

**CASE
STUDY**

York County Expands ECE Grants to Create ECHO

The Need:

In the last 3 years, over 50 early child care centers have closed down in York County, with those still open operating at an average of 85% capacity due to lack of staffing. Community Connections for Children (CCC) found that the highest need for funding was amongst small family and center based programs. Many of them don't have the capacity for successful applications for existing federal, state, and local grants, which make up the majority of early childcare funds. Many don't have access to sufficient revenue streams as federal and state funding CCW and STARS and private pay from families don't align with expenses.



Why Now? In addition to the previously mentioned closure of early childhood education programs, existing centers were facing challenges in retention and waitlists. Those who survived the pandemic are operating on average at 85% of typical enrollment due to teacher and workforce shortages. Early childhood education program waitlists average 50-75 children, and many have stopped adding children to their lists. Without access to child care funding, the education crisis in York county would continue to spiral, with fewer providers and reduced capacity.



The Innovation: ECHO (Every Child Has Opportunities) launched two new grant opportunities, Innovation and BLOOM funds, each targeting a specific underserved audience. ECHO Innovation Grants support innovation, focusing on increased capacity and quality for DHS certified family, group and center providers, Early Head Start/Head Start, and Pre-K Counts grantees. The grant dollars range from \$25,000 - \$50,000.

BLOOM ECHO Start-Up Grants support individual entrepreneurs who are opening DHS certified family home-based programs. The grants are broad to cover costs associated with zoning, DHS Certification, administrative and program expenses and range from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

These expansions built upon the York County Early Childhood Educator Awards that were created in 2022 to promote the retention of qualified teachers through financial awards and incentivize educators to stay in the field reducing turnover.



How it's Done: The process was intentionally designed to be simple and responsive for early childhood applicants. While ECHO was able to utilize much of their existing framework in evaluating potential fundees, their focus on "low barrier" grantmaking standards helped to widen the scope of applicants. To help foster success, CCC Quality Coaches and Connections staff and BLOOM Business Empowerment Center staff worked with applicants during the process to assist with the administrative burden of the application.



How it's Funded: Funding partners include WellSpan Health, J. William Warehime Foundation, Powder Mill Foundation, United Way of York County, Kinsley Foundation, York County members of ELIC, and York County Community Foundation.



The Impact: ECHO has raised over \$3.4 million in annual, multi-year funding to foster innovation solutions to increase capacity in high quality ECE programs. Strategies include recruitment and retention of ECE educators, expanded capacity of existing ECE programs, creation of new ECE programs, and creating a collaborative environment with York County employers to support efforts to meet the ECE needs of their employees.

In mid-July, ECHO's operations committee approved funding for 19 Innovation Grants, for a total pilot round investment of \$818,000. Combined with the \$140,000 approved for the pilot BLOOM grant that will help seven start-up, home-based early childhood education entrepreneurs, grantees anticipate that 500 additional York County children will be served in high-quality ECE programs and 75 new early childhood educators will be employed.

The projects are spread across York County, with ten unique zip codes represented, from Hanover to Fawn Grove, Spring Grove to the City of York.

Get Involved: The Case Studies in Caring series explores best and promising business practices created with available resources that are custom-crafted to meet local child care needs for communities and workforces. To learn how your business can join the movement to invest in caring, contact the Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission at info@pearlylearning.com and find an online toolkit for businesses to support working families and child care at Investments in Caring PA, www.investmentsincaringpa.com.