



## EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER

*A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System*

1718 CLEVELAND AVENUE NORTHWEST  
CANTON, OHIO 44703

877.691.8521  
[ecresourcecenter.org](http://ecresourcecenter.org)

### OUR MISSION

*The mission of the Early Childhood Resource Center is to promote the healthy development of young children by strengthening families, improving the quality of early learning experiences, increasing school and community readiness, and informing public policy.*

#### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE HOURS

Monday: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday: 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday: 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Thursday: 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Friday: 8:00 to 4 p.m.

The Center is closed on weekends.

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# ECRC Community Chronicle

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER :: *Fall News 2021*

## THE WORKFORCE BEHIND THE WORKFORCE

### HOW CHILD CARE AFFECTS THE ENTIRE ECONOMY

#### Child care is essential infrastructure that supports our entire economy.

Every day, millions of us leave home and head to work. During our commutes—and once we arrive—there are lots of systems in place to support us. Even though all workers are valuable individual contributors, none of us do our work alone.

Roads and bridges help us get to work. Water, sewer, and waste removal systems ensure we can work in sanitary environments. A telecommunications infrastructure connects us with colleagues and clients who may be in the same building or halfway around the world. We rely on these systems so frequently, and often so seamlessly, that it's easy to ignore them...until something malfunctions.

Because the roads we travel are so visible, it's obvious when they begin to crumble. If the internet goes out, you know it immediately. Either the garbage has been taken away, or it begins to pile up.

Other supports that help our economy function are less publicly visible, but they're no less important. And when those supports begin to break down, they can wreak widespread havoc. The early childhood system is a prime example. Early childhood professionals really are the workforce behind the workforce.

And we're now seeing the effects of a breakdown in that early childhood system.

#### **Wanted: Lots of Employees, Fast**

Employers are scrambling to find workers at all levels, from entry-level service jobs to white-collar career positions. But workers simply can't work unless they have child care. And because child care duties mostly fall to women when care is unavailable, this crisis is playing out in a very gendered manner. The number of working women is now at a 33-year low,<sup>1</sup> with 2.2 million fewer women in the American workforce in October 2020 than in October 2019.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Amanda Weinstein is an associate professor of economics at University of Akron. She thinks we need to consider a collective solution to the problem. Just as it makes no sense for each of us to pave our own individual

#### ECRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*The ECRC Board of Directors plays an important role in providing fiscal and legal oversight, making policy decisions, conducting strategic planning, and more. Chosen for their professional expertise and understanding of early childhood issues, each board member can serve a maximum of three three-year terms.*

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## Dear Friends,

There's a child care crisis in our country right now. Employers need workers, but workers need child care. And early childhood professionals need a wide range of supports. This newsletter highlights just some of the supports we are providing throughout our region.

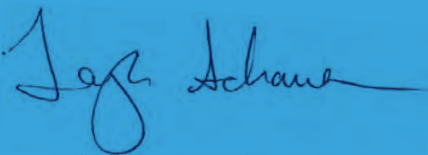
We're the early childhood experts, with over two decades of experience. Because of our efforts:

- Early childhood administrators are learning how to attract and retain the best employees while increasing organizational stability.
- Early childhood professionals are pursuing the credentials and training that form the foundation of a stable career path. They're also receiving mentoring and coaching to help them feel confident in the field, which enhances expertise, commitment, and satisfaction. They're equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to get children ready and excited to succeed in school.
- Employers are beginning to understand the value of high-quality child care, and they're connecting their workers with the high-quality care that allows them to be productive employees.
- Families are finding the high-quality care options that meet their unique needs, whether they need care during nontraditional hours, care for children with disabilities, or care in a specific location.

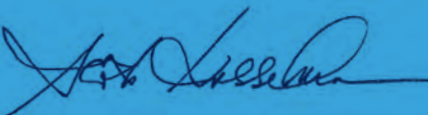
We're here for the entire community. Because even if you're not a parent or employer, these issues affect you. After all, the products and services we all depend on—including food, clothing, and medical services—can only be available if there's a stable child care system in place. And we all have a vested interest in ensuring that our economy is functioning and our communities are thriving.

We pledge to continue doing everything we can to provide much-needed early childhood supports and services, to the benefit of everyone.

Sincerely,



Taylor Schauer, Board Chair



Scott Hasselman, Executive Director



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*Continued from page 1*

roads, it makes no sense that a patchwork of individual child care solutions should be the standard when child care is a fundamental element of a healthy economy. She believes employers need to advocate for a universal child care system, operated for the common good.

While no universal system is coming anytime soon, there are ways to get things back on track within the system we have, both right now and in the long term. But a solution will require government, employers, early childhood professionals, and families to work together.

### **Child Care is a Business, Too**

To understand why many workers can't find child care, it's important to know that child care has always operated under a unique mixture of competing requirements, which the pandemic has only complicated.

Most child care centers are very small businesses, without deep pockets even in the best of times. Child care administrators are continually trying to address a web of challenges that include licensing requirements, quality requirements, and human resources demands. The pandemic complicated matters by making staffing and sanitation even more complex. And while there's a continuing call for high-quality care, there's a gap between the true cost to provide that care and the amount that public funding pays.

Unlike companies that can raise the cost of their products when the cost of doing business rises, child care centers can't raise their fees: parents simply can't afford to pay more.

Case in point: the federal government considers child care affordable if it costs no more than seven percent of annual household income. In an average Ohio household, parents need to spend one-third of their annual income to pay for high-quality care for just one infant.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, child care wages are unconscionably low: the average early childhood teacher in Ohio earns \$9.86 an hour.<sup>4</sup>

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Beyond funding, there's an essential truth about the profession that cannot be ignored: being a child care provider is incredibly stressful. As burnout is rising, some employees are simply fleeing, even in the middle of the workday. Decreased staffing levels make it unsafe to fill classrooms, which further fuels the shortage of child care.

Even for the many individuals who are greatly fulfilled by the work, it's hard to ignore the increasing availability of positions in other fields

that offer more money, are much less stressful, and have fewer training requirements. Wages in those other fields continue rising to unprecedented levels—while child care wages are slightly increasing, but not really keeping pace. Add in a pandemic, and it's no surprise that many who had been working in early childhood simply walked away. In order to remain open, understaffed child care centers are seeking solutions that will help workers feel valued and invested in their work. ✦

## The Child Care Crisis: It Affects Us All

### **The Problem:**

**Inadequate Funding**  
Public funding and private pay rates don't cover the cost of care.

**Demand for Increased Wages**  
Child care programs can't compete with wages offered by other employers.

### **The Result:**

**Employers, Families and Children Alike are Affected.**  
Harm to our economy,  
Harm to workers,  
Harm to families, and  
Harm to child development

*Many thanks to the following individuals who offered valuable perspectives: Barbara Bennett, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce; Angela Moses, Early Childhood Resource Center; Brynn Popa, Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce; Kirstin Toth, GAR Foundation.*

*Notes: <sup>1</sup> bit.ly/3AbwQ6E; <sup>2</sup> bit.ly/3lvVomw; <sup>3</sup> ampr.gs/3rSVCF; <sup>4</sup> bit.ly/3rV9yiA*

# Helping Administrators Recruit and Retain Good Workers

To stabilize “the workforce behind the workforce,” two Early Childhood Resource Center programs are helping child care administrators learn to attract and retain good workers while strengthening their financial practices.

Through the **Workforce Retention and Financial Viability Project**, administrators from 11 Stark County child care programs are receiving individual coaching, networking opportunities, and virtual professional development delivered by national experts on marketing, finance, and staff retention. The project is funded by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton.

Lyndsay Gatto is the regional child care director at the YMCA of Central Stark County. She’s participating along with Executive Director Heidi Wilson. Lyndsay says the project has helped the YMCA retain good employees

by offering lots of supports that keep them engaged and invested in the workplace as well as the work. Those supports begin the moment the employee comes on board, continue with frequent check-ins to make sure the employee has everything she needs to succeed, and are deepened by the use of creative engagement techniques. And when an employee does leave, now an exit interview is conducted to learn more about what might keep employees invested in staying put.

Ryan Johanning is the executive director of Campus Preschool and Child Care Center in North Canton. Participating in the project helped him fine-tune his policies. While the Center had prioritized its responsiveness to families, excessive responsiveness was threatening sustainability. Tuition has now increased, and families are now asked to pay tuition for all days their children are scheduled

**At the YMCA, the newly implemented staff engagement activities have been more creative than expensive, and they’ve been wildly successful. One example is the recent Lucky Ducks promotion, which engaged employees both in person and on social media to reinforce a sense of belonging.**

## Lucky Ducks!

As Y Childcare Staff, we are a lot like ducks – we remain calm, cool, and collected while paddling like crazy underneath! We certainly do our best to keep our ducks in a row!

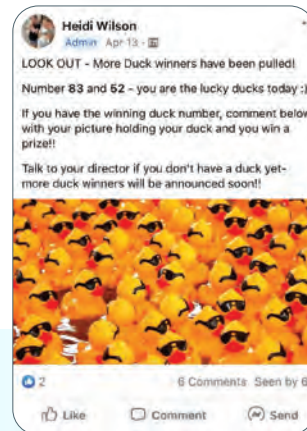
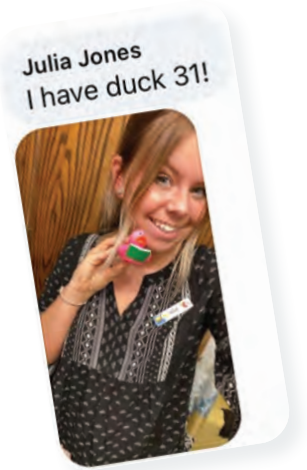
You have received a duck to remind you to keep paddling, even when the waters are rough!

Your lucky duck has a number on the bottom. Keep an eye on our staff Facebook page, as we will be randomly drawing lucky numbers! If your lucky number is drawn, share a selfie with your lucky duck and you will win a prize!

**Thank you for keeping us afloat!**



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS



to attend. While there was some initial pushback from parents, aligning scheduling and tuition policies with those of other local providers has stabilized finances. Ryan also now has a five-year plan in place containing both short-term and longer-term goals.

**The Administrative Leadership Project** is being offered for 22 child care center administrators throughout our six-county service area. The goal is to help administrators assess their center’s financial viability; recruit, retain, and engage high-quality staff; and strengthen their leadership and supervision skills. Participants are receiving training from a national expert through the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, as well as individualized coaching from the Early Childhood Resource Center. This project is funded by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Michelle Frease is the director of St. Rose Sunny Days Childcare Center in Girard. She found the networking aspect of the project very valuable. As Michelle tells it, “the admin project has helped me to make connections with other center directors with the same dedication and commitment I have for the field of early childhood. The Director’s Tool Box workshop (offered as part of the project) is a fabulous addition to our professional development portfolio.”

Kim Garra is the director of the Mandel Early Childhood Education Center in Akron. Participating helped her deepen employee engagement. She says, “I’ve learned how to change the culture for my staff from this project, and as a result, I have instituted more staff involvement and input in the decision making and policy/procedures updates in my program.”

# fall friendships

A beautiful sunny evening with a slight breeze greeted the 140 people who attended our Fall Friendships fundraising event on Tuesday September 14 at Gervasi Winery’s Outdoor Pavilion.

Guests mingled during the cocktail hour and then feasted on roasted Atlantic salmon and chicken piccata, which perfectly complemented their Gervasi wines. Sara and Jon performed, overlooking the beautiful lake.

We thank all who attended, all who gave wine bottles, and all who sponsored a SPROUT backpack for the children who will be attending kindergarten. Here are a few images of our friends enjoying the perfect evening.



## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

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**Derek & Emily Gordon**

**Erin Jeffries**

**Mandy Keller**

**Amanda Kendle**

**Ed & Louise Mahoney**

**Gail Moore**

**Ronald & Wanda Young**

# STARS: Addressing School Readiness—and Equity

The STARS (Supporting Teachers and Ready Students) program is working to enhance school readiness while stabilizing the fragile early childhood system. Becoming a high-quality program is a critical goal, but many programs, especially those in Akron's poorest neighborhoods, simply don't have the budget for comprehensive coaching and training.



For the third consecutive year, this program, funded by the GAR Foundation, is bringing the Early Childhood Resource Center's expertise right to those urban Akron child care centers. STARS is providing training, best-practice curricula, coaching, and guidance on engaging families. Most centers that participated in the project's first year have now earned high-quality ratings, and the participating staff have earned the Child Development Associate Credential. Most centers have continued with the project, and a new cohort has signed on to participate.

There's a great need for this work: Akron's children are not entering school ready for success. During the 2018-2019 school year, only 56% started school on track, and only 20% demonstrated readiness.

*STARS was created with the belief that we can do better for these children.*

The 1,133 children enrolled in the 32 STARS programs are 78% are non-white, and 76% come from households that are sufficiently low income that they qualify for subsidized care. The hope is that by equipping early educators with an arsenal of professional tools, strategies, and knowledge, more children will be ready for school.

But the project serves another function as well. Early childhood professionals are primarily women, and in places like Akron, they're disproportionately women of color. In fact, 72% of the staff at the STARS centers are non-white, and they earn \$10.60 an hour, on average. Projects like STARS contribute to equity by offering the training and coaching the staff need to build a stable lifelong career pathway, while helping the centers increase revenue that can be used to improve wages and benefits.

STARS is also promoting equitable early learning experiences for early learners by helping educators examine their own biases and training them to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Training on addressing bias and cultivating cultural responsiveness will help the educators learn to talk to young children about race, make them aware of their own biases, and teach them to plan for culturally responsive child engagement, and engage families in culturally responsive ways.

By enhancing school readiness and helping teachers to provide culturally responsive care, we advance equity and inclusion in the wider community for generations to come. ♦

## MANY THANKS

We thank all those who have made contributions in the name of a loved one or favorite teacher. We are honored that they have chosen to celebrate their loved ones with a gift to our organization.

**Jim and Vicki Conley,  
in honor of Robert Warren**

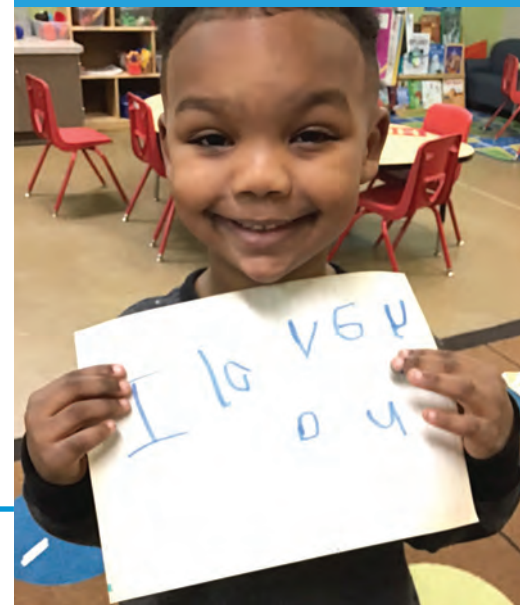
**Kimberly Connors,  
in memory of Brandon Hawkins**

**Bill Nolan & Betsy Nolan Gorton,  
in honor of the 50th anniversary of their  
parents, Terry and Joyce Nolan**

**Eun Young White,  
in honor of Jeff White and Griffin**

Those generous gifts help us to provide the early learning resources children need to be ready for school.

*If you would like to celebrate someone by making a contribution in their name, please contact Sandy Turner at (877) 691-8521 or [sturner@ecresourcecenter.org](mailto:sturner@ecresourcecenter.org)*



## In SPARK, Math is Fundamental

*When many parents think of getting ready for kindergarten, they automatically focus on the alphabet and the skills needed for reading. But kindergarten readiness doesn't just require early literacy skills. In fact, early math skills are actually the more accurate predictor of school success.<sup>1</sup>*

When a family enrolls in the SPARK kindergarten readiness program, screenings are administered to measure the child's literacy and math skill levels. They're measured again after program completion: this shows the progress the child has made while participating in the program. Analysis of the screening scores showed that SPARK children have been making greater gains in literacy than in math.

So a team of SPARK representatives from across the state collaborated to enhance the math elements of SPARK lessons. The revised lessons show parents how to embed math into everyday interactions.

That's no easy feat: math anxiety is widespread. One research study found parents focus more on language skills with their children, know less about how to focus on math, and need help overcoming their own math anxiety.<sup>2</sup>



Each SPARK family is assigned a specially trained home visitor, known as a *parent partner*, who visits the home monthly to conduct lessons and activities. During the visits, the parent partner gives simple, accessible explanations of key math concepts and demonstrates lots of easy ways to work on those skills with their children every day.

The aim is to make teaching math accessible by showing parents they don't need expertise, academic degrees, or extraordinary efforts. They need only involve their child in counting the stairs, sorting the socks, spotting red cars in the parking lot, or deciding which plate has more carrots. Math is taught through easy actions requiring no special supplies or preparation.

By getting in the habit of pointing out the math that's all around us, SPARK parents are helping their children strengthen those fundamental math skills they'll need for school success.

SPARK is betting that the enhanced focus on math will pay off big, both in kindergarten and beyond. ♦

Notes: <sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/3IxpMNE](https://bit.ly/3IxpMNE); <sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/3iVj4Pu](https://bit.ly/3iVj4Pu)