

**CASE
STUDY**

Duolingo Invests in Child Care Staffing for Allegheny County

The Need:

As a business and community leader within Allegheny County, Duolingo embarked on a philanthropic search for the best way to be a steward of the community they worked in, particularly when it came to the historically disenfranchised neighborhood of East Liberty. Upon a listening tour with the community and local organizations, Duolingo learned that one of the greatest needs for East Liberty was child care access. Duolingo took these concerns to heart and completely revised their grants and processes to accommodate the different needs of child care centers.



Why Now? Post COVID-19 pandemic, the stress on the child care industry has only been exacerbated by the struggle to retain workers in the field. A recent study¹ from the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children reveals the ongoing impact of the child care crisis across the state, citing that less than 50% of child care in Pennsylvania meets high-quality standards. In 2022, Duolingo embarked on a “listening tour” of the East Liberty community and realized that they were uniquely positioned to ease the burdens of child care in their neighborhood.



The Innovation: Prior to the listening tour, Duolingo believed that the best way for them to assist would be to buy reserved seats at child care centers, ensuring a fixed amount of revenue each year. However, after several community meetings, Duolingo realized the real issue centers were struggling to solve was hiring and training enough staff to meet the child care demand in East Liberty. While child care providers do face real challenges with keeping their seats, they also struggle with keeping up with the high wages and benefits needed to attract full-time staff. After their listening tour, Duolingo structured their grants to continue to allow seat reservations and expanded funding to also include staff salaries, business training, and financial coaching.

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: Phase one of funding kicked off in October 2023 and provided \$1 million through a grant process to help local child care programs increase their program capacity, staffing, and support for families. In addition to the grants, selected providers also receive business coaching assistance from community-based partner(s) to help stabilize their businesses. In subsequent years, early learning programs will receive a grant allocated towards tuition-free seats for qualified families. The Early Learners First program also works year over year with its investment, ensuring that the child care industry in East Liberty will continue to grow sustainably, rather than having to find alternative funding sources after the initial grant period. After evaluating eligibility, 9 programs met Duolingo’s criteria for initial grants and were invited to apply for support. Those selected for the program will then receive up to \$80,000 to assist them in meeting the true cost of care. These costs include expenses like staff benefits and facility improvements, which allow them to welcome more children to their programs.



How it's Funded: While Duolingo is responsible for providing all funding, the Early Excellence Project served as a fiscal sponsor and partner throughout the implementation process, and Trying Together was a key stakeholder in facilitating community communication.



The Impact: Duolingo released its first round of grantees, with 9 centers receiving funding: Brightside Academy Early Education-East Liberty, Child’s Way, Davis Family Childcare, Eastminster Child Care, Homewood-Brushston YWCA, Hope Academy Powered by Hosanna House, McCoy’s Learning Center, LLC, Mt. Ararat Early Childhood Development Center, Shady Lane School.

1. Pennsylvania Partnerships For Children. (2023, August). *2023 State of Early Care and Education in PA. Reports and Fact Sheets PFFC*. <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/890097018/18/>

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@paeearlylearning.com and find an online toolkit for businesses to support working families and child care at Investments in Caring PA, www.investmentsincaringpa.com.