{xiv}

“ Finances become a challenge. Working makes it so you end up spending less time with children. I’m not always able to be there for my daughter so she can grow into who she wants to be. ”

– Community member and parent

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

RELATIONSHIPS AND PRACTICES

Early education and care centers hold a unique relationship with families who put their trust in providers to care for their children. A simple “hello” and “how are you” from staff to families during drop-off and pick-up times can be powerful tools in building trust and positive relationships with families.^{xv} Additionally, early education and care providers are often the first to know when a family might benefit from additional services – maybe a parent changes work schedules or loses a job that puts their child care benefits at risk; or they learn that the family needs to move and might have a hard time maintaining their enrollment at the center. While providers often use these relationships to best support the needs of the children in care, there is an opportunity to leverage these relationships that help connect the family with other supports or services.

How might we support whole family success by leveraging the trusted relationships between providers and families and help families connect to additional community resources that build resiliency?

RESOURCE FLOW

Addressing the systemic challenges associated with the lack of stability and sufficiency in critical resources, including public funding and a credentialed/licensed workforce, is necessary to ensure our local early education and care sector is robust and healthy. This is a foundational step necessary to improve the accessibility, affordability and variety of options in quality early education and care to best meet the needs of all families.

How might we mobilize our efforts to influence improvements in the stability and sufficiency of resources so more families with low incomes can access quality early education and care that meets their needs?

DATA FROM INSIGHTS

Survey participants identified the most beneficial solutions as those focused on **Resource Flow and Practices**, such as:

- Make sure available resources can be easily accessed by all community members
- Make more resources available for children and families to manage social/emotional challenges
- Ensure availability of resources with a special focus on supporting underserved community members
- Create more affordable community solutions (such as housing and education) that meet families’ needs

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