

The Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC), established in 2000, promotes the healthy development of young children by strengthening families, improving the quality of early learning experiences, and increasing school and community readiness. The ECRC serves families and educators, focusing heavily on high-poverty areas that lack access to high-quality early childhood services, resources, and programming. The ECRC has become a community early childhood hub and a highly collaborative community partner.

The City of Canton awarded \$40,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to the ECRC for a year-long program that's helping Canton residents start their own family child care businesses.

The program, which began in August 2018, is designed to pave a career path for the participants while increasing the amount of high-quality child care that's available in the low-income, underserved southeast and northeast areas of Canton. Those neighborhoods lack sufficient high-quality child care – in fact, only one provider was available, with no child care centers operating at all in the southeast.

The ECRC worked with the Stark County Department of Job and Family Services to identify seven participants: all were interested in pursuing early childhood careers, owned or rented a single-family home, had either a high school diploma or GED, and had passed background checks.

ECRC staff worked with each participant to make sure they were on the right path. Then they helped the participants make individualized plans of action. They were coached weekly and received six hours of licensing training. Weekly monitoring and coaching included training in early childhood best practice, help with physical set-up of the location, and guidance and support as each participant started their own small child care business. The participants also received supplies (furnishings and books) and developmentally appropriate toys.

All of the participants are (or will be) pursuing a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential by taking ECRC classes and receiving coaching from ECRC staff. The nationally recognized CDA credential ensures a solid early childhood career foundation. The CDA also serves as the first step for pursuing additional secondary education in early childhood. The credentialing process is extensive: candidates must take 120 hours of classes, work with young children for 480 hours, create an extensive portfolio, undergo observation, and pass an exam. ECRC staff lead the classes and coach the participants.

The CDA credential is a crucial part of the process, because the state requires it before providers can enter the Step Up To Quality system. Only Step Up To Quality providers are eligible to serve families receiving state-subsidized child care. Providers begin with a one-star rating. As they improve their quality sufficiently to ascend to the next level in the five-star system, the provider's reimbursement amount increases accordingly.

One participant is applying to enter Step Up to Quality in May. The others have readied their paperwork for when they'll be eligible to submit. The ECRC will coach and mentor the participants along the way.

As of today, two participants have already opened their Family Child Care businesses and five have submitted to be approved. **This program is a game-changer for dozens of Canton families: open seven days a week, these providers could serve 200 children in what had been extremely underserved areas of the city.**