



The child is  
the center  
of everything  
we do.



# We're here for you—

## The Early Childhood Resource Center 2023 Board Members

Kirstin Toth, *Board Chair*  
K. S. Toth Associates

Joe Luckring, *Board Vice Chair*  
PNC Financial Services Group

Richard Craig, *Board Treasurer*  
415 Group

Michele Benson, *Board Secretary*  
GBS Corporation

Taylor Schauer, *Immediate Past Board Chair*  
Schauer Group, Inc.

Bradley Belden  
The Belden Brick Company

Melissa Chow  
The J. M. Smucker Company

Allyson V. James  
Community Action Akron Summit

Dr. Anju Mader  
Stark County Mental Health & Addiction Recovery

Ellen McWilliams-Woods  
Illumine Integrated Solutions, LLC

Brian Mertes  
Black, McCuskey, Souers, & Arbaugh, LPA

Shelley Morgenstern  
Community volunteer

April Porter  
Waterford.org

Marisa R. Rohn  
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton

Dr. Jennifer Ross  
Akron Children's Hospital

Robert H. Stewart, III  
M. Conley Company

Sr. Catherine Walsh  
Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine

---

This report highlights our work over  
the past fiscal year, from July 2022  
through June 2023.



# through every transition!

## Dear Friends,

The journey of a child's development is full of transitions, from infancy to toddlerhood, from scribbling to creating art, from recognizing letters to constructing sentences and paragraphs. Each day, children gain new skills that become the building blocks of their future abilities. As they transition through different stages of development, they gain new perspectives and insights. Educators and parents are expected to adapt seamlessly to each transition and support children on their way to their next milestone. It's a lot to sort out, but the Early Childhood Resource Center is here to help.

At the Early Childhood Resource Center, we support educators and families throughout the year as they navigate the transitions that come with teaching, guiding, loving, supporting, and raising children. Whether it's transitioning from crib to bed or from phonics to the science of reading, we can provide assistance every step of the way.

This report highlights a sample of the work we completed during the 2023 fiscal year to help educators and families across our region thrive in the midst of all the transitions early childhood brings. We're proud to have been a constant source of support for our community.

As an organization, we've also experienced transitions, as Executive Director Scott Hasselman retired in October 2023 after 13 years of capable leadership. Over the course of his tenure, Scott transformed a modest professional development organization serving Stark County educators into the region's early childhood headquarters, greatly expanding the Early Childhood Resource Center's capabilities and reach. Scott will be missed, and we wish him well on his next adventure—an epic journey through South and Central America.

That said, we are thrilled to share Angela Moses has been appointed as the new Executive Director of the Early Childhood Resource Center. Angela has been with the organization, serving as a passionate advocate for early childhood education, for over 22 years. She, too, has played a key role in supporting the growth and expansion of the Early Childhood Resource Center. Under her leadership, we are excited to take on new challenges and continue supporting educators and families throughout our region.

We look forward to working with Angela as we navigate the transitions ahead and continue to provide high-quality resources and services to our community.

Sincerely,



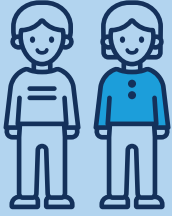
Kirstin S. Toth, 2023 Board Chair



Joseph Luckring, 2024 Board Chair



**2,219**  
Children  
served



**15,448**  
Home visits



**19,886** Books  
distributed



Ohio  
school  
districts  
served

# Preparing Children

**Twelve months a year, we get families ready for school.** As transitions go, starting kindergarten is a big deal. It's hugely significant for both parent and child, and a successful transition into kindergarten is strongly linked to future academic and social success.<sup>1</sup> School readiness is complex. It requires a child to master numerous early literacy, math, fine and gross motor, and social-emotional skills. Our SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) program brings a school readiness expert, known as a parent partner, right into a family's home to help the parent and child develop the knowledge and skills needed to be ready for the big transition to kindergarten.

The SPARK program has recently undergone a transition, as well: Mary Brady, Director of SPARK and SPARK Replication, retired at the end of 2023. We wish her well and thank her for her decade of SPARK leadership and for 19 years of service to the Early Childhood Resource Center. Our incoming Director of SPARK and SPARK Replication, Danielle Bunner, is no stranger to our community and brings 15 years of SPARK experience to the role. We know the program remains in very good hands during this seamless transition.

---

## SPARK: Now a Best Practice

The SPARK kindergarten readiness program has officially been designated a Best Practice by the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP). Best Practice is the highest possible designation available, indicating the highest degree of evidence, equity, relevance, and impact.

According to AMCHP, "Best practices have been reviewed and substantiated by experts in the public health field according to standards of empirical research; are replicable and produce

desirable results in a variety of settings; and clearly link positive effects to the program/practice and not to external factors."<sup>2</sup>

AMCHP includes Best Practice programs in its Maternal and Child Health Innovations Database, which catalogs "what's working" for policymakers and funders seeking highly effective programs that are grounded in practice-based evidence, meaningfully embrace collaboration, and have been successfully replicated with positive outcomes.





## Zakaree: Uniquely Wonderful

Early Childhood Resource Center team member Kelley Moffett was a SPARK parent partner when she first met Zakaree and his family during their initial in-home lesson. She knew right away that Zakaree was an exceptional little boy.

Zakaree told Kelley that he liked watermelon—and then he spelled the word. He followed that up by saying, “Grandpa says I need to be quiet,” and then he spelled quiet as well. He was 3 years old.

Kelley was amazed by Zakaree’s unique abilities, which manifested in other ways too. Zakaree taught himself new languages by watching YouTube videos, recited the alphabet in Mandarin, and could write down the names of stores and restaurants he visited. In preschool, Zakaree preferred playing by himself and had a strong need for things to be done exactly the same way every time. At home, he insisted that every SPARK lesson followed the same structure, starting with writing in his SPARK journal.

Zakaree’s grandparents, who assumed guardianship of Zakaree and his siblings after their mother passed away, also noted their grandson’s distinct abilities. Like Kelley, they knew that understanding and tapping into Zakaree’s uniqueness would be critical to his success.



*Zakaree during one of his SPARK lessons*

As a SPARK parent partner and a passionate advocate of school readiness, Kelley used her training and access to community resources to connect the family with a provider who assessed Zakaree and diagnosed him with autism. Kelley was by the family’s side at every appointment. Once Zakaree was diagnosed, Kelley guided the family through the process of pursuing an individualized education plan (IEP) through their school district, to help ensure appropriate supports would be in place in the classroom.

Since Zakaree started kindergarten in Fall 2023, he’s moved from spelling words to reading at a second-grade level, and he’s even made some friends. He’s teaching himself cursive writing, and he’s been learning a lot about cars, as well. All in all, this unique little boy is off to a uniquely wonderful start—thanks, in part, to his participation in SPARK. ♦

---

*Kelley also connected Zakaree’s family with one of the Center’s OhioKAN kinship navigators, who helped them access respite care services. Zakaree and his siblings have now been officially adopted by their grandparents.*



Offered  
**227**  
evidence-based  
parenting education  
classes



**254**  
individuals  
participated in  
Parent Cafés

Provided  
fatherhood  
services to



**539**  
fathers



Provided  
carseats  
to **176**  
families

**4,875** children  
visited the Inspiration  
Station



# Strengthening Families

**Twelve months a year, we support families so they can weather life's transitions.**

Strong families aren't built in a day. They're constructed, bit by bit and interaction by interaction, over the course of years. Our classes, coaching, and support provide the building blocks that become the solid foundations strong families need to thrive.





## Anya's Journey: Overcoming Adversity and Finding Hope

Two years ago, Anya was facing great difficulty. Her newborn daughter was placed in foster care due to Anya's positive drug test at the time of birth, and Anya's abusive partner had kicked her out of her home.

It was a challenging period in Anya's life. However, with determination and guidance, Anya's life has taken a dramatic turn for the better. To regain custody of her daughter, Anya was required to attend parenting classes at the Early Childhood Resource Center. These classes, along with one-on-one coaching from her instructor, Emily Baughman, helped Anya get her life back on track.

During the coaching sessions, Emily shared about challenges she had overcome and said, "I'm not here to judge you; I'm here to walk with you." From there, Anya expressed her desire to get her life in order, and together, they made a plan.

Anya grew up feeling like she never quite fit in. She lived in a foreign orphanage until she was adopted by American parents at the age of 4. Emily explained that as an adult, Anya was "sitting on a three-legged chair," in contrast to her peers whose chairs were made more stable by the support and guidance they received from dependable, loving adults. Emily's role was to help Anya stabilize her chair.

Anya has done exactly that. She has regained custody of her daughter and now has an infant son. The



*Anya, pictured here with her children*

Early Childhood Resource Center provided funding (through a grant from the Ohio Children's Trust Fund) that enabled Anya to maintain stable housing and access child care, so she could take a job as a peer support worker at Deliverance House, the rehab facility where she'd gotten clean. A bright future seems possible now that her chair is resting firmly on all four legs.

To keep her chair stable, Anya continues to attend the weekly class Emily teaches at Deliverance House, and she regularly seeks out Emily's guidance. Anya recommends parenting classes for all parents, no matter their life challenges. Participants learn the fundamental skills needed to care for and support children, including concepts like sleep safety and the importance of routines. They also learn about the developmental stages young children grow through, strategies for school readiness and positive discipline, and ways to strengthen the parent-child bond.

The classes and coaching Anya received through the Early Childhood Resource Center provided something else that's essential for stability: hope. They helped Anya understand she is capable of creating the strong family and stable foundation her children need. ✦



**7,183**

Coaching and technical assistance sessions provided to **723** child care programs



**11,170**

Educators attended **689** training classes

Helped **379** parents find high-quality child care



# Educating Teachers

**Twelve months a year, we equip early childhood professionals to support children's transitions as they master the skills needed for success.** Being an educator is no easy task—it's a multifaceted balancing act that requires a great deal of guidance and support. We're here for our region's early childhood professionals, whether they need training on developmentally appropriate practices, answers to Step Up to Quality questions, or expert guidance from an early childhood specialist who understands.

## Building Small Businesses

Family child care centers are small, in-home businesses that accommodate 12 or fewer children. While most individuals who start family child care centers have previous child care experience, they often lack experience as business owners.

While licensing requires an understanding of teacher-to-child ratios and sanitation requirements; training in CPR, first aid, and health and safety issues; background checks; and a home inspection, there's no mandatory training on the basics of running a business. Many providers learn as they go, sometimes after making costly mistakes.

Fortunately, the Early Childhood Resource Center offers a number of comprehensive training programs to support child care businesses, including the **All Our Kin business training program.**

All Our Kin is a national training curriculum facilitated by Early Childhood Resource Center's certified staff that teaches family child care providers about bookkeeping and budgeting; insurance and risk management; contracts and policies; and marketing. The training requires a 10-week commitment; but, according to participants, it's time well spent.

Recent training participants Violeta Popov and LaToya Fornore both say they wish they'd had

the information they learned during the training when they first opened their businesses.

Violeta has been a family child care provider in Brunswick since 2007. The All Our Kin course taught her how to make an effective budget and helped her determine the right questions to ask her accountant.

LaToya has been a Youngstown family child care provider since 2019. For her, it was a revelation to learn she should always be marketing her program to the public, just as major brands do. She's since made new business cards and flyers to market her business every chance she gets. Her efforts are paying off; her home is full, and she continues to rely on lessons learned during training to guide her success.

Both Violeta and LaToya shared that tax issues were another useful topic covered during training. Additionally, both loved being part of a cohort of other providers, as connecting and learning from others was extremely helpful and affirming. The participants still chat, text, and collaborate. Building upon the valuable information they learned in training—and supporting each other when issues arise—will help these providers sustain their businesses for years to come.



*Theresa Lemon (left) celebrates Epworth's 50th anniversary in May 2023 along with (then) Massillon Mayor Kathy Catazaro-Perry.*



## Epworth Nursery School: A Five-Star Center

Epworth Nursery School has long been considered a Massillon institution. So when Epworth celebrated 50 years of operation in May 2023, Massillon's mayor declared it Epworth Nursery School Day to mark the occasion. Over the last five decades, many families have entrusted multiple generations of children to the care of Epworth staff.

Despite its long history, high quality, and established community ties, up until recently Epworth was still considered a two-star center on the five-star Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) rating scale.

“Applying for credentials like Step Up To Quality is incredibly overwhelming,” Epworth Director Theresa Lemon shared. She went on to explain barriers related to the SUTQ application process. “The amount of paperwork and other factors involved was very discouraging to us for a long time. But the Early Childhood Resource Center walked us through the entire process, step by step, and got us to where we are now.”

With help and guidance from Early Childhood Specialist Corriene Dippel, Epworth was able to jump straight to a five-star rating, which denotes the highest possible quality of care and also qualifies Epworth for increased state reimbursement.

Many elements needed for the five-star rating were already in place, but Theresa needed support when it came to documenting them. Corriene helped Theresa sort resources and services into the right categories and identify training classes and activities that had occurred but had not been recorded.



*Theresa Lemon (left) celebrates Epworth's 50th anniversary along with Rachel Randolph, who was enrolled at Epworth during her preschool years, and Robin Shaw, who has taught at Epworth for four decades.*

“She really nailed down all the extra practices we'd already been doing, but just hadn't been filing properly,” said Lemon. “With her help, we were able to work through all the fine details.”

The Early Childhood Resource Center also provided additional trainings to help Epworth staff maintain the school's high quality, conveniently making sessions available online and in person.

“Even after reaching the five-star rating, the Early Childhood Resource Center is still an active resource to us,” said Lemon. “Whenever we're considering new goals, trainings, or grants, Corriene's always ready to listen and talk through the best strategy.”

By partnering with the Early Childhood Resource Center, Epworth Nursery School has earned the recognition and benefits that will allow it to continue serving local families for generations to come. ♦



## 2023 CONTRIBUTORS

# MANY THANKS



We are deeply grateful to all those who share our vision and invest in our work. We could not make these impacts without their support.

Note, this listing reflects gifts received from January-December 2023.

### FUNDERS

Child Care Aware of America  
 City of Canton Community Development Dept.  
 GAR Foundation  
 Kinnect  
 OCCRRA  
 Ohio Department of Education  
 Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (now the Department of Children and Youth)  
 –Child Care Resource and Referral  
 –Governor’s Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives  
 –Ohio Commission on Fatherhood  
 –Ohio Children’s Trust Fund/Early Childhood Safety Initiative  
 Project Rise/Akron Public Schools  
 Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton  
 Stark County Family Council/Ohio Children’s Trust Fund  
 Stark County Women’s Fund  
 Summit County Children Services  
 United Way of Greater Stark County  
 United Way of Summit and Medina  
 University of Chicago/TMW Center  
 Workforce Initiative Association (OhioMeansJobs Stark and Tuscarawas Counties)  
 YWCA Canton

### DONORS/CONTRIBUTORS

#### \$10,000 and above

PNC Foundation

#### \$5,000 and above

Deuble Foundation  
 Employers Health  
 Fisher-Renkert Foundation  
 W. Henry Hoover Fund  
 Stark Community Foundation (via donor advised fund gifts)

#### \$2,000 and above

415 Group  
 Belden Brick Company  
 Bradley and Aimee Belden  
 Black, McCuskey, Souers & Arbaugh LPA  
 The Walter K. and Wilda E. Bortz Fund  
 Eagles 190  
 GBS Corporation  
 Peggy and Scott Hayward  
 Edward A. Mahoney, III and Louise F. Mahoney  
 Kirstin S. and David J. Toth  
 Eun Young White

#### \$1,000 and above

Apex Herbals, LLC  
 Melissa Chow  
 Justin Crues  
 Scott and Laura Hasselman  
 Cynthia L. Hunt  
 Innis Maggiore Group, Inc  
 The J.M. Smucker Co.  
 Kaulig Giving  
 The M. Conley Company  
 Angela Moses and John Harris  
 Janice G. Murphy  
 Jeremiah A. and Sarah L. Rippel  
 Schauer Group, Inc.

Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine  
 Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad

#### \$500 and above

AWP Safety/Area Wide Protection  
 Michele Benson  
 Canton Professional Educators’ Association  
 Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce  
 Jonathan Chastek  
 Community One Credit Union  
 Richard and Andrea Craig  
 Danielle Curry-Bentley  
 Worl Evans  
 Robert G. and Linda R. Ganser  
 Kempthorn Motors, Inc.  
 Joseph and Kimberly Luckring  
 Anju G. Mader, MD  
 Bill and Mary Nolan  
 Oriana House, Inc.  
 Psychological & Educational Solutions, LLC  
 Marisa Rohn  
 The Timken Company Matching Gifts Program  
 Kristine Willhite  
 Steve Yablonski

#### \$200 and above

Atrium OB/Gyn, Inc.  
 Robert F. and Kathy K. Belden  
 Mary Brady  
 Danielle and Scott Bunner  
 Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health  
 Laurel Derrick  
 Jennifer Dale Fox  
 Gayle A. Harter  
 David James  
 Sherry Kauffman  
 J. Dan and Suzette Matthews  
 Ellen McWilliams-Woods, PhD  
 Brian R. Mertes



Frederick and Marcia Moses  
 Chrissy and Kevin Rice  
 Jennifer Ross  
 Taylor and Kari Schauer  
 Elizabeth Schilling  
 JD and Heather Schippert  
 Cecilia M. Schweizer, PhD  
 Maria and Michael Spencer  
 Robert H. Stewart, III  
 Robin Stursa  
 Reverend Stanley D. and Carol Wallace  
 Amy Wise

**\$100 and above**

Julie Abiecunas  
 Gina Chiaro  
 LeTosha Dawson  
 Corriene Dippel  
 Lynne Dragomier  
 Crystal Nacolle Dunivant  
 Cynthia Gansmiller  
 Laurie and Greg Gemberling  
 Christine D. Hendershot  
 The Honorable Michael L. Howard  
 and Debra Howard  
 Amanda and Jon Kendle  
 Michael and Suzanne Kremer  
 Peter J. Leahy  
 Sharon K. Luntz  
 Michael McGuinness  
 John and Laura Moses  
 Dane K. Parker  
 Gary and Monica Plauger  
 Adrienne Price  
 Safety Resources Company of Ohio  
 Mark J. and Cynthia M. Samolczyk  
 Katherine A. Schweizer  
 Jennifer and Jacob Scott  
 The Sherwin-Williams Company  
 Matching Gift Program  
 Jeff Sunderland  
 Laurie Vogt  
 Sister Catherine Walsh, CSA  
 Taylor Weaver  
 Edward D. and Susan M. Whitmore  
 Karen Young

**Friends**

AmazonSmile Foundation  
 Haley Belcher  
 Jessica Bennett  
 MaryBeth Bush  
 Jessica Cherok  
 James M. and Victoria S. Conley  
 Michael Courtney  
 Geehan Group  
 Derek and Emily Gordon  
 Lori Grosse  
 Liz Henke  
 Matthew and Kimberly Hinderegger

Todd Imwalle  
 Marian Jeris  
 Ashley Johnson  
 Alicia Jordan  
 Janet and Robert Kidney  
 Melanie Kungle  
 Brannon and Mandie Marshall  
 Kim Mullen  
 Nathanael P. and Shelly D. Munn  
 Jeff O'Neill  
 Thomas M. Paumier, DDS  
 Angela Perisic  
 April Porter  
 Mike Stull  
 Danielle Triplett  
 Jane Vignos  
 Charlene Wagner  
 Stephen T. and Donna M. Walters  
 Kaitlyn Wentz

**Tributes**

In memory of Eileen Close Lowe  
 James and Victoria Conley

In honor of Scott Hasselman  
 Cynthia Hunt

In honor of Cece Schweizer's birthday  
 Katherine A. Schweizer

**Volunteers**

Kiwanis Club of Canton  
 PNC area branch managers

**We would also like to thank a number of our donors/board members who have asked to remain anonymous.**

**2023 FUNDRAISER RECAP**

The 2023 Early Childhood Resource Center annual fundraiser was held at the Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium Sky Terrace on Thursday, September 14. Thanks to our generous sponsors, donors, and attendees, the event generated nearly \$60,000 in support of the SPARK kindergarten readiness program. We sincerely appreciate all who contributed to the success of this event.



**MAJOR THANKS**

In September 2023, the Early Childhood Resource Center received a \$25,000 gift from generous donors who wish to remain anonymous. This funding will allow our organization to continue serving local families in many ways in the coming year, including preparing area children to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. Thank you for helping us fulfill our mission!

**2024 GIFTS**

Should you wish to support the Early Childhood Resource Center in 2024, now is the perfect time to set up a recurring monthly or quarterly gift or to get a head start on your annual giving with a one-time gift.

Make a one-time or recurring gift by credit card or direct debit by scanning the QR code below or visiting [www.ecresourcecenter.org/donate](http://www.ecresourcecenter.org/donate).

Contact Taylor Weaver at 330.491.3272 or [tweaver@ecresourcecenter.org](mailto:tweaver@ecresourcecenter.org) for more information about additional giving options, such as:

- Charitable gift annuities
- Gifts of appreciated stock
- Deferred gifts from your estate
- Distributions from a retirement savings account



## OUR MISSION

The mission of 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.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

Early Childhood Resource Center provides a welcoming atmosphere, inclusive of all people, that honors, respects, and celebrates everyone's unique perspective. We encourage diversity and the sharing of thoughts and ideas to create a learning environment that is responsive to the needs of all young children and those who educate and care for them.

**The Early Childhood Resource Center has three regional offices located throughout the organization's service area:**

*(Administrative Office)*

1718 CLEVELAND AVENUE NORTHWEST  
CANTON, OHIO 44703

37 N. HIGH STREET, SUITE D  
AKRON, OHIO 44308

6414 MARKET STREET  
BOARDMAN, OHIO 44512



**EARLY CHILDHOOD  
RESOURCE CENTER**

*A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System*

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