



SPARK joins the Early Childhood Resource Center

After a decade, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton will be entrusting the management and operation of SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids™) to the Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) in Canton.



SPARK is a parent-focused intervention program that works with families, schools and the community to increase children's readiness for kindergarten, increases parents' effectiveness as learning advocates for their children, and improves children's transitions into elementary school. More information is available at sparkohio.org.

Over the past decade, SPARK has been managed by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton and has served more than 3,600 Ohio children. This fall, the program expanded to serve nine counties and 1,400 children. In Stark County alone, SPARK reaches more than 460 families in Alliance, Canton, Massillon, and Minerva.

SPARK rounds out the ECRC's diverse array of offerings for families that include educational children's programs, family support services, and parenting education. The Center also has a unique collaboration with the Stark County District Library and houses a specialized early childhood library. It currently has more than 1,500 members. With the addition of SPARK, the ECRC becomes a one-stop early childhood resource.

Live Well Stark County Awards Grants for Community Gardens

Live Well Stark County, a volunteer group of community leaders, recently awarded five grants of up to \$4,000 for the creation or expansion of community garden and nutrition education programs for low-income Stark County residents. The goal of the grant program is to teach low-income families about good nutrition, increase access to healthy foods, and reduce consumption of unhealthy foods.



A community garden is a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people. Community gardens in low-income neighborhoods expand access to fresh produce, thereby improving residents' health and reducing grocery expenses. They also serve to beautify neighborhoods and promote a sense of community.

Grant funds were provided by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, a Live Well Stark County member organization. Other member organizations and partners will play key roles in implementing this program, including Ohio State University Extension-Stark County, the Stark County Health Department and Stark Parks. The group is looking forward to collecting and analyzing program surveys to determine how this pilot program can be improved and expanded.

Bethlehem Project for Oral Health receives Give Kids a Smile Day grant

The Foundation of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children grant program awarded the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton's Bethlehem Project for Oral Health the program's maximum funding level of \$20,000. Bethlehem was one of only 15 awards made out of 63 proposals from across the country! The grant will support incentives for Give Kids a Smile Day screening participation, educational and oral hygiene materials, and oral care coordination services for children identified as needing follow-up care during Give Kids a Smile Day in February 2014.



Foundation President Appointed Chair of Early Childhood Advisory Council

We congratulate Foundation President Joni T. Close, who was appointed in March by Ohio Governor John Kasich to be the chairperson of the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council. The 25-member council includes a diverse array of stakeholders from early childhood programs, schools, higher education, state departments, foundations, and other groups. The Council provides advice and guidance to the Governor's office and legislative leaders on state policy issues and seeks to align and coordinate programs serving Ohio children from the prenatal period through kindergarten, with a focus on promoting school readiness. Joni has been serving on the Council since 2010.



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