



Expanding the ECE workforce:

How Children's Village leveraged funding and workforce development partners to formalize and expand their staff recruitment pipeline.

Problem Context

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is in the middle of a protracted child care crisis, with the industry shrinking in both capacity and centers over the last five years. Chief among the contributors to this crisis is the recruitment and retention of child care workers. According to a September 2023 Start Strong PA survey¹, 50% of child care programs reported having at least one classroom closed due to staffing issues. This forces child care centers to focus on staying solvent, taking away from their time to recruit, train, and retain their staff.

Many of these issues stem from low initial pay in the industry, with 21% of child care employees relying on Medicaid and SNAP programs to survive in their current career. Since the COVID pandemic, individuals are not interested in low paying jobs, with no benefits, that require initial and ongoing training. In the child care industry, which historically hasn't received the same level of respect as education for older children, recruiting new employees is particularly challenging.



Example Case Study-Children's Village

Children's Village, a child care center based in Philadelphia, has a history of success recruiting and retaining individuals for the ECE industry. The William Penn Foundation granted funding to Children's Village to pilot an innovative Early Care and Education (ECE) educator training model due to their success. While this funding was awarded in 2019, implementation of this program was delayed to late 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. COVID highlighted the challenges of recruiting and retaining ECE educators. Low wages, little or no benefits, and a lack of recognition for the importance of this work required Children's Village to look for innovative solutions to address this issue.

Key Characteristics of Project

1. **Workforce development as a partner in recruiting entry level ECE:** In the past, most of Children's Village recruitment came from ad hoc outreach with staff reaching out to family friends, etc. Children's Village decided to seek out partnerships with workforce development organizations, including CareerLink and JEVS workforce development. Children's Village intentionally focused their efforts in creating partnerships with these centers, rather than just sending recruitment materials. Children's Village staff participated in job fairs, recruiting workshops, and staff development, and forged working relationships with key staff in both programs. As a result of these efforts, Children's Village enhanced and expanded its recruiting methods to a wider audience in the workforce. William Penn funding was used to leverage partnerships with CareerLink and other workforce development projects.



2. **Recognizing that a competent workforce requires pre-service, formalized training, and onboarding:** One of the largest barriers to a career in child care is the amount of training and mentoring required to acclimate to the classroom setting, even in an entry-level position. Because of the staffing crisis, many centers don't have the opportunity or luxury to support new employees in this way. At Children's Village, trainees receive paid in seat training and in classroom mentoring to meet entry-level requirements for the industry. Training is focused on the health and safety of children, child-staff interaction, and best practices in ECE. This is now the standard for recruiting new employees.
3. **Recruiting employees with diverse experiences:** Children's Village recognized that relying on the traditional, passion-influenced pool of child care talent was not sufficient to recruit the amount of entry-level staff needed in the current industry framework. They believed that reaching out to populations who aren't considered traditional ECE educators and offering them this paid training would expand the hiring pool while showing these new employees that child care isn't just a job but a career with a state-funded credential trajectory. This approach has shown success, with several of the employees recruited in this way continuing employment and making career advancements at Children's Village.

Learnings From Model and Recommendations

Children's Village has experienced both success and challenges over the course of this project, and would like to share their learned experiences with organizations wanting to replicate a program like this in the future.

- Recognizing the support employees need to successfully engage with training and employment: Children's Village recognized that working with entry-level staff for whom employment is new presented additional challenges. Employment programs such as CareerLink provided informed candidate recruitment, work-readiness training, administrative support, and engaged in regular communication with Children's Village staff, reducing the burden on the child care provider to address these issues and supporting success.
- Sustainable funding is needed-and not just for new employees: To address the severe staffing challenges in the ECE industry, child care programs cannot rely on time limited funding, whether through private foundations or public dollars.
- Workforce development centers should create a specific ECE recruiting toolkit: Workforce centers and ECE programs need to partner in creating and implementing specific ECE tracks for potential employees. This would allow centers to focus solely on providing high quality training and retention and not devote significant resources to recruiting entry-level staff.

¹ Start Strong PA, (September 2023.). *September 2023 Child Care Crisis Survey Fact Sheets*. PA Child Care Crisis. Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://startstrongpa.org/pa-child-care-crisis>