



ECRC Community Chronicle

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER :: *Summer News 2020*

INTERESTING TIMES

A LETTER FROM ECRC BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There's a saying: "May you live in interesting times." These months have certainly been interesting.

Of course, none of us anticipated a pandemic. But when it happened, we knew one thing: families and educators alike were depending on the Early Childhood Resource Center. Things were changing so rapidly, and everyone wanted answers.

Our staff members, working from home, were answering questions all day and late into the night. We set up new communication channels to make sure honest, accurate information could be relayed as rapidly as possible.

Throughout lockdown, we remained committed to serving the community. After a brief period of total closure, we were the only local provider offering background checks (while observing strict safety and sanitation rules, of course). Those background checks are a critical

component of pandemic response: many essential services cannot be provided without them.

We've continued providing the training, classes, and school readiness services educators and families need. To do that, we mostly pivoted to an online presence. Those we serve have pivoted right alongside us.

No one knows what things will look like going forward, but you can count on us for information, resources, and services. Even when things are rapidly changing and answers are hard to come by, we are here. If answers exist, we will get them for you. As things reopen and rules change again, count on us. We will get through it together.

With appreciation,

Taylor Schauer, Board Chair

Scott Hasselman, Executive Director



Helping Essential Workers During a Pandemic



On March 9, Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency. Most child care facilities closed by March 26. By April 1, only programs approved as pandemic child care programs were permitted to operate, to serve the children of essential workers and first responders.

Child care programs operate on very thin margins in the best of times. With no time to plan, and very little financial cushion to weather the crisis, child care providers needed answers, assistance, and resources. They looked to the Early Childhood Resource Center for support.

Our number one priority was making sure providers had accurate information. We launched a Facebook page to provide real-time updates to pandemic child care programs amid constant change. As new information was available, we posted: we relayed information on state funding shifts, emerging best practices, new regulations, and health and safety requirements. Providers used our page to network, offer support, and learn from each other.

In addition, we knew the programs would need resources

they had never before needed, at a time when less funding was coming in the door. We were able to redirect some of our Ohio Quality Infrastructure Grant funds into grants for cleaning supplies, toys, and other items they needed to operate during the pandemic. Personal protective equipment (PPE) was widely needed. For many programs, the lack of PPE was a barrier to reopening. With those grant funds and some United Way support, we created and provided PPE kits containing masks, thermometers, hand sanitizer, and cot sheets.

When the non-pandemic programs shut down, lots of workers were displaced. At the same time, the pandemic programs needed workers. So we created an online system to match the hundreds of displaced workers with the pandemic programs that needed them. That matchmaking was critical to ensuring that workers could work and programs could serve families of essential workers.

That pandemic Facebook page has now been opened to all programs, to keep them informed and offer support as the landscape continues to change. It's one of many strategies we're using to connect, inform, and guide. ♦



Be Part of a Lifelong Memory!

Starting kindergarten is a very big deal. It's a milestone parents and children alike will never forget.

Now you can be a part of a SPARK family's lifelong memory. Sponsor a backpack filled with supplies for a SPARK child who's beginning kindergarten. We will attach a tag that you've personalized with special words of encouragement.

To sponsor a backpack, send your \$25 check in the response envelope provided with this newsletter, along with your note to a SPARK child.

**You'll help to start
the school year off right!**





STAYING OPEN TO SERVE

The Looking Glass Learning Center, in Portage County, is one of 235 child care programs in our region that became pandemic programs during lockdown. While remaining open was challenging, Looking Glass owner Jenny Adams and her staff found support in community, and through the Early Childhood Resource Center.

Looking Glass has two locations: one in Brimfield and one in Kent. As lockdown began, Jenny polled parents to learn how many were essential workers who would require child care. It became apparent that she would only be able to keep one location open. She had to close the other location and lay off some staff members.

As things changed rapidly, Jenny and her employees wanted answers. The families she served wanted answers, too. Jenny was grateful for her connection to Early Childhood Resource Center staff, who remained constantly in touch and

available to answer questions. She also found connection through the Early Childhood Resource Center Facebook page that was created to provide pandemic-related news and support for early childhood professionals. She says, "I felt very supported. ...I have never been so connected to colleagues across the field."

Looking Glass received grants for supplies from the Early Childhood Resource Center and United Way of Portage County, and a parent donated a \$100 Amazon gift card. Jenny put together a "field day" kit for outdoor play, including sprinklers, ribbon wands for outdoor music, games, bubble wands, and a splash pad (which was a huge hit with the kids). She's also purchased a water table, a climbing caterpillar, and supplies.

The pandemic-related health and sanitation supplies she received from

I have never been so connected to colleagues across the field.

Jenny Adams, Owner
Looking Glass Learning Center

the Early Childhood Resource Center were extremely helpful as well. Looking Glass already had one thermometer; adding another meant there was no line for entry. That made it much easier for families to keep their distance during drop-off.

Today, both Looking Glass locations are operating at capacity (following the state's reduced caregiver-to-child ratios), and they're receiving lots of calls from parents in need of child care. ♦

Going from Classroom to Computer

THE TRANSITION TO ONLINE LEARNING

Transitioning to online classes has been quite an adjustment—for both instructors and participants alike.

DINA: STARTING IN PERSON AND FINISHING ONLINE



Dina Morrison

For the past year, Dina Morrison has been caring for infants at Champion Day School. Dina was initially concerned about working in child care, since she's not a mom. Now, though, she really loves her job and feels she has found her path. Champion Day School is her second home, and she thinks of the children there as "her kids."

In October, Dina started taking Child Development Associate (CDA) classes in Youngstown. The nationally recognized CDA credential often serves as the foundation of a lifelong career in early childhood. For many child care programs, having CDA-credentialed staff members is critical for meeting Step Up To Quality benchmarks.

Earning the credential requires 120 hours of classes. Last fall, Dina was one of 117 early childhood professionals in our region who started classes in person, but had to finish online because of the pandemic.

Dina really loved learning in a group. She and her classmates learned the fundamentals of being early childhood professionals, and they also learned about activities they would be conducting in the classroom. Dina loved learning to make gooey oobleck (something she had always wanted to do), and designing her dream classroom and sharing her vision with her classmates.

In fact, Dina enjoyed learning alongside the other students so much that adjusting to online classes took her a while. She had to learn to tune out the activity around her at home and concentrate on the computer. But she soon developed a daily routine. Every day, she would watch the governor's daily press conference with her grandmother. After that, it was time for class.

Feeling supported helped ease the adjustment. The instructor, Carrie, constantly kept the class motivated and positive by sending supportive emails and texts. It was clear that she wanted all the students to know she was there for them.

Dina had a lot of independent work to complete. She was nervous about creating lesson plans on her own, but Carrie encouraged her and helped get her through. She also compiled her portfolio on her own, an activity that would typically be completed in the classroom. She missed having the other students there to give feedback.

After classes ended, there was an online graduation ceremony on Zoom, followed the next day by a "drive-through graduation," where each graduate received a certificate and had a photo taken. Dina became emotional because she couldn't hug or congratulate her classmates in person.

Dina took her CDA exam on July 24 and is preparing for the required portfolio review and classroom observation. She's a bit impatient for those final steps, telling her administrator she wanted to "get this done now!" She's been showered with support from the parents of the children she cares for, who want to bring the children in on the day she's observed, and from Carrie, who texted, "You can do this!"

It's clear that no pandemic is going to slow Dina and her classmates down. They've weathered a crisis together with grace, and are looking forward to rewarding careers. ♦



Early Childhood Specialists Sara Davis (left) and Tina Lemon.

TRAINERS: ADJUSTING TO TECHNOLOGY

Early Childhood Specialist Sara Davis teaches lots of training classes for early childhood professionals. For Sara and her colleagues, learning to use new technology required a lot of preparation, practicing, and trial and error. There's a learning curve to working with two screens at the same time—and choosing the right screen to share. If the wrong screen is shared, the whole class is staring at nothing. Videos have failed to play, or played without sound. Internet access has been slow at times, and an instructor once got kicked out of a training room when a hacker tried to access it. Lessons and group activities had to be adapted to work online, and chat logs had to be examined to make sure all participants were as engaged online as they would have been in person (as is required in order to earn credit for attendance).

The staff learned that many classes are simply not compatible with online learning. Some are too hands-on to work well, like the play dough creation class, make-it/take-it classes, and team building classes involving trust activities and skits.

After lots of practice, Sara and her colleagues are now comfortable with the technology, and they understand what kinds of online classes work well for both instructor and participant.

Sara prefers in-person teaching. It's more hands-on, there's more interaction and productive discussion, and it's easier to do things like role playing. That said, online learning is more flexible, the classes are shorter, and it's a greener option (class materials are provided electronically). And in a pandemic, it's indispensable.

In addition, online networking groups, like those offered for program directors, have been an invaluable tool for keeping people connected. Those groups have been attracting new participants, including many who could never before attend the in-person sessions because of scheduling conflicts.

In a post-pandemic future, it's clear that online options must remain in our toolbox; they expand our ability to reach even more educators and parents, even more often. ♦

CARE Kits: A Great Start

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

According to a recent study, more than half of students experience summer learning loss through the primary grades, “with compounding summer deficits leaching away on average nearly 40 percent of students’ yearly progress.”¹

By fall, many children will have gone for six or more months with no formal learning, which will cause learning loss to a degree never before seen. As lockdown began, community organizations were giving families lots of educational resources. Stark County’s Great Start for Great Futures coalition wanted to wait and provide resources through summer, to continue mitigating the effects of school closures.

Coalition members, community members, and representatives of local organizations all came together to donate resources for CARE kits, to be distributed to local families with babies and young children. The free kits contain educational tips, tools, resources, and fun activities for families with young children, including bubbles, books, stress balls, literature, magazines, masks, and coloring books, all contained in a colorful cardboard box that families can also use to store their own books or toys.

Throughout May, the Early Childhood Resource Center collected all the donated materials. In June, a team of volunteers assembled 294 boxes in one day. Kit distribution was timed to coincide with Stark Library’s summer reading program, to encourage family learning over the summer. Kits have been distributed throughout the community. They’re available at Head Start programs, libraries, pharmacies, and through agencies and organizations that serve families.

Families who picked up kits were asked to fill out a brief demographic survey. The kits themselves contain a second survey with questions about which kit contents were most useful, and what other resources might be helpful to include. Responses will be used to inform future efforts, so the coalition can keep getting useful resources into family homes throughout Stark County. ♦

¹ https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2020/07/damage_from_lost_learning_time.html?r=292037103&cmp=soc-edit-fb&fbclid=IwAR2UJEPYdv_9KjRphaiM8d6UQYQU0Fa6AbKdzZakHn_vfkyNcXV5663n-E





A Virtual SPARK: Reimagining Home Visiting

Since 2003, the SPARK program has given Ohio families a kindergarten readiness advantage. In-home visits are at the heart of the SPARK model. But of course, in-home visits became impossible in March.

A pandemic certainly wasn't going to keep SPARK staff from serving families. Luckily, they're used to working with young children, so they're experts at expecting the unexpected.

SPARK Director Mary Brady and her staff had to re-envision what home visiting can be. She says, "We just kept asking, what one thing can we do today to make sure our SPARK families, our staff, our colleagues, and our own families are safe? Each day, we added to the list. When we look back at this time, we will be able to say we adapted, survived, and thrived. The team and the work will be stronger, despite the interruption."

Virtual lessons seemed like a natural alternative. Staff had to quickly learn new technology. And they weren't the only ones dealing with a learning curve; parents were anxious about making online learning work. As Parent

Partner Missy Beebe said, "I have just tried to constantly reassure them that they will make it and they're doing a good job. I found something online that I sent to my parents. It says, When parenting and teaching feels too heavy, drop the assignment and snuggle up and read together. Reading is enough."

SPARK Program Supervisor Danielle Triplett found that the new circumstances inspired commitment on the part of many parents. She said, "One thing that all the parent partners noticed was increased parent engagement during virtual lessons. Parents have all stepped up to the plate and are taking a more active role."

Social media became an indispensable engagement tool: storytime videos were posted daily on Facebook and YouTube. In April, families were asked to contribute to an online video by having their SPARK child draw a picture that included the state-promoted tagline #InThisTogetherOhio.

Food insecurity is a real concern for many SPARK families, and it increased during lockdown. So parent partners and donors provided food and other essentials, reached out to make sure families knew help was available, and connected them with organizations offering assistance.

As the weather improved, some families became interested in socially distanced in-person visits. This was challenging for both families and parent partners. It's hard for a parent partner to keep her distance when a young child is so excited to see her. Naturally, the child wants a hug—and so does the parent partner!

No one wants to experience a pandemic. But the SPARK staff are confident they've done everything they can to make the time productive and engaging. Missy Beebe sums it up well: "It took me out of my comfort zone, and I feel I have become a better parent partner because of it."

They—and the families they serve—will never forget the efforts they've made. ♦



Sister Joanne Caniglia, who is a math education professor at Kent State University, has developed STEM kits for SPARK families.

Rayden (pictured above) used materials from the kit to practice both math and social distancing by drawing a six-foot circle.

Catching Up, One on One

The Canton City School District has reported that fewer than 40% of students participated in online learning during lockdown. This means that the majority have fallen greatly behind in their learning.

Thanks to support from the Sisters of Charity Foundation, two Canton City teachers and three SPARK parent partners worked together to help some students catch up before school starts again.

In March (before the schools closed), the district administered student assessments. For a new Early Childhood Resource Center program called *SPARK Plus*, the teachers used those assessment scores to develop individualized lesson plans for K-3 students enrolled at the JRC, YMCA, and YWCA child care programs.

Over the summer, the parent partners had socially distanced one-on-one tutoring sessions with the students.

The students loved the individual attention, and they were eager to learn.

One third grader said, “My mom said I need to stay smart. What are you going to do to keep me smart?”

Well, we worked hard to keep them smart, and we wish them all a great start to a new school year!

Getting the Books Out

REACHING
OUT



Every year, Stark County students from GlenOak, Hoover, Perry, and Massillon Washington high schools hold children’s book drives to benefit the Early Childhood Resource Center. This year, the students surpassed their annual goal—and in March, they delivered us 4,600 books!

The books were distributed throughout the community:

- Each week, books (along with educational supplies) were delivered to the porches or front steps of 200 preschool-age children participating in our SPARK kindergarten readiness program. Many of these children will be attending Allen Elementary School in southeast Canton.
- Three to five books were included in each Great Start for Great Futures Kids CARE Kit. Kits were distributed to nearly 300 Canton and Massillon families.
- Books were given to children participating in the Early Childhood Resource Center’s *SPARK Plus* summer tutoring program.
- Books were given to Stark County District Library for curbside distribution to local families.
- Books for older children were given to the Sandy Valley Local School District.

We’re so grateful for the efforts of these students. They outdid themselves this year, and their hard work has brought learning, togetherness, and joy to families throughout our community. ♦





EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

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CANTON, OHIO 44703

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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.

CENTER HOURS

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

Friday: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Our building is currently closed for walk-in visitors. Please call to make an appointment for production lab time or a background check.

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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.