



Growing
Stronger
Together

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2024-JUNE 2025

As the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) moved to implement Early Start CT on July 1, 2025, C3's combined Leadership Work Group and School Readiness Council has been meeting to discuss and plan for the transition to Local Governance Partners (LGPs). LGPs, a vital part of OEC's vision for Connecticut's early childhood system, will serve as community hubs that strengthen trusted partnerships with families, providers, and local stakeholders while empowering families to shape strategies that address the holistic needs of children from birth to age five. The first six months will focus on refining our current C3 structure to meet the four core components: a Fiduciary (Town of Colchester) to oversee contracts and budgets; a Liaison (C3's Early Childhood Coordinator) to coordinate services and support quality; a Parent Ambassador to amplify family voices and connect caregivers to resources; and a Community Table of stakeholders (C3's Leadership Work Group) dedicated to advancing early childhood outcomes. Through this model, C3 will continue to engage families by building networks and promoting



Chelsea Long with her daughter Poppy

participation, providers through quality assurance and professional development, and the broader community by convening partners and implementing collaborative solutions. As an LGP, C3 will receive a stable funding stream for 2025-2027 and get support from Shine Early Learning, the LGP Intermediary with the OEC. Building on our success as a School Readiness Council and Local Early Childhood Collaborative, C3 will use these foundations to move into our new role as a LGP under Early Start CT.

PARENT COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS

Julia Lash
Rosemary Kelley

STAFF

Cindy Praisner, Coordinator
Laurie Buyniski,
Program Coordinator

SR COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS

Kaitlin Cassidy
Jennifer Rummel

POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS - FAMILY PLACE LIBRARIES™

The Cragin Memorial Library received the FamilyPlace Libraries™ designation on Tuesday morning, November 19, 2024, when representatives certified the library as a site and awarded the official Family Place banner. Family Place Libraries™ is a national initiative that transforms libraries into welcoming community hubs focused on early literacy, parent education, and family support, with a network of over 500 sites in 32 states. The program is founded on the understanding that good health, early learning, parental involvement, and supportive communities are essential to a young child's development. Cragin has strengthened its family-friendly environments through staff training, enhanced collections, specially designed spaces, collaboration with community resource providers, and hosting Parent Child Workshops. This milestone marks the culmination of years of dedication and investment by C3, the Cragin Memorial Library Board of Trustees, and the Friends of Cragin Memorial Library.



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR - RENEE BEHLMAN



The Behlman Family

We are proud to recognize Renee Behlman as Volunteer of the Year for her outstanding service as Secretary on the Parent Council over the past two years. Renee has brought exceptional organizational skills, dedication, and a positive spirit to her role, ensuring that the work of the Council ran smoothly and efficiently. Her commitment to keeping everything and everyone organized and motivated has made a lasting impact. We are deeply grateful for the energy and care she has poured into supporting the Parent Council's mission.

Renee is pictured here with her husband Nick and children, Natalie and Ben.



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"The FLIP IT strategy is so simple, but so effective once you understand how and why it works. The classroom instruction was excellent and I learned something new each week, but maybe best of all was being able to discuss real life scenarios with other parents and share our challenges and successes. It's so nice to not feel alone in navigating these tricky childhood behaviors." -FLIP IT Parent Workshop participant



Family Dance Party



Parachute fun at Baby & Me



Joyful Noises crafts support fine motor skills and creativity

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

C3 hosted a workshop for early care and education providers from across the community, *Creating a Compassionate School Culture*, by Bradley Hospital's Department of Behavioral Education and Training. Participants appreciated the many concrete strategies and materials provided to the group. Additionally, Joy Lenares provided a Circle of Security Classroom refresher to a cohort of Colchester Elementary School teachers at their request.

NEW PROGRAMS

C3 added a few new offerings this year including a Book Club for Parents, a Healthy Tech Habits series, and Conscious Discipline classes for Dads! We received positive feedback for all of them and will continue to offer in the coming year.



Stroller walks on the Airline Trail bring families together!

PARENT COUNCIL

Our Parent Council met regularly this year to assist us in engaging with families and our community. They planned and supported our presence at several community events such as Trunk or Treat, Holiday Homecoming, and Farmer's Markets. They also created their own events, such as Popsicles at the Park and Hot Cocoa at the StoryWalk, to invite families to connect and have fun together. Additionally, the Parent Council organized fundraisers that brought in over \$2000 to help us provide free childcare for families attending our workshops. Thank you Parent Council!



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"Miss Joy is simply the best. I have so appreciated the Joyful Noises program as a parent. She is truly a wonderful facilitator who makes meaningful connections with all children and their families. I will be continuing to sign up for the additional programs in the fall, particularly as my children get older." -Joyful Noises Parent

C3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Positive early childhood experiences in the first years of a child's life are foundational for future health and success.
- Children need sensitive and responsive first relationships to grow and thrive.
- Families' cultural differences, diverse languages, values, strengths, and needs are all honored and welcomed.
- Vision and goals are family-centered and family-driven.
- Strategies and actions are based on current best practices, available research, and data.
- Collaborative partnerships, community engagement, sharing of resources, and continuous evaluation create community change.
- All families need a strong network of nurturing relationships.
- Children facing barriers, risks, setbacks, or challenges to their healthy development are sought out and offered quality services.
- Families receive services and supports in an efficient, equitable, coordinated, caring, professional, and effective manner.

PROGRAM DATA

- Provided **24** subsidized school-day preschool spaces and **21** part-day spaces through School Readiness.
- **188** Families participated in Play & Learn groups and Stroller Walks across **3** seasons.
- **46** Parent Education opportunities of varying lengths.
- Provided **206** sessions of programming for children.
- **60** Parents/Caregivers participated in at least one of our Parent Education programs.
- Hosted **11** evening or weekend family programs and participated in **5** community awareness events.

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

DONATIONS RECEIVED IN 2024-2025

- Inishmor Fundraiser \$511
- Sweet Aroma Fundraiser \$70
- Family Pizza Fundraiser \$800
- Mandi Lee Photo Session \$712
- Mel's Downtown Creamery Fundraiser \$226
- Plum Tomato Fundraiser \$100
- Kidsignments Fundraiser \$40
- Stop & Shop Bloomin for Good \$170
- Colchester Lions Club \$575
- Parent Council Coin Challenge \$92



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"I am working on being more aware of how I parent. I am excited about the changes I am already seeing in myself and my relationships with my children."

-Participant of Conscious Discipline Workshop Series