North Carolina
Mecklenburg and Burke Counties

Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) is one of the EHS-CCP grantees in North Carolina. After an open competition, they partnered with four- and five-star quality-rated child care centers in Mecklenburg (home to the Charlotte metropolitan area) and Burke Counties, serving a total of 270 children directly.

FAST FACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children Directly Benefiting</th>
<th>Children Indirectly Benefiting</th>
<th>Child Care Partners</th>
<th>Local Communities Affected</th>
<th>Total Grant Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$5.5M</td>
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THE MODEL STANDOUTS

Child Care Resources and Referral Agency as a Grantee: CCRI is a regional child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agency that administers all child care subsidy programs in Mecklenburg County and co-leads North Carolina's child care resource and referral (CCR&R) system. The structure and function of CCR&R agencies, which exist in 99 percent of all populated zip codes in the country, can be successful EHS-CCP grantees. For example, CCRI has access to local and statewide data on available resources and child care supply, quality, cost, and demand. The agency is also involved in cross-sector early childhood education policy development at the state level, which facilitates partnerships with other state agencies and service organizations. As is the case with CCRI, CCR&Rs are often the agencies families turn to for early care and education, for consumer education and referrals, and to enroll in child care subsidy programs, making them especially effective at family recruitment. Finally, CCRI houses an extensive early childhood training and technical-assistance staff, which can help partners enhance the quality of their services.

Professional Development: CCRI supports teachers earning a CDA and encourages staff to reach higher levels of education. Teachers have access to specialized education coaches and have professional development plans. They also have access to an extensive training program that covers topics such as curricula, assessments, developmental screenings, social-emotional development, classroom management, health and safety, and family engagement. Center directors are also included in professional development and receive training on data management systems, Head Start Program Performance Standards, curricula, and child assessments, in addition to one-on-one coaching on various administrative and business development topics, such as budget allocation.

Comprehensive Services: All enrolled children and families are offered an array of comprehensive services, including developmental screenings, hearing and vision screenings, mental health supports, nutritious meals, individualized curricula, and support for children with disabilities. For children with significant medical needs, the center partners with medical staff to train teachers on medication administration and other appropriate supports. This enables the families of children with disabilities and complex health needs to go to work knowing that their children are receiving high-quality early care and learning experiences from a competent team of professionals.

Family Engagement: The program offers robust supports for families. Family support specialists work with families to help ensure that they receive direct support and referrals to other partners in the community to meet their basic needs, including housing, food, and employment specialists. They also offer parenting classes to strengthen parenting skills and support parents in being their child’s primary advocate.

“My child is finally learning because of this program”
—Partnership Parent
Coaching for Quality Improvement: The teacher-coaching approach brings significant change to many of the partners’ classrooms. Every teacher in the program receives at least a minimal level of coaching; 28 teachers in 28 classrooms receive intensive coaching to improve their practice. This deeper level of coaching enables teachers to better reflect on practice, learn how their teaching impacts child outcomes, and improve their knowledge and skills.

Coaching opportunities provided by the EHS-CCP brought about significant improvements in the program. For example, one child who was scheduled to transition to an older-age classroom was experiencing behavioral difficulties. Prior to and during that transition, a coach modeled and shared new strategies with the teachers in the new classroom. The coach also worked with the child’s mother to access mental health support services. The child is now successfully integrated into the new classroom. Had such an intervention not taken place, the child would have been at much greater risk for suspension or expulsion from the program.

THE RESULTS

- Seven staff completed a CDA, and one is in the process.
- 15 staff members are enrolled in higher education degree programs.
- Staff received an additional 84 hours of training in topics such as lesson planning, conscious discipline, curricula, assessments, supporting children with disabilities, cultural competency, and supporting children’s social and emotional development.
- All partners increased pay scales for the EHS-CCP staff.
- The program helped 12 families secure stable housing since the start of the EHS-CCP.
- All partners offered families mental and dental health supports. Prior to the grant, none did.
- More than 500 children who are not enrolled in the EHS-CCP are indirectly benefiting from the program, through access to playgrounds, learning spaces, research-based curricula, and highly trained teachers.

THE TAKEAWAYS

CCRI and their partners agree that the quality of the comprehensive services that the EHS-CCP program makes possible is what they would like to see for all child care programs and for all children and families. Though implementing the EHS-CCP model is challenging, the model brings significant benefits to children and families in the community.

Undoubtedly, the quality of early care and learning in the community is better in the two communities that are part of the grant. Even centers that were already operating at the highest levels of the state’s quality rating system made significant improvements. These quality enhancements make an important difference in the lives of the children and families being served and will continue to do so for future cohorts of children.

In addition to helping children and families, the partnership program is prompting a paradigm shift for early childhood educators. For the first time, many now consider themselves as professionals, because they are invested in as professionals. Through access to higher levels of education and high-quality training, the staff are more skilled at their roles as educators. Although there is a steep learning curve to operate
as an EHS-CCP, with frustration and challenges along the way, the resources and supports provided make the leap to even higher levels of quality possible or attainable.

The EHS-CCP is one way to continuously advance quality in participating programs. Though the changes are not systemic due to the small size of the grant, the partnership model serves as an example of how to raise the quality of child care. It is important to North Carolina’s families that the partnership program continue and grow so that it can build community-wide capacity and make more systemic improvements that support more children and families.

There are thousands of children and families in North Carolina who are still not receiving the benefits of this program. Within the grantee’s two service areas alone, nearly 10,000 children under the age of 3 are estimated to be living in poverty. The demand for affordable, high quality early care and education for these children far surpasses available funding to ensure their access to these programs.