



ECRC Community Chronicle

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER :: *Winter News 2017*

Working Together to Make a Difference

It's so important to teach our children to work together to achieve their goals. It's equally important for grown-ups to work together on behalf of children.

At the Early Childhood Resource Center, we believe working together is the only way to accomplish our vision. In fact, collaboration is an integral part of our vision statement:

The ECRC is a leader, recognized for working together with community partners to ensure:

- **Parents have the knowledge and resources to support their children's healthy development;**
- **Children have access to high-quality early learning experiences staffed by educated professionals;**
- **Children begin school ready and eager to learn**
- **Schools are ready to receive, educate, engage, and involve all children and families; and**
- **Communities and policy makers understand and actively support the development of young children.**

That's because collaboration is the most impactful way to make a difference. You can learn about how the Early Childhood Resource Center's collaboration with Ohio Means Jobs is helping Poetry and other young people start their careers in early childhood (page 4).

A collaboration with Child Guidance and Family Solutions is helping the Early Childhood Resource Center reach families and educators in Summit and Medina counties (page 6).

And a collaboration with Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority helped children learn to make music together, all summer long (page 7).

Working together makes a real difference—for each of us, for all of our communities, and for our children's futures. ♦

“Tell me who you walk with,
and I’ll tell you who you are.”

— ESMERALDA SANTIAGO

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Many times, when people learn of the Early Childhood Resource Center, it’s in relation to our work with another organization. They know we’ve partnered with a specific group on one effort, or a different group on another effort. They know us as community-wide collaborators.

That’s intentional. It has been our experience that in order to engage and make an impact in early childhood, it’s important to be visible and present within the cities, counties, and communities being served. Whenever possible, we work to build local relationships that foster effective collaboration and service delivery. These local relationships help us understand and address local needs, challenges, and opportunities.

We’ve partnered widely throughout Stark County since 2000, working to effect positive change by collaborating with schools, government agencies, community organizations, and others. Now we’re forging partnerships in Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Trumbull counties as well. Wherever early childhood work is being done, we strive to be at the table. If you live or work in our region, we would love to hear how collaboration with the Early Childhood Resource Center might help you meet your goals. Together, we can secure the region’s future by making sure families and children have what they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Amanda Kendle

AMANDA KENDLE, ECRC BOARD CHAIR

Scott Hasselman

SCOTT HASSELMAN, ECRC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



REACHING
OUT

SPARK: A Mobile Resource for Families

SPARK lessons and activities help children develop and strengthen the skills needed for kindergarten readiness.

But the parent partners, who work with the SPARK families, know that school readiness is about much more than just academic skills. It's also about families having what they need so they're able to focus on learning. After all, it's pretty hard to care about the alphabet if you're hungry or cold.

SPARK serves many high-poverty neighborhoods, and SPARK families sometimes face very complex life situations. Parent partners form close bonds with the families they serve. They never know what issues parents might mention, or what needs may have arisen since the last home visit. To prepare for whatever their families might need, the parent partners learn all about community resources—from food banks and social services agencies to clothing giveaways and community festivals. They know who to call and how to connect families to the resources that really make a difference.

The goal is for each SPARK family to see their parent partner as a trusted advisor who really does have answers (or can find them) and can offer a listening ear. With some complicated life issues addressed, families are better able to focus on getting ready and eager to succeed in school. ♦

ENGAGING PARENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

In Canton, two Allen Elementary preschool classes are collaborating with SPARK to offer monthly parent engagement sessions, thanks to funding from PNC.

SPARK parent partners, preschool teachers, and aides work directly with the families on literacy and math activities that complement what the children are learning in school. Sessions are scheduled right before pick-up time in the afternoon.

The first session was offered in September; it focused on apples. Activities included a reading of the classic Dr. Seuss book *Ten Apples Up On Top*. Parents and children also engaged in songs and fingerplays, and they used apples as tools for learning basic math concepts.

The sessions will be offered through the end of the school year.



Poetry: Starting Her Career



Poetry's grandmother is so proud of her, and she has every reason to be. It seems Poetry is following in her grandmother's footsteps. Her grandmother has worked in child care her entire life, and even spent time as a foster mom.

Poetry helped with the children when she was younger, but wasn't particularly interested in working in child care. When she graduated from high school, she took medical assisting classes and worked retail jobs. But nothing held her interest.

Until now. Poetry says she has grown to "understand the importance of taking care of kids."

As part of a collaborative workforce development program offered through Ohio Means Jobs, Poetry is taking classes at the Early Childhood Resource Center to earn her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, while also spending two days a week observing and helping in the infant room at the Canton YWCA Child Care Center.

Poetry is one of eight participants taking CDA classes. Together, they will go through 120 hours of training on topics such as child development, first aid and safety, and developmentally appropriate learning environments. Poetry's instructor provides support, encouragement, feedback, and mentoring. Learning as a group adds critical peer support, so they never feel alone.

At the YWCA, Poetry helps the teachers by playing with and reading to the babies, feeding and changing them, and keeping them safe. She likes that she gets to observe while also being active in their care, so that she can apply the concepts she's learning. She loves seeing the techniques the teachers use when they interact with the babies.

Poetry now definitely wants a career in child care. She knows that this program will help her get there. But most importantly, she and her grandmother are so proud that she's working to achieve her goals. ♦

What is the CDA? The Child Development Associate (CDA) is a nationally recognized early childhood credential. For many early educators, the CDA is the foundation of a lifelong career. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), "obtaining a CDA is an important accomplishment and one that develops well-informed practitioners, knowledgeable in child development and best practices for teaching young children."

CDA-credentialed workers signify that a child care center's staff are qualified. In Ohio, a center can only enter the state's Step Up To Quality rating system if at least half the staff members have a CDA.

Since 2000, the Early Childhood Resource Center has provided CDA classes, mentoring, coaching, and support to hundreds of students.



We had a wonderful time at *The Big, Big, Really Big Toy Box*. Zander's favorite thing was making the I Spy bag & getting to see Batman!

— Participant



REALLY BIG THANKS!

This year's *Big, Big, REALLY BIG Toy Box* fundraising event was a rousing success. More than 700 were in attendance, and they were helped out by 86 amazing volunteers.



We couldn't possibly hold such a large event without our 32 generous sponsors, including corporate and community partners PNC, Incept, Cognizant, and Malone University, whose employees and students graciously took the time to volunteer.

Event proceeds support programs and services that the Early Childhood Resource Center provides all year long.



For the past two years, this day has been the highlight of my year. I want to thank you again for providing me this chance to be Batman and make those kids smile!

— Volunteer



Branching Out: Partnering Throughout the Region

When the Early Childhood Resource Center began to branch out into the six-county region it's now serving, our highest priority was to find collaborative partners who could help us serve the region effectively. Child Guidance & Family Solutions (CG&FS) hosts our new Akron office, which serves Medina and Summit counties. We asked CG&FS representatives why they felt a partnership with Early Childhood Resource Center was the right choice:

Karen Talbott, President and CEO: CG&FS welcomed Early Childhood Resource Center because we have a common interest in and dedication to helping young children and their families access high-quality services that they need to be successful in their lives. CG&FS works with children, families, schools, agencies and others to identify and resolve social-emotional issues for a heightened quality of life for all residents of our community and beyond. Collaboration in these endeavors is always a plus.

Barbara Werstler, LPCC-S, ECMH, Early Childhood Initiatives Manager: I am thrilled to have the Early Childhood Resource Center as our neighbor and partner; they are literally right next door! The Early Childhood Resource Center team is warm, inviting, and so helpful. The CG&FS *Toddlers And Preschoolers Succeeding* (TAPS) program prepares more than 4,000 young children in Summit and Medina Counties for school success by promoting social-emotional skills in a positive learning environment. TAPS reduces the number of expulsions and suspensions children experience by offering professional development opportunities for early educators and parents, on-site coaching, parent interactions, and connection to needed resources. In my discussions with Early Childhood Resource Center Regional Director Kyle Priestly, we are exploring several areas for collaboration, including:

- **Early Childhood Resource Center disseminating important resources to our communities.**
- **TAPS Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants who work in child care centers and preschools will receive training with Early Childhood Resource Center's Brittany Thomas on the *Strengthening Families* model to support TAPS centers in engaging families in their young child's educational experiences.**
- **Early Childhood Resource Center and TAPS will support each other in providing professional development for early educators, in order to increase the number of skilled early educators and, ultimately, increase the number of high-quality preschools and child care centers in our community.**
- **Summit Education Initiative's (SEI) Cradle to Career Alliance works in partnership with the Early Care and Education team of the Summit County First Things First collaborative to increase kindergarten readiness and school success. As SEI partners, Early Childhood Resource Center and CG&FS are working with SEI to increase the number of child care and preschool centers completing the Transition Skills Summary (TSS) for every child transitioning to Kindergarten. SEI's TSS provides critical information to parents and teachers to assist in a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten. TSS results also inform professional development for early educators, families, and community providers.**

Our community is rich with resources and richer when we unite toward common goals—we're stronger together! Preschools and child care centers are going to see the Early Childhood Resource Center and CG&FS seamlessly working together with other community providers to ensure every child is prepared for school success. ✦

NEWS BRIEFS

MAKING SUMMER MUSIC TOGETHER

Thanks to a grant from Stark Community Foundation's *Summertime Kids* program, the Early Childhood Resource Center offered a weekly summer music program at Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority's Jackson Sherrick and Linwood Acres community rooms. A local musician conducted lessons on rhythm, listening, and collaboration. A wide range of ages participated; older children were encouraged to help younger ones. At the end of each lesson, the group would sing *I believe I can fly*, as loudly as possible! Each lesson ended with a craft or activity designed to allow the children to bring the supplies home to use over and over.

It was delightful to watch the children become so engaged. They especially loved beating the drums and making music with their friends.



Reaching the Stars

The Early Childhood Resource Center is working closely with child care centers throughout the region to help them improve operations by entering the Step Up To Quality rating system and increasing their star ratings.

Massillon's Planting Seeds of Hope Children's Center recently earned a four-star rating. While the process was not easy, Director Loreen Smith felt that becoming highly qualified was definitely worthwhile:

We were already a three-star center. It was important to go for the four-star rating to distinguish ourselves from other centers in our area. Having a four-star rating gives the staff confidence and pride, and it allows parents to know that this is a high-quality center.



Loreen Smith, director of Planting Seeds of Hope

To prepare our staff and build their confidence, we conducted mock Ohio Classroom Observation Tool assessments. We knew that all of our teachers knew the answers, but some of them tend to get nervous or struggle to find the right words to explain what they do. These mock assessments helped

them express themselves clearly and gave them a better understanding of how to put into words what they do each day with the children.

Our teachers are amazing; they worked extremely hard to be ready. When inspection day came, they did great! All of the teachers who were interviewed were able to articulate their planning and assessment processes with ease.

We look forward to moving to a five-star center sometime in the future.

To learn which other centers have recently earned stars, visit ecresourcecenter.org/congratulations-new-stars





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A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

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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.

CENTER HOURS (NEW!)

Monday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Tuesday 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Wednesday 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The Center is closed on weekends.

877.691.8521

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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 three-year terms.