



**Growing  
Stronger  
Together**

# ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2023-JUNE 2024

Our portable classroom in Bacon Academy was home to our Joyful Noises program for the past two years. BA staff welcomed us with open arms and provided for our urgent need for programming space. But alas, times change and so do the needs of schools. Fortunately, as we needed to leave Bacon, CES was able to provide a space for us again. We, along with our Early Head Start partner, are back in room H20 in the gym hallway. Our space is all set up and ready for families!

The Office of Early Childhood is moving forward with Early Start CT. This new legislation is designed to reduce unnecessary red tape, improve childcare accessibility, and reduce the burden on providers. This will mean future changes to our School Readiness Council as they implement the plan. In the meantime, our School Readiness Council and C3 Leadership Workgroup will combine meetings. The School Readiness Council's work has been integrated into our Community Plan for many years and we hope that merging the two meetings will bring further efficiencies and a greater understanding of the full scope of our strategies for all members.

Each year, funding for C3 is a patchwork of different sources stitched together to make the most of our resources while maintaining the sustainability of our core offerings. This year is no different. ARPA dollars that were used to bridge a budget gap for the past two years are exhausted. Thankfully, the Connecticut Children's Collective was able to advocate for continued dollars for local early childhood councils at a slightly higher level than previously received. Though we won't have funding for bigger projects such as the town-wide mailing or supporting Cragin's Family Place Library initiative, we will be able to provide the programs that we've come to be known for- Joyful Noises, Baby and Me, and parent education like Circle of Security.



- **Provided 24 subsidized school-day preschool spaces and 21 part-day spaces through School Readiness.**
- **137 Families participated in Play & Learn groups and Stroller Walks across 3 seasons.**
- **60 Parents/Caregivers participated in at least one of our Parent Education programs.**
- **Provided 184 sessions of programming for children.**
- **53 Parent Education opportunities of varying lengths.**
- **Hosted 13 evening or weekend family programs and participated in 7 community awareness events.**

Our vision remains the same- to ensure Colchester's children and families are thriving within a nurturing community!

## C3 CO-CHAIRS

**Julia Lash  
Brittany Hebert**

## STAFF

**Cindy Praisner, Coordinator  
Laurie Buyniski,  
Program Coordinator**

## SR COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS

**Kaitlin Cassidy  
Jennifer Rummel**

# POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS - PARENTS

Since C3's inception in 2008, parent voice has played a central role in the development of our community plan and steered the implementation of our work. Parent representatives have been an integral part of the Leadership Work Group and the School Readiness Council. In 2017, parents had a vision to develop their own committee to support the work of C3 and formed our first Parent Council. Over time, however, attendance at Parent Council meetings fell off and this group began to fade out. In 2023-24, the Parent Council revived its mission and began to meet regularly again. Parent Council members are parents and community members that work to engage parents, promote two-way communication between families and C3, and support the implementation and sustainability of C3's Community Plan. The group focused on fundraising for C3 last year and was able to raise about \$2000 to be used toward the free childcare we provide for our parent education programs. It is exciting to see how the group has formalized its structure and recruited more parents to serve! Meetings are open to all!



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIONS

Through our School Readiness Council, we are charged with supporting those who work so hard every day on behalf of young children in Colchester. Whether they are early care and education providers in private centers, home settings, or public school classrooms, C3 offers relevant and free professional development opportunities. This past year, Joy Lenares introduced Bacon Academy Child Development students to Conscious Discipline concepts. Additionally, we've offered seats in an asynchronous online Conscious Discipline workshop series called "Handling Upset". For the first time, a cohort of teachers at Colchester Elementary completed the Circle of Security Classroom workshops and Castle delved deep into the FLIP IT strategy. We love being able to help teachers support their students in building stronger self-regulation skills.

## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR - NINA BRYANT



Nina has been a parent representative with C3 since the Fall of 2022 when she approached us about joining the Leadership Workgroup meetings. Since that time, Nina has been a regular participant in our meetings, shared insightful perspectives on our work, developed surveys and reviewed pertinent data, supported C3 community events, and contributed to the rejuvenation of the C3 Parent Council. She pitches in whenever and wherever she can. Nina's efforts have truly helped us move forward and we are so grateful for her!

# MEET MEGAN GAUTHIER



In early 2024, we decided it was important to strengthen our social media presence through our existing Facebook and Instagram accounts. We looked for someone to assist us with creating content that would be engaging and informative. Our main goal was to develop a Book Recommendations list with reviews and promote it to our C3 families. Megan Gauthier was just the right person to help us! Her background as a Copywriter, Social Media Manager, Book Reviewer and Blogger was the perfect fit! She developed summaries for all of the books on our 'must-read' list and designed a webpage that would allow our followers to find them easily. These books offer a variety of parenting topics and strategies, for caregivers of infants to adolescents. Now these reviews are highlighted each month on our social media pages and with the help of Kate Byroade, there are copies in multiple formats available at Cragin Memorial Library. After the successful completion of that project, Megan continued to assist us by creating social media content including posts and videos to promote the Sparkler app and our Parent Education programs. It has been a great help to have Megan's technical expertise on this initiative!

## FLIP IT® - STRATEGY FOR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

As parents, we are often putting out fires and living in survival mode. However, when we are equipped with tools that help us face challenging behaviors in the moment, by guiding ourselves and our child through that tough time, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Here is where FLIP IT® comes in! "FLIP IT® is a strategy that offers a simple, kind, strength-based, commonsense, and effective four-step process to address children's day-to-day challenging behavior. The four steps are embodied in the FLIP mnemonic which stands for F – Feelings, L – Limits, I – Inquiries and P – Prompts. FLIP IT is nothing new, but transforms best practice into a strategy that is easy to remember, applicable in a variety of challenging situations and portable."

This year we brought the FLIP IT® strategy to preschool providers and parents. During the training sessions, participants learned the meaning behind the acronym and practiced the language so that when they went back to their classrooms and families they could easily translate the formula in those heated moments. It can be tricky to adapt to a new method and easy to slip back into old ways of dealing with unwanted behavior. However, the FLIP IT® strategy teaches participants that we first must FLIP ourselves, meaning that we as the adult must be calm and regulated first before we can address the child. In addition, when connecting with a child, we remember that there is a root cause for behavior and without empathy, we cannot move forward. Understanding where the behavior comes from is critical!



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*"FLIP IT gives parents and caregivers a repeatable formula for handling challenging situations and BIG emotions. As a mom of 2 little ones, it has helped me tremendously and being able to say I "FLIPped" a situation successfully is always something I look forward to. Thanks C3 for giving me the tools I need to raise resilient kids (and stay sane while doing it)!"*

# FLIP IT® - CONTINUED

FLIP IT® goes hand in hand with other Parent Education programs we offer such as Conscious Discipline and Circle of Security. It is the perfect blend of principles and techniques which makes it quick to learn and easy to use. We will continue to share this valuable program with providers and parents in the coming year.



## PARENT COMMUNITY CAFE



On May 3rd, C3 hosted the first-ever Parent Community Cafe event in Colchester. The event took place at Colchester Elementary School and consisted of a shared meal, a chance to connect, and small group discussions on the topic of self-care. The Connecticut Children's Collective trained Parent Ambassadors and members of the Local Early Childhood Collaboratives to deliver the Community

Cafe style program. Abbey Dunbar-Willbanks and Julia Lash, C3 Parent Ambassadors, chose the topic questions and led the group discussion. Café conversations are intended to spark leadership and to develop the relationships necessary to strengthen families. Those in attendance enjoyed the evening, especially those who were able to take advantage of childcare. They appreciated having time to share their thoughts and hear ideas from others.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

- Colchester Public Schools
- Town of Colchester
- Colchester Youth & Social Services
- Cragin Memorial Library
- CASTLE
- TVCCA
- Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Connecticut Children's Collective
- FamilyWise Behavior Solutions

## DONATIONS RECEIVED IN 2023-2024

- Inishmor \$492
- Sweet Aroma \$70
- Family Pizza Fundraiser \$400
- Oz n Bones \$200
- Mandi Lee Photo Session \$682
- Mel's Downtown Creamery Fundraiser \$110
- FlipGive \$58
- Gifts from Families & Non-Residents \$420
- Stop & Shop Bloomin for Good \$230
- Colchester Lions Club \$575
- PEP Fundraiser \$143



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*"Joyful Noises has been a joy for my family over the last four years. We have made so many true connections that will last a lifetime. Thank you C3!"*