



# Growing Together.

# Growing Together in Purpose:

**APPROACHING 25 YEARS OF CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY**



## **Dear Friends,**

When we think about early childhood, we often picture the precious milestones of a child's development, from their first steps to their first words. At the Early Childhood Resource Center, our focus goes beyond these moments; we are dedicated to supporting the growth of families as a whole. This journey of collective growth can vary in duration—some paths may unfold over months, while others may span years. Regardless of the trajectory, we are here to provide unwavering support.

Over the past year, we have experienced significant growth and transformation, and we are excited to share some of these highlights with you.

## **Growing Our Team**

In September 2024, we were thrilled to welcome two new members to our Executive Team: John Neidert, Senior Program Director, and Tiffany Roper, Director of Outreach and Parent Education. Additionally, in June 2024, we were honored to once again receive state funding to continue serving as the

Child Care Resource and Referral agency for Stark, Summit, Portage, Medina, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties. This support has allowed us to onboard several new staff members, as well as promote several employees to supervisory roles, which ultimately expands our ability to serve local children.

## **Supporting the Community**

In partnership with the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, we recently added two Parent and Youth Ambassadors to our team. These individuals bring invaluable lived experience to the role and are dedicated to providing resources and support across the entire ecosystem of services available to families. From child care referrals and foster, kinship, and adoption supports to maternal and infant wellness resources, our ambassadors are here to help families navigate the complexities of state and local social systems to access the support they need.

Our SPARK program has also expanded, now serving Springfield Public Schools, which extends the reach



of our kindergarten readiness program to benefit even more children and families across Summit County.

Additionally, we have begun hosting monthly in-person Parent Cafés within each of the six counties we serve, fostering community among parents/caregivers and providing a safe space for open communication.

### **Celebrating 25 years in 2025**

As we reflect on the achievements of the past year, we eagerly anticipate celebrating the Early Childhood Resource Center’s 25th anniversary in 2025. This milestone is a testament to the growth of our organization and the impact we have made in promoting the healthy development of young children and strengthening families. We look forward to commemorating this special occasion with events, historical reflections, and shared stories throughout the year. Visit [www.ecresourcecenter.org/25years](http://www.ecresourcecenter.org/25years) for more details.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to each of you for your continued support. Whether through financial contributions, advocating for our services, partnering with us, or attending our events, your involvement is essential to achieving our mission. This 2024 Impact Report highlights the influence of your contributions, and we invite you to explore the stories, achievements, and milestones made possible by your support.

Thank you for being a vital part of the Early Childhood Resource Center. Together, we are growing a strong community.

Warm regards,

**Joseph Luckring**, 2024-2025 Board Chair

**Angela Moses**, Executive Director

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**This report highlights our  
work over FY24, from July  
2023 to June 2024.**

**2,199**

Children  
served



**15,266**

Home visits



**19,664** Books  
distributed



Ohio  
school  
districts  
served

# Nurturing Readiness

Every day, the Early Childhood Resource Center team nurtures growth by supporting preschoolers and their families as they prepare for kindergarten. Just as a strong tree begins with deep roots, a child's educational journey is built on a foundation of early learning and family support.

**Starting school is a major developmental milestone—one that shapes both children and parents—and a smooth transition into kindergarten fosters future academic and life success.** However, school readiness is about more than just recognizing letters or counting to 100. It's about growing essential skills—early literacy, math, fine and gross motor, and social-emotional development—all of which help children thrive in school and beyond. The Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program plants these seeds of success by sending trained staff directly into family homes. These dedicated parent partners cultivate learning and confidence, equipping both parents and children with the tools they need to flourish in kindergarten and beyond. Together, we're not just preparing children for school—we're growing stronger families, confident learners, and a brighter future.





## One Family's SPARK Story: Overcoming Challenges Together\*



**Our journey with the Early Childhood Resource Center's SPARK kindergarten readiness program began years ago, and it has truly been a lifeline for our family.**

Over the years, we've faced many challenges, from poverty and food insecurity to periods without running water and a lack of basic necessities. Through all of these obstacles, the support we've received from the Early Childhood Resource Center has made a world of difference.

Violet, our eldest, was the first to benefit from the SPARK program in 2020. She was shy at first, but she quickly grew to love her "school time" with Missy, our assigned SPARK Parent Partner. Despite the disruptions we experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Missy found ways to continue providing regular SPARK lessons, including meeting with us at her office. Violet learned so much by participating in SPARK, from colors and counting to letter sounds and rhyming. Writing her name was something she struggled with, but thanks to Missy's patience and encouragement, she eventually mastered this skill, as well.

After Violet graduated from SPARK and successfully transitioned to kindergarten, we enrolled Katie, our spirited daughter who never shies away from a challenge. Mastering her numbers proved to be a bit difficult for Katie at first; however, Missy turned the lesson into a fun song, and soon Katie was counting confidently.

Next, it was our son Chase's turn to experience SPARK. Missy knew just how to adapt each activity to meet the needs of our energetic boy who found

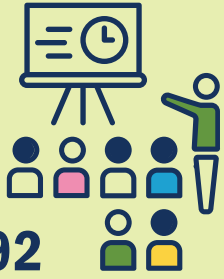
it hard to sit still for long periods of time and incorporated "brain breaks" into each lesson. She also helped us secure the speech services our son needed, facilitating an evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) with Canton City Schools.

I'm thrilled to report all three of our older children are now thriving in school. They attend AIM Academy, Canton City's year-round program. Missy's dedication to serving as our SPARK Parent Partner has left a lasting impact on our family. In fact, she still checks in on the kids several times a year, which shows just how much she cares.

Now, it's even easier for Missy to check in, as she is serving as the Parent Partner for our youngest daughter Allie, who recently started SPARK. During Allie's first lesson, I shared with Missy that I was taking custody of my younger brother, and his kindergarten assessment revealed that he lacked basic readiness skills, which broke my heart. He didn't know how to count or his letters, letter sounds, colors, or shapes. I was reminded how my older children had learned all of these things through SPARK, and I realized the profound impact Missy has had on our family. Her dedication ensured my kids were prepared for school, and for that, I am forever grateful. ✦

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*\*Details of this SPARK family's story have been summarized and shared with permission; though, names of the children have been changed to protect the family's privacy*

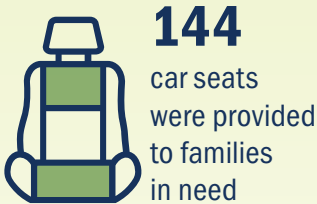


**792** individuals participated in evidence-based parenting education classes



**340** individuals participated in Parent Cafés

**702** dads received fatherhood services



**144** car seats were provided to families in need



**2,652** visits to our Inspiration Station & Children's Library

**74** families referred to foster/adoptive agencies

**250** kinship/adoptive families were connected to resources and supports

# Strengthening Families

**Every day, the Early Childhood Resource Center helps families grow stronger together, preparing them to navigate life's challenges with confidence.**

Just as a tree grows over time, strong families are nurtured through consistent care, support, and meaningful interactions. Our classes, coaching, and resources provide the essential building blocks that help families establish deep roots and a solid foundation, which allows them to branch out and build a brighter future for generations to come.

## HEARTFELT APPRECIATION

Parenting is a rewarding journey of never-ending growth—one that comes with challenges, learning, and endless opportunities to nurture strong family connections. No matter how much experience a parent has, there's always room to grow in knowledge and confidence.

At the Early Childhood Resource Center, we're here to support that growth by offering valuable resources and a wide array of evidence-based parent education courses designed to empower parents and caregivers.

Our classes have a meaningful impact, especially for those navigating co-parenting relationships. The gratitude we receive from participants speaks to the lasting difference these programs make. Here's a glimpse at some of the heartfelt thank-you notes our staff received over the past year.

*"Thank you! This class helped me better understand how kids' brains work and how to be a better parent to my children."*

*"Thank you for making this class available. It has helped me better understand my three kids and the various stages they are all going through as they grow. The open class environment made it feel safe and relaxed."*

*"Thank you for coming and teaching this class. I have a lot better understanding of how both men and women think now. You have taught me things that I didn't know previously and have helped me learn more about parenting and relationships, while changing my mindset about split housing for my daughter. Thank you for coming. I really appreciate you."*

*"Thank you. I have learned a lot about what kind of parent I am, as well as different ways to improve my parenting and my relationship with my daughter."*





Early Childhood Resource Center staff regularly facilitate Parent Cafés. Two past Café sessions held at our Canton office are shown here.

## Parent Cafés: Facilitating Family Connections

A Parent Café is a structured, yet informal gathering where parents and caregivers come together to share experiences, build relationships, and strengthen their parenting skills. These events are designed to provide a supportive space for open conversations about parenting challenges, successes, and personal growth.

The Early Childhood Resource Center has several team members who are specially trained to host Parent Cafés, which utilize The Five Protective Factors framework to help families build resilience, strengthen connections, and access valuable resources. Café discussions typically focus on topics such as managing stress, child development, effective communication, and self-care.

The goal of a Parent Café is to foster a sense of community among parents/caregivers while equipping them with knowledge and strategies to support both their own well-being and their children's. Parent Cafés are designed to encourage open communication among attendees, allowing them to share experiences, learn from one another, and build supportive networks. Cafés provide a safe and nurturing space for attendees to discuss a wide variety of topics related to parenting and family life.

The structured format of Parent Cafés includes guided discussions and activities that create a supportive atmosphere where participants feel comfortable sharing their personal stories and challenges. This environment of trust and mutual

respect enables parents/caregivers to open up about their experiences, leading to meaningful connections and personal growth.

Recently, Early Childhood Resource Center staff hosted a Parent Café at the Columbiana Jail, focusing on the theme of Family Connections. Among the participants were two sisters who had been estranged for some time due to deep-seated family tensions. As the Café unfolded, the structured discussions and supportive environment encouraged the siblings to engage with one another in a way they hadn't in years. Through guided conversation, shared reflections, and the support of fellow participants, the sisters began to see past their misunderstandings. They realized how addiction had fueled their divisions and how much they truly needed each other. With tears in their eyes, they embraced—allowing years of pain and resentment to begin melting away. In that moment, the Parent Café became more than just a discussion space; it became a bridge to healing and growth. The sisters expressed their gratitude to the group, acknowledging that without the Café's structured-yet-compassionate environment, they might never have found the courage to reconnect.

This powerful moment highlights the true impact of Parent Cafés—not just as a place for learning, but as a space where relationships are rebuilt, understanding is fostered, and families grow stronger together. ♦



**6,668**

Coaching and technical assistance sessions provided to **667** child care programs



**10,331**

Educators attended **722** training classes offered by ECRC staff

Helped **618** parents find high-quality child care



# Educating Teachers

**Every day, we help early childhood professionals grow in their ability to support young learners as they develop the skills needed for success. Teaching is a dynamic and demanding role—one that requires continuous learning, adaptability, and support.**

At the Early Childhood Resource Center, we're committed to nurturing educators and providing needed supports by offering training in developmentally appropriate practices, answering questions related to the state's Step Up to Quality rating system, and offering expert guidance from specialists who truly understand the challenges and rewards of early childhood education. Together, we are strengthening educators, empowering young learners, and planting the seeds for successful communities.



*Child Development Associate program graduate Mackenzie, pictured center, along with some of the children she cares for each day as a lead teacher.*





## Mackenzie's Journey: From Student to Lead Teacher

In 2024, Mackenzie, a single mother of two young children, proudly earned her associate degree in early childhood education—a critical milestone on the path to achieving her dreams. Her sights are now set on earning a bachelor's degree, but Mackenzie's journey started with her participation in the Child Development Associate (CDA) program at the Early Childhood Resource Center.

Made possible through funding from Ohio Means Jobs of Stark and Tuscarawas counties, the Early Childhood Resource Center's CDA program provides free coursework, hands-on coaching, paid on-the-job training, and invaluable mentorship to individuals who are passionate about shaping young minds. For Mackenzie, the program became more than just the first step on a rewarding career path—it became a solid foundation for her future.

Balancing motherhood and education, Mackenzie immediately put the knowledge she gained in the classroom into practice with her own children. In addition to attending CDA classes, she also gained real-world experience through the program, which assisted her in finding a job placement with a local child care center. It was here that Mackenzie discovered her passion for nurturing young learners. As her confidence and expertise grew, following her training, Mackenzie sought employment at a child care center that shared her philosophy on early childhood education. With the support of her Early Childhood Resource Center coach, Mackenzie connected with a high-quality child care program in Stark County and was hired as an assistant teacher.

Mackenzie's hard work and dedication to her role did not go unnoticed. Within just one month of earning her CDA credential, she was promoted to lead toddler teacher. She embraced her new role wholeheartedly,

inspiring both children and fellow educators with her commitment to early learning.

Now, Mackenzie is paying it forward. She regularly speaks to groups of aspiring educators, sharing her experiences and encouraging them to pursue their own paths in early childhood education. Reflecting on her journey, Mackenzie shared:

*“I love being a teacher because of the children. Hearing parents tell me what their kids have learned in my classroom is my biggest motivation.”*

Mackenzie's story is one of perseverance, growth, and the incredible impact of the Early Childhood Resource Center's CDA program. Through education, mentorship, and determination, she has transformed her life—and the lives of the children and families she serves. Her journey proves that with the right support and a willingness to grow, anything is possible. ♦

### CDA

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, administered by the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, DC, is a nationally recognized credential that focuses on the skills of early care and education professionals. Built around six core competencies, CDA candidates earn 120 hours of training in eight subject areas, compile a professional portfolio, collect questionnaires from parents, and are observed by a professional development specialist as they care for children in a group setting.

## Empowering Growth at The Learning Tree

**Growth is at the heart of everything the team at The Learning Tree does. This is evident in the Trumbull County child care center's recent efforts to enhance the quality of early education and professional development for its staff. With the dedicated support of Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) specialists, The Learning Tree is implementing the following targeted initiatives in language and literacy; infant and toddler care; and professional coaching to cultivate an environment where children and teachers grow together toward success:**

### **Fostering Language and Literacy Development**

Thanks to funding from the United Way of Trumbull County, three preschool and pre-K classrooms at The Learning Tree have been actively engaged in improving early literacy experiences. Through this work, Early Childhood Resource Center staff used the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) assessment to provide Learning Tree educators with a comprehensive analysis of their classroom environment and teaching practices. Then, over the course of six months, teachers worked with ECRC specialists to set personalized goals that enhance language and literacy support for their young learners. This project not only enriches classroom instruction, but also provides teachers with valuable classroom materials, books to be distributed to families to encourage engagement, and other literacy-focused resources to reinforce learning at home.

Additionally, the LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis) Program has helped Learning Tree's pre-K educators measure and improve language interactions with children. This program uses cutting-edge tools to capture the number of words spoken by caregivers—and subsequent child vocalizations, offering real-time insights to encourage meaningful conversations that build early literacy skills.

### **Strengthening Infant and Toddler Classrooms**

The Learning Tree is also participating in the ECRC's Infant and Toddler project, which is funded by OCCRRA (the Ohio Child Care Resource and

Referral Association) and leverages Child Care Resource and Referral grant funding from the Ohio Department of Children and Youth. This initiative focuses on quality enhancement in early childhood environments through the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS). Conducting a pre- and post-assessment helps specialists and educators collaboratively develop customized action plans, ensuring that infant and toddler classrooms provide the highest level of care and learning experiences.

The project also includes six Ohio Approved virtual training sessions, covering essential topics such as language, math, science, art, transitions, books, and social studies. These sessions, paired with monthly onsite coaching, empower educators with tailored strategies that not only strengthen their classrooms but also highlight and build upon their individual strengths as teachers.

### **Bringing Families Into the Learning Journey**

Recognizing that early childhood education thrives when families are engaged, the ECRC helped organize a Language and Literacy family education and engagement event, which was funded by United Way of Trumbull County. Families gathered to participate in storytime, crafts, and a shared meal, while also having the opportunity to enroll their children in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Each child received a swag bag filled with educational materials, ensuring that learning continues beyond the classroom. By strengthening family-school connections, the event further



Early Childhood Resource Center staff assisted The Learning Tree in hosting a recent family education and engagement event focused on language and literacy.



reinforced the idea that children, educators, and families all grow together in their shared pursuit of educational success.

### Impacting Educators and the Community

The Early Childhood Resource Center has provided personalized coaching, high-quality resources, and professional development opportunities that have transformed The Learning Tree’s classrooms and empowered its teachers.

One administrator shared, “The support from the ECRC has been invaluable. The training and resources provided have significantly improved our ability to prepare children for kindergarten and enhanced the quality of our infant and toddler classrooms.”

At The Learning Tree, growth is not measured in numbers alone—it is reflected in the confidence of

teachers, the curiosity of children, and the strength of family bonds. With the support of the Early Childhood Resource Center staff, the Learning Tree continues to blossom, proving that when educators, children, and families grow together, the entire community thrives. ♦

*“Participating in projects offered by the ECRC has not only benefited the children we serve, but has also helped our staff grow professionally. Their coaching and guidance have been crucial in setting and achieving our goals.”*





## 2024 CONTRIBUTORS

# MANY THANKS



We sincerely appreciate each and every one of you who share our vision and support our mission. Your generosity allows us to make a meaningful difference in the communities we serve, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

This listing reflects gifts received from January-December 2024.

### GRANTORS/FUNDERS

City of Akron  
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National Fund for Workforce Solutions/  
Fund for Our Economic Future  
Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA)  
Ohio Department of Children and Youth  
—Child Care Resource and Referral  
—Governor’s Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives  
—Ohio Commission on Fatherhood  
Ohio Department of Education  
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(OhioMeansJobs Stark and Tuscarawas Counties)  
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**In honor of Mary Brady's Retirement**  
Psychological & Educational Solutions

#### **In memory of Theodore Savastano**

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#### **In memory of Sister Michael, Saint Paul Grade School**

Anonymous

#### **Volunteers**

PNC area branch managers

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

# Spark Success Annual Fundraiser

EARLY CHILDHOOD  
RESOURCE CENTER

## 2024 Fundraiser Recap

The 2024 Early Childhood Resource Center annual fundraiser took place at the Metropolitan Event Centre in Downtown Canton on Thursday, September 12. The event theme, To Infinity and Beyond, perfectly captured our aspirations, as we look to celebrate our 25th anniversary in 2025.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, donors, and attendees, the event successfully raised more than \$65,000 to support the SPARK Kindergarten Readiness Program. Additionally, attendees donated 43 backpacks filled with school supplies to be distributed to SPARK program graduates to facilitate their smooth transition to kindergarten. Heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to the success of this event.

### THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS



**THANK YOU**, also, to our event in-kind donors:  
Angello's 2 Go and Santangelo's Catering



## Major Thanks

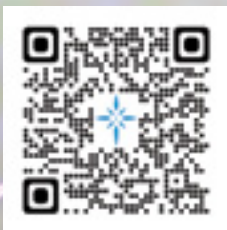
We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our anonymous donors, who, once again, have generously gifted \$25,000 to the Early Childhood Resource Center, allowing our organization to continue strengthening families and promoting the healthy development of young children.

## 2025 Gifts

If you would like to support the work of the Early Childhood Resource Center in 2025, consider making a recurring monthly or quarterly gift. You can make a one-time or recurring donation via 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



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