



Community Chronicle

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER *Summer News 2023*

Planting Seeds of Success



One seed, by itself, never looks like much. It might be tiny, or wrinkled, or it may look like a discardable speck. However, when you plant that seed at just the right time, under the right conditions, it can develop into something amazing.

With children, as with seeds, timing matters a great deal. A child's earliest years are a critical time period that sets the stage for lifelong success. In fact, according to the First Things First organization, 90% of the brain is fully developed by the time a child turns 5 years old.¹ This is why early childhood care and education is so important.

So much growth and development takes place before children reach kindergarten. And data clearly support that the long-term impacts of high-quality early education are numerous and significant:

- A 2021 MIT study followed thousands of children who attended Boston Public Schools' public preschool program. The researchers found these children were suspended less often in high school, were less likely to be incarcerated as juveniles, and were more likely to enroll in college on time, compared to those who did not attend the public preschool program.²
- In another 2021 study, published by the journal *Child Development*, researchers compared children from low-income families to their peers from middle- and high-income families, following the children as they grew. At age 26, the individuals who grew up in low-income families and had had at least 24 months of high-quality early education were equally as

educated and earned just as much as their peers from higher-income families.³

- A 15-year landmark study, published in the *AERA Open* journal of the American Educational Research Association, followed the lives of 4,000 children. Its conclusions further reinforce the power of high-quality early education: "In 1998, Oklahoma became the first state to offer free public prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds. Tulsa's program was heralded for being well run and well funded, with an expenditure that would be the equivalent of \$12,000 per child in today's dollars. Children without preschool [experiences] managed to catch up to those who went to preschool. But in high school, an advantage for the preschoolers re-emerged. They were taking harder classes and more of them were graduating high school on time. In the latest study, published in January 2023, children who went to preschool were far more likely to go to college within a couple years of graduating high school."⁴

These recent studies join an ever-growing body of research showing the influence of early childhood education on numerous components of life success, including levels of educational attainment, family stability, criminal history, and emotional well-being.

With children, as with seeds, timing matters a great deal.

A child's earliest years are a critical time period that sets the stage for lifelong success.



Dear Friends,

At the Early Childhood Resource Center, the child is at the center of everything we do. There's a reason for that: we know that when we keep the child as our focus, great things happen.

Everything we do plants the seeds for our community's future. In this newsletter, you'll learn about some recent seeds we've planted:

- Through our Business Operations and Staffing Solutions (BOSS) project, we're helping child care administrators realize stability and sustainability by instilling sound business practices and teaching staff retention strategies. This way, their doors can remain open as families need them for years to come.
- Our SPARK program is about to send more than 1,000 children off to kindergarten ready to succeed. We're confident they're getting the best possible start, thanks to the skills they've developed throughout the program.
- By co-hosting the recent community Foster Care Expo, we've shared valuable information and resources with nearly 100 families interested in pursuing foster care. This outreach and support helps ensure loving homes are available for the numerous children in our region who are in need of care.

Why do we do this work? Because we know it helps children develop the confidence needed to succeed and the foundational skills that encourage lifelong learning. In addition, our efforts also help our entire community. Economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman has determined that for every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education, the community gains \$13 as a result of the positive effects the investment has on a wide variety of life outcomes, including those related to health, crime, education levels, and income.¹ It's clear that planting those seeds benefits every one of us.

With great optimism,

KIRSTIN S. TOTH, BOARD CHAIR

SCOTT HASSELMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Continued from page 1

No matter which aspect of life has been examined, the conclusion has been the same: those who received high-quality early childhood education went on to lead more successful lives.

This is why early childhood professionals are so committed. They know their work is the great equalizer. If a child is fortunate enough to come from an affluent family that has the resources to fully support his or her healthy development, high-quality early childhood education enhances the benefits the child receives at home. And if a child is in a more vulnerable life situation, high-quality early childhood education can provide the advantages needed to break free from the cycle of poverty and succeed.

We salute early educators everywhere and encourage you all to keep planting those seeds of success; we know they're the seeds that will bear fruit for generations to come. ♦



INCREASING IMPACT: A TWO-GENERATION STRATEGY

While we know early childhood programs are highly effective, children need other supports as well. Research shows using two-generation strategies, or those that aim to help both parents and their children, are even more beneficial to a child's development.

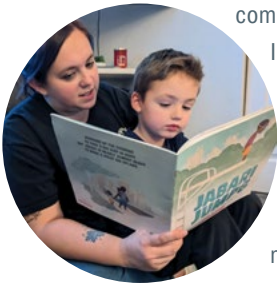
For example, we know that less chaotic home experiences are key to helping children thrive.⁵ As a result, programs like the one offered by Head Start of Lane County, Oregon, are teaching parents ways to reduce stress while also helping their young children learn to regulate emotions.⁶

Two-generation strategies like these are powerful, which is why the Early Childhood Resource Center serves parents as well as children and educators. By helping parents understand their children's development, we prepare them to better support healthy development as their children grow. By equipping parents to strengthen their families and get their children ready for kindergarten, we offer the children in our community the best possible advantage. By teaching educators to engage parents in their children's learning, we enable parents to become their children's lifelong learning advocates. Our parenting classes, fatherhood programming, and supportive services for kinship and adoption caregivers, as well as our professional development opportunities for teachers, are all designed to provide the support and guidance that can make all the difference in a child's life.

SPARKing Growth

HERE'S HOW WE'VE PREPARED OUR SPARK CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS.

COOPER and his mom snuggle up to read *Jabari Jumps*. This story has become a fast favorite because of its wonderful, relatable storyline. Throughout the reading, Cooper



comments, “Hey—I do that too!” or “I know how that feels.”

It’s so important for children to make connections to characters in

stories by identifying similarities between themselves and the characters. Doing this helps them build empathy, a vital interpersonal skill that helps children successfully navigate their social world and establish positive relationships with adults and peers. When Cooper demonstrates awareness of emotions, he can begin to respond to another’s distress in caring ways. For example, he can show concern for the needs and feelings of others. Social competence is a foundational skill we work hard to cultivate in the SPARK program, not only because it’s a vital part of school success, but also because our world needs more helpers and empathizers.

Kindergarten readiness requires a wide range of knowledge and skills, including the **social-emotional skills** Cooper is strengthening as he relates to the character in his book. Through SPARK, Cooper is developing skills he will need to use when sharing, taking turns, answering questions, and bonding with his peers.

Children who participate in SPARK also spend lots of time strengthening the **fine motor skills** they’ll need in school.



For instance, when first starting SPARK, **CHANCELOR** often needed to be reminded how to hold a writing utensil properly. Then, one day, he just picked up a marker and it fell into his hand perfectly, like he had been doing it that way all along. He made good use of his newly mastered skill, making sure to take his time as he traced over letters with patience and grace. Now, he’s well on his way to writing, painting, cutting, and sculpting with ease—all because of the coordination he developed during his SPARK lessons!



With help from her parents, **AMELIA** is not just spelling her full name correctly—she’s also making sure the letters stay

on the correct lines during her SPARK lessons. She’s learning sequencing and number order as well. She’s acquiring the **academic knowledge** needed to succeed in kindergarten. Academic knowledge includes knowing letters, numbers, shapes, and patterns, and having print awareness—all critical skills for kindergarten and every grade thereafter.

Participating in SPARK is a highly effective way to help children develop readiness skills. By assessing skill levels when a child first begins participating, and then again after they’ve participated for some time, we’re able to measure each child’s progress and provide extra support when needed. The assessment scores clearly show that SPARK participants significantly strengthen their literacy and math skills over their time in the program.

We’re so proud of the more than 1,000 SPARK children throughout the state who will be transitioning to kindergarten this fall. Like Cooper, Chancellor, and Amelia, they’ve worked hard to gain the skills that will help them succeed in the classroom and beyond. ✦

SPARK support doesn’t stop once lessons are over. We send each SPARK child off to kindergarten with their very own backpack containing all the school supplies the child will need throughout the year.

We also help children through the transition into kindergarten. During the first week of school, SPARK parent partners assist at many SPARK schools. We’ve found that having a familiar face present can help put children at ease as they’re getting used to the school environment.





Shawn Crable, former NFL player and ECRC employee, speaking on his experience as a foster child.

Foster Care Expo

The Early Childhood Resource Center recently partnered with the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services and numerous public and private foster care agencies throughout Northeast and East-Central Ohio to co-host a Foster Care Expo for current and prospective foster caregivers.

COMMUNITY
PARTNERS

Held on April 29 at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, the Expo featured guest speaker Shawn Crable, a former Early Childhood Resource Center employee (and former linebacker for the New England Patriots) who grew up in foster care.

During his keynote address, Shawn shared about his experiences, noting how foster and kinship caregivers stand in the gap and play a vital role in helping families heal and reconnect. These families or individuals provide temporary care for children while local children's services agencies work with the children's primary families toward reunification.

The event was critically important, as the need for foster caregivers is currently at an all-time high. In fact, the number of Ohio kinship homes and placement of foster children with relatives has increased 47% since 2016.

Nearly 15,000 Ohio children are living somewhere other than their parents' homes, but only around 6,000 foster homes are available.¹

Families attending the Expo had the opportunity to learn about becoming licensed foster caregivers and to network with vendors and representatives from community agencies who provide resources and support.

This Expo was the first event of its kind in Ohio, with public and private agencies joining forces to promote the cause. The event was deemed a success, with one prospective foster parent even taking the first step to become licensed by enrolling in her first pre-service class. We hope to see many more follow in the months ahead, because all children deserve to grow and thrive in a stable environment. ♦

The BOSS Project: It's Just Good Business

It's no secret that the pandemic placed enormous strain on child care centers. Even before the pandemic, most centers were operating with razor-thin profit margins. In its 2021 report entitled *The Economics of Child Care Supply in the United States*, the US Department of the Treasury frames the problem by stating, "The child care sector is a crucial and underfunded part of the American economy."¹

Even in the best of times, shrewd operational strategies can determine whether a business is sustainable or ultimately closes.

Our Business Operations & Staffing Solutions (BOSS) project equips child care administrators with the knowledge, tools, and strategies they need to build sustainable business models. Since September, a group of around 20 child care administrators has been working with our early childhood specialists to learn about developing operating polices, forecasting finances, recruiting and retaining staff, and working toward financial sustainability. Nationally recognized consultant and author Karen Foster-Jorgensen has been teaching the administrators to analyze their financial statements and create business plans, and

local consultant Mark Plaster has helped the cohort address staffing challenges and engage employees.

Tammy Maffei, director of Latchkey Kids in Norton, says participating in the BOSS program has helped her tremendously. Latchkey Kids provides before- and after-school care. The center had been charging on an hourly basis; however, working with Karen Foster-Jorgensen helped Tammy understand that transitioning to a per-day rate would strengthen her finances significantly. In fact, the analyses she conducted through the BOSS project helped Tammy pinpoint several changes to further enhance the center's bottom line. Additionally, she learned concrete strategies for creating a positive work environment and handling staff conflict, both of which are critical elements of staff retention.

Through the BOSS project, Tammy has come to value the benefits of using Procare software, which offers a suite of business automation functions specifically for child care centers. She had begun using Procare a year before participating in BOSS, but Procare is extensive and requires a steep learning curve. The BOSS coaching Tammy received from the Early Childhood Resource Center helped her learn to use

the software efficiently.

But that's not all. Tammy also benefited from networking with other BOSS project participants. All administrators wear so many hats. Connecting with others in similar roles helped Tammy see that she wasn't the only one experiencing certain challenges.

For example, before Marcia Ruse participated in BOSS, she found financial tasks to be quite time consuming. As the director of Bazetta Christian Childcare Center in Cortland, Marcia was hoping to maximize operational efficiency. As she states, "Every Tuesday, I would have to prepare an invoice for each child, print the invoice out, and place the invoice in parent mailboxes. Every Monday, I would collect the checks out of our drop-box and proceed to process tuition payments. I would make copies of the checks and drive to the bank to make a deposit. At the end of December, I would run a report and type out letters for parents filing income tax. It was time-consuming and a nightmare."

With support from Early Childhood Resource Center staff and Procare representatives, Marcia, too, began using Procare software to streamline operations. Marcia was thrilled with the results, as were her staff and families. "Parents were excited that they could make payments from their cell phones. Teachers [can now] do lesson plans and child assessments online. Finally, the hours I spent on invoices, receiving payments, scheduling, and payroll have been reduced tremendously. I would recommend implementing Procare in any child care center."

With strategies gained through the BOSS project and continued coaching and support from the Early Childhood Resource Center, these centers will now be able to serve families for as long as they are needed. ♦

Renowned early childhood consultant Karen Foster-Jorgensen leads a BOSS training session.





REACHING
OUT

Local high school students collected over 1,000 books that will be distributed to children and families.

BOOKS, BOOKS, EVERYWHERE



Book Drives: Once again this year, students enrolled in the teacher academies at GlenOak, Hoover, and Perry high schools very generously held a book drive to collect new and gently used children's books. Dozens of boxes filled with books were then donated to the Early Childhood Resource Center. We thank these students, as well as our employees who volunteered to clean and sticker all 1,008 donated books. We look forward to giving these books to the children and families we serve. ♦

Take a Book, Leave a Book: New at our Canton location: this spring, a Little Free Library was installed in the corner of our parking lot near the fence that surrounds our outdoor playscape. We invite all Stark County readers to come check out our selection of books, which range from board books for infants all the way up to novels for adults. Visitors will primarily find a large array of new and gently used children's books and young adult literature, with new titles added each week. ♦



Huddle Up: Save the Date!



**Join us for our Kindergarten Kickoff Fundraising Event
Thursday, September 14
from 5:30-8:30 pm
at the Hall of Fame Village Sky Terrace**

Enjoy an evening under the stars while supporting our SPARK kindergarten readiness program.

Tickets are \$75 each and will go on sale soon.

Visit ecresourcecenter.org/fundraiser for additional details.





EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

1718 CLEVELAND AVENUE NORTHWEST
CANTON, OHIO 44703

ecresourcecenter.org

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage

PAID

Canton, OH
Permit No. 648

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.

ECRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kirstin Toth, Chair

Joe Luckring, Vice Chair

Richard Craig, Treasurer

Michele Benson, Secretary

Taylor Schauer, Immediate Past Chair

Bradley Belden

Melissa Chow

Allyson V. James

Dr. Anju Mader

Marisa Rohn

Dr. Jennifer Ross

Robert H. Stewart, III

Sr. Catherine Walsh

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 3-year terms.

HELP PLANT THE SEEDS OF SUCCESS

You can help make a difference!

Give a \$25 gift to help success take root for a child in our community.

Your generous contribution can:

- Help children prepare for kindergarten
- Equip moms and dads with the skills they need to strengthen their families
- Help educators learn effective techniques for teaching our little ones everything they need to know

Together, we can cultivate a thriving future for our community!

To give securely online, visit bit.ly/giveecrc



For more information and for center hours, visit ecresourcecenter.org
or call us at 877.691.8521.