

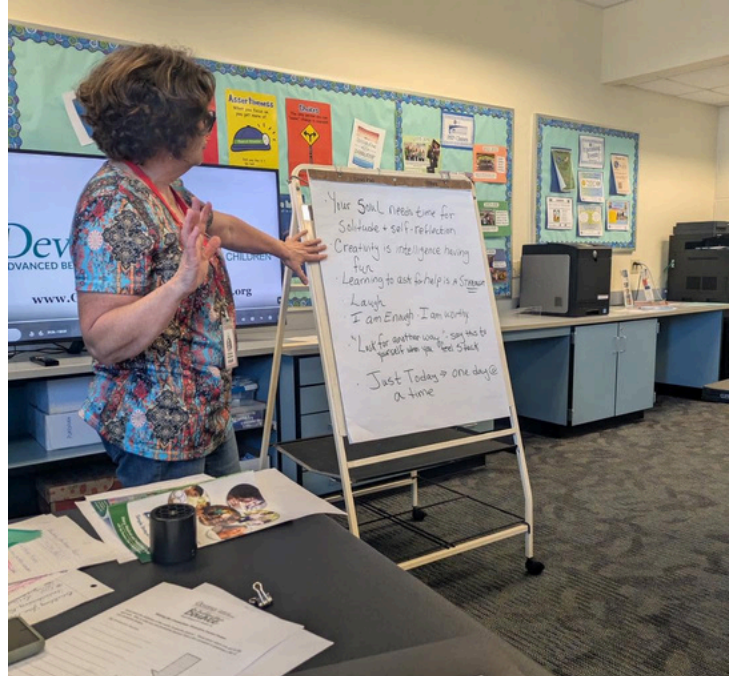


Growing
Stronger
Together

ANNUAL REPORT

July 2025–June 2026

The Parent Cafe on the topic of “Budget Bites: How to save money at the grocery store and still eat healthfully” was a tremendous success. It was the most well-attended Parent Cafe to date, with 32 caregivers participating and 26 children in childcare! Parent Ambassadors worked hard to create a night that provided an opportunity to meet other parents in the community, learn alongside each other, and inspire conversation on a topic important to them. C3 partnered with WIC nutritionists to provide the educational part of the evening. Participants expressed that it was nice to have a night of community and learning as well as free childcare.



C3 provided many education opportunities for parents and caregivers. New this year, Dads were able to talk about switching from *Work Mode* to *Dad Mode*, which sparked great conversation. Also very impactful was this year’s Build Your Bounce workshops series (class pic below).



STAFF

Cindy Praisner, Coordinator
Laurie Buyniski/Melissa Deacon
Program Coordinator

FACILITATORS

Kaitlin Cassidy
Joy Lenares
Sharon Wilinski

PARENT AMBASSADORS

Erin Howes
Chelsea Long

POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS -



Over the last year, the state made significant investments in the Early Childhood system by formally combining its legacy School Readiness and Child Day Care programs into a single, streamlined state-funded model known as Early Start CT. Beginning in January 2026, 1,000 new subsidized slots for income-eligible infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children were added. Enchanted Jungle was added to our community programs receiving funds! Additionally, the OEC is making changes that support providers as well. The creation and infusion of funds into the state's Early Childhood Education Endowment allow these improvements and will fund future plans to support both providers and parents.

C3 has just completed its first year as a CT Early Start Local Governance Partner (LGP). Though the changes required of the new system have brought ups and downs, we are so grateful for the State's commitment to local collaboratives and ensuring family voice. As an LGP, we have received over \$120,000 for our contract covering years 2025-26 and 2026-27. These funds have significantly supported our work and helped us weather recent budget challenges. Our Community Table completed a Local Needs Assessment and will be creating a Community Plan this fall.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR - SARAH RUSSELL



Sarah with her youngest son at the Story Walk (above), as a dinosaur (top right), and at Farmer's Market (bottom right).

We are proud to recognize Sarah Russell as Volunteer of the Year for her outstanding service as a parent volunteer. She has been a core member of the Parent Council, assisting at community events such as Trunk or Treat and Farmer's Markets, as well as the Parent Council hosted events Rock Painting at the Park and Hot Cocoa at the Park. Sarah also completed People Empowering People (PEP) and was instrumental to the success of their Winter Gear Swap community project.



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"The C3 program has given my daughter a safe and fun place to learn and play, and it gave me the chance to build meaningful connections with other parents. The parenting workshops have also been a wonderful resource for expanding my parenting toolbox."

PLAY AND LEARN GROUPS

For the youngest crew, we offer an engaging Baby and Me class for infants up to 2 years. Our Joyful Noises classes provide a fun space for learning for children 18 months to 5 years. Caregivers attend with their children, providing an opportunity to make important social connections. We offer Joyful Noises 6 times per week. Over 80 families a week participate in one of these sessions!



PARENT COUNCIL

Our Parent Council met regularly this year to engage 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 hosted events like Rock Painting at the Park and Hot Cocoa at the Park to invite families to connect and have fun together. Additionally, the Parent Council organized fundraisers that raised approximately \$2000 to support our programs and initiatives. Thank you Parent Council!



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"C3 has been pivotal to our parenting journey. Through the support of parenting workshops and play and learn groups, we have become the parents we always wanted to be for our children. C3 has brought us closer together as a couple, as a family, and been integral to us finding our village here in Colchester."

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

- Supported **32** subsidized school-day preschool spaces and 15 part-day spaces through Early Start CT (formerly School Readiness).
- Provided **185** sessions of programming for children.
- Hosted **3** Book Club nights on *Anxious Generation* and *Good Inside*
- **147** Families participated in Play & Learn groups, Stroller Walks, and/or parent education workshops.
- **54** Parent Education opportunities of varying lengths such as Circle of Security, FLIP It, Conscious Discipline, PEP, and Build Your Bounce.

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
- Shine Early Learning, Inc

DONATIONS AND FUNDRAISERS

- Inishmor Fundraiser \$573
- Fresca Fundraiser \$340
- Family Pizza Fundraiser \$450
- Fornarelli's Fundraiser \$200
- FlipGive Fundraiser \$207.59
- Color House Fundraiser \$30
- Stop & Shop Bloomin for Good \$211
- Colchester Pizza Fundraiser \$235.66
- Mel's Downtown Creamery Fundraiser \$60
- Nina Bryant Volunteer Hours Donation \$436.96



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"...the parenting classes were an essential resource for me. No matter what challenge I was facing, C3 was always a place I could look to for support and guidance, and most importantly, where I didn't have to feel alone in my parenting struggles."