



Innovation & Possibility

2020 IMPACT REPORT

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER

LESSONS FROM 2020

One of my favorite quotes from this year was “We are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm.” Even though we may all be living through this pandemic, not everyone is dealing with it the same way. Others may have battles or struggles that are harder for them to handle. I will take this into the new year and be kind to others, no matter the situation.

Danielle Bunner
SPARK Supervisor

I learned that I am much more tech savvy than I would have ever thought possible. I can Zoom and navigate Google Classroom like nobody’s business!

Tina Lemon
Early Childhood Specialist

Our ability and need to change program delivery allowed us to think outside of the box. Despite many obstacles, we never lost sight of the main goal: to serve families.

Danielle Triplett
SPARK Supervisor



I have become a lot more adaptable to challenges—and to technology!

Gary Plauger
Parent Engagement Coordinator

I learned that early care professionals are some of the strongest people I know.

Megan Ballard
Early Childhood Specialist

I learned to never give up. Our programs are resilient and capable of adapting. COVID only added to our ability to serve families – we now have a way to reach them all.

Shawn Crable
Director of Parent Engagement

Dear Friends:

In 2019, when we were planning out the Early Childhood Resource Center’s strategic direction, we envisioned many possibilities. But we couldn’t have envisioned, or prepared for, the events of 2020.

Looking back over the year, it’s clear how much an organization can accomplish when its board, staff, and community partners are determined, resilient, and committed.

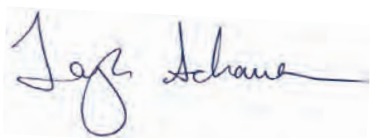
When the ground shifted under our feet, we could have given up. Instead, we chose to innovate. Using technology, creative approaches, and constant readjustment, we accomplished our goals in new ways.

And even better, we learned. Having to adapt teaches lots of lessons; in this report, we’ve included the perspectives of our staff members on some of the lessons they learned over the year.

We are so proud of them. They are some of the most dedicated and creative professionals we have had the privilege to work alongside. Their commitment to the communities they serve is ironclad.

We believe 2021 will bring brighter days. But we’ll carry with us those lessons we have learned, along with our continued commitment to the children, families, and educators we serve throughout our region.

With Optimism,



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Board Chair



Scott Hasselman
Executive Director



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Malyck: Ready for First Grade

1,680 CHILDREN SERVED

School Readiness and Beyond: Helping All Children Succeed

The average student has lost seven months' worth of learning due to the pandemic, while low-income students lost over a year. It's projected that these losses will worsen achievement gaps by 15 to 20 percent.¹ Through the Early Childhood Resource Center's SPARK kindergarten readiness program and SPARK Plus tutoring program, we work to ensure children begin school ready and eager to learn.

The SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) program is a parent-focused program that collaborates with families and schools to increase children's readiness for kindergarten, increase parents' effectiveness as their children's first teacher, and improve children's transitions into school.

In 2020, to mitigate pandemic-related learning loss, we developed and began to offer the much-needed SPARK Plus program, which provides individual tutoring to help K-2 students build the literacy and math skills they need to perform at grade level.

Since its inception, SPARK has partnered with school districts to address student needs. These longstanding partnerships led to a collaborative effort in the summer of 2020. SPARK Plus is an innovative program launched to address the academic needs of K-2 students affected by the pandemic.

SPARK parent partners worked with individual children to boost their academic, social, and emotional skills.

Through SPARK Plus, more than 100 students received the educational support they needed. Our valued partnerships with the school districts made the program possible. These partnerships are a core component of SPARK, and they strengthen our efforts to ensure ready kids.

Malyck started first grade in September. To get ready, he participated in the SPARK Plus summer tutoring program. As tutoring began, he struggled with sounds, individual letters, and rhyming. He scored a 39% on the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness pre-test.

Michelle is the SPARK parent partner who worked with Malyck every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday over the summer.

Like most kids his age, Malyck wasn't interested in sitting at a desk to do a worksheet: he wanted to be active, and he wanted to talk. So Michelle started each session off with engagement. She would ask him about his day, and really listen to the answer. Then she would turn their lesson into a game. During one session, she asked him to choose a colored marker and make an X on the tic-tac-toe board every time he answered a question correctly. She took the time to encourage and guide Malyck as he learned, saying, "watch me do it," then, "we can do it together," and finally, "now you do it."

When a child gets an answer right, Michelle's favorite expression to use is "kiss your brain!" When she says that, the child knows to kiss his hand and pat his head. Malyck loved that: his big brown eyes would light up every time he patted his own head.

Michelle is so proud of this "sweet as pie" young man. As summer ended, he took the Heggerty assessment again. This time, he scored a 94%!

When Michelle told Malyck that their time together would be ending, he looked at her and said, "I don't want you to leave."

Michelle was sad to see him go, but she knows she's done her job: she sent Malyck off to school prepared and ready to learn.



¹ www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime#

64 PARENTING CLASSES OFFERED

806 PARENTS ATTENDED

1,276 CHILDREN IMPACTED

Parent Engagement: Helping All Families Thrive

Children with involved fathers are twice as likely to enter college or find stable employment after high school, 80% less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms.²

By offering parenting classes, coaching, and mentoring, we work to ensure parents have the knowledge and resources to support their children’s healthy development.

Since receiving Ohio Commission on Fatherhood funding, the Early Childhood Resource Center has served fathers in Stark and Summit counties. Over the past year, we have provided parenting education, case management services, and court navigation services, and linked clients to employment services. Through our work, fathers have become more active in their children’s lives.

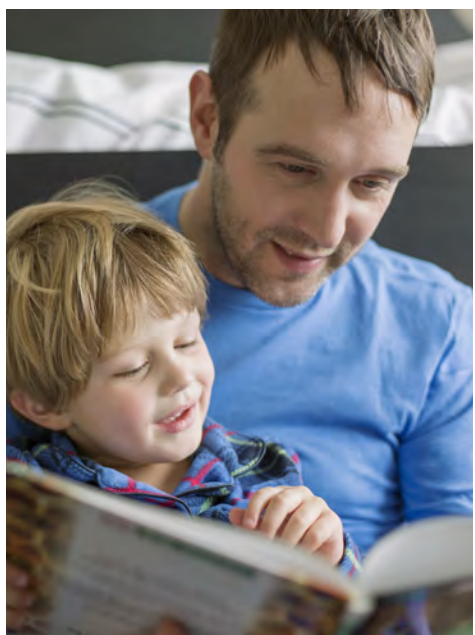
We help fathers get—and stay—engaged in their children’s lives.

Research and experience tell us that children succeed more often when Dad is in the picture. They grow up happier, healthier, and more adjusted. Their grades are better. They stay in school. They have the self-confidence that stems from the stable, consistent presence of both parents.

Our parenting classes and parent engagement services strengthen families by reinforcing parenting practices that enhance child well-being and lay the foundation for positive and constructive co-parenting relationships.

That has definitely been the case for Scott Wood. Parent Engagement Coordinator Gary Plauger elaborates:

“As I have watched Scott’s progress, I have seen tremendous growth in his understanding of what it is to be a father. As a result of this relatively new understanding, there is a passion to do better as a father and even as a person who is co-parenting. Scott’s overall confidence has certainly increased as a result—which benefits not only his son, but all those he comes in contact with.”



“I’m not quitting till I get my son in my life.” **Scott Wood**

Scott Wood is one determined guy. His six-year-old son Blake means absolutely everything to him, and Scott is committed to doing whatever it takes to be there for him.

Scott and Blake’s mom are no longer together, and Scott’s weekly visits with his son were very short. Scott knew that to increase the amount of time they could spend together, he would have to become a good role model and mentor to his son.

In August, Scott met with Parent Engagement Coordinator Gary Plauger. Gary could tell how frustrated Scott was, and also how determined. Scott learned that working with the Early Childhood Resource Center would strengthen his parenting skills—and help him prove that being a great dad was his highest priority.

At Gary’s suggestion, Scott has now taken three parenting courses: *First Five Years*, *Active Parenting Now*, and *24/7 Dad*, along with a first aid course, and Scott and Gary have been meeting weekly for individual coaching sessions.

Scott feels he has gained the skills necessary to be a dependable, supportive, compassionate father, and he’s also developed a much more positive co-parenting relationship with Blake’s mom.

Visitation times continue to get longer each week, and Scott remains determined to be the dad Blake needs.

909 TRAINING CLASSES OFFERED FOR 17,384 EDUCATORS

177 EDUCATORS COMPLETED CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE TRAINING

8,513 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COACHING SESSIONS PROVIDED

Professional Development: Supporting Child Care Businesses During the Pandemic

As many businesses were shutting down during the pandemic, child care providers offered an essential service for frontline workers. The Early Childhood Resource Center was there every step of the way to meet the needs of child care providers by distributing masks, thermometers, gloves, cot sheets, and cleaning supplies. In addition, we provided health and safety training, coaching, and peer support opportunities for providers isolated by the pandemic. We also provided large boxes filled with art supplies and learning materials; they were a much-appreciated addition.

The Early Childhood Resource Center is the state-designated Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, and Trumbull counties. By providing training, coaching and technical assistance, we work to ensure children have access to high-quality early learning experiences staffed by educated professionals. Together with our child care partners and funders, we have significantly increased the quality of early care and education programs in our region. The overriding goal is to ensure that providers increase their quality in the state's Step Up to Quality star rating system, which awards each provider from one to five stars based on adherence to standards. Providers that are considered highly rated are those that have earned three or more stars. Because of our efforts, more than half of the child care programs in our region are now highly rated.



LaToya: Making learning fun—and safe



“I did not know how creative I was until the pandemic hit,” says LaToya Williams.

At LaToya’s family child care home in Youngstown, she’s used to making learning fun: encouraging hands-on play, engaging the children in sensory activities, and taking them on lots of field trips. But in a pandemic, those strategies just didn’t seem possible.

Is it even possible to care for children safely in a pandemic? Early on, LaToya wasn’t sure. So she sought answers. Early Childhood Resource Center staff members provided guidance as state regulations were changing rapidly. She also consulted the parents she serves, including two who are nurses and one who works at a school.

As it turns out, it’s completely possible—with flexibility, creativity, and a solid understanding of safety precautions.

LaToya takes lots of measures to keep everyone safe: as parents drop children at the door, she takes each child’s temperature before the child enters, removes shoes, and washes hands. She teaches the children how to stay safe and how to keep others safe. They watched videos about wearing masks and spent time making their own play masks. All the children are comfortable with masks now, and no one is scared of them.

To minimize sharing, each child received a personal set of learning supplies: crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and paper, all packaged in a special box labeled with the child’s name. Sensory activities are no longer shared, but they’re still fun: each child’s personal sensory bin contains foam and play dough. Some toys have been stashed away until it’s safe to share once again.

LaToya’s Child Care recently received a five-star Step Up To Quality rating. Because that’s the highest possible rating, five-star programs are expected to engage parents in the learning that’s going on each day. That was easy when parents could just drop by to visit. Now, the parents are still engaged—the engagement just looks different. One parent Zooms in to read a story to the children; another Zooms in to lead sing-alongs. The parents who are nurses contributed to a lesson about washing hands.

This is a “new normal,” but it’s not at all impossible. LaToya admits that it was “scary when it first hit,” but she’s learned to “relax, take a breath, and calm down” when faced with new challenges. Then she’s ready to keep making the learning fun.

LaToya’s Child Care is one of hundreds of programs in our region that became pandemic providers during lockdown.

LaToya also pursued the five-star rating during the pandemic, even though many providers decided to delay until the pandemic had passed. Early Childhood Specialist MaryBeth Bush guided her every step of the way.

MaryBeth attests to LaToya’s dedication, saying, “She kept the kids coming and she kept the kids safe.” She also says LaToya lived up to her program’s slogan: *LaToya’s Child Care is a Home Away from Home.*

Without early childhood professionals like LaToya, the essential workers who got us through would not have been able to serve our communities. In the midst of a pandemic, their perseverance is to be commended.

MANY THANKS

We thank our generous contributors and volunteers for their commitment to the children and families living in our communities.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The 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.

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.



**EARLY CHILDHOOD
RESOURCE CENTER**

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

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