

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



**200 WEST 11TH STREET
ERIE, PA 16501
814-874-0144**

CREATING LIFELONG LEARNERS, ONE CHILD AT A TIME

BOARD PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

“A CHILD’S LIFE IS LIKE A PIECE OF PAPER ON WHICH EVERY PERSON LEAVES A MARK.” – ROBERT HEINLEIN.

Early Connections is honored to be one of the educators making a mark on a child’s life that leaves a positive imprint on their development and growth. We remain committed to offering young children high quality early learning in a safe and nurturing environment that helps to unlock their potential in our local communities.

I first became associated with Early Connections in 2014 and am now proud to serve as Board President. All Board members are passionate in support of the Mission: “Early Connections supports the success of young children and their families through leadership, advocacy, and quality programs in early care and education.”

It is a privilege to work with the dedicated teachers and administrative staff at Early Connections. These individuals continually work hard to ensure a continuity of quality care and education to the children and their families they serve. On behalf of the entire Board, thank you.

The Board also recognizes and thanks the many businesses and organizations that have helped Early Connections to grow and continue to positively impact the lives of children and their families.

To our community, we invite you to join us in as an organization that helps educators, families, and entities statewide in addressing the gaps in early childhood care and education. At Early Connections we are committed to promoting collaboration and partnerships while taking action resulting in positive outcomes for our children.

In this annual report you will find highlights of the work and accomplishments with community partners over the past year. Early Connections is entering the next year optimistic, energized, and eager to expand the organization, the services it offers, and the positive impact it has on our community.

Thank you!

MICHAEL PLAZONY

BOARD PRESIDENT



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Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeship Program*

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Monica Stanford, MPA
Family Support Child Success Specialist

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Director - City Center

Tammie Lentz
Assistant Director - City Center

Martina Johnson
*Director - Harbor Homes
& John Horan*

Marisol Kercado
Assistant Director - Harbor Homes

Hope Glover
Director - Union City

Carm Beardsley
Director - North East

Stephanie Dambaugh
Assistant Director - North East

To Our Readers

We invite you to learn more about Early Connections. Throughout this past year, we demonstrated our continued commitment to our children and families to provide high-quality early care and education throughout Erie County. We appreciate the time and dedication of our Early Connections team, who are committed to our children, their families, our community, and our organization. They inspire us all every day!

Despite the childcare staffing crisis, our team was fortunate to welcome new teachers, as we reopened classrooms and welcomed families back to our centers. To help provide a solution to the staffing crisis that has plagued our state and country, we have been able to forge new strategic partnerships as we began to create a pipeline of new credentialed child care educators. Bridging this connection between childcare workers, employers, and higher education, Early Connections has been designated to serve as the Intermediary for the Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program.

In the fall of 2022, Early Connections became the Sponsor for the Pre-Apprenticeship Program, beginning the process of carving new pathways for students in high schools and Career and Technical Education to receive opportunities in employment and postsecondary schools. This is a new initiative at Early Connections. Partnering with other leaders in our region and across the state, we are committed to finding solutions and developing new processes to aid in this crisis, while strongly advocating for the child care profession.

Early Connections continued to administer Erie's Future Fund, offering preschool scholarships to over 40 high-quality early childhood education locations throughout Erie County. We have much appreciation of our Erie's Future Fund partners and stakeholders, who have supported this wonderful initiative since 2011. Because of them, the doors to quality preschool are open to qualified Erie County children, preparing them for success in kindergarten and our community's future workforce.

Early Connections (formerly the YWCA) has a long history of leadership within Erie County, serving children and their families since 1895. We are thankful for our staff, board, partners, and community who support our work. Within our 2022-2023 Annual Report, we share our journey of regrowth post-pandemic. As we look ahead to 2024 and beyond, we are excited about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. We are grateful for the chance to help make a difference in the lives of the children and families living within our community!

MICHELLE M HARKINS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Early Connections provides high-quality early care and education services to children at five locations, including three in the city of Erie, one in Union City, and one in North East. Our programs include preschool, child care, before-and-after school care, and summer care. Each location individualizes its offerings and hours to meet the needs of the families it serves. Every year, we serve over 275 children between the ages of birth and 12 years old.

Our sites are equipped with:

- PA Dept. of Human Services Licensure
- Keystone STARS participation at a STAR 4 level
- Creative Curriculum for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in every classroom
- Nutritious meals and snacks
- Opportunities for family participation
- Secure building entry systems
- Acceptance of Child Care Works (CCW) subsidized child care payments, Pre-K Counts, Infant Toddler Contracted Slots, Erie's Future Fund Scholarships, and other scholarship opportunities.



The North East center is a close-knit family living in the same area and enjoying what the town has to offer. We take our students into the community to showcase the different products and services our town provides. We

have visited the fire station as well as an apple farm to learn more about the people near us.

Because we are able to rent two rooms within the kindergarten pod of the elementary school, there is a seamless transition for our students into kindergarten. The NESD is welcoming to our families and provides many opportunities within the school for our students to participate in.

~ Carm Beardsley

I am very happy with my children's progress. My oldest went here for 3 years and she is the only kid in Kindergarten who can write her first and last name. My second child has gained confidence and speaks really well for her age. They take such great care of the kids as well.

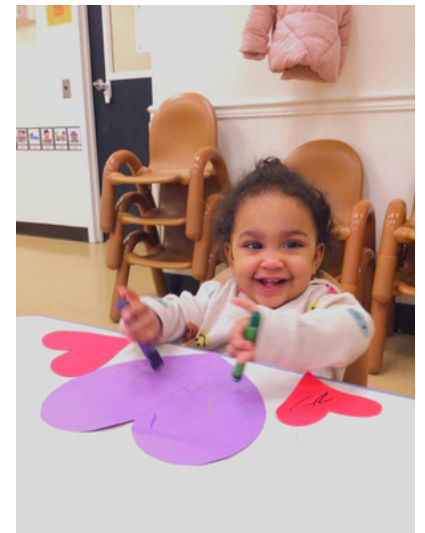
~ Chrissy Kerstetter



INFANT TODDLER CONTRACTED SLOTS A FREE CHILD CARE PROGRAM FOR QUALIFYING FAMILIES

The Infant Toddler Contracted Slots (ITCS) Program builds upon the already established infrastructure of the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC) Program. Children in the ITCS program receive priority placement for Pre-K Counts.

- Free full time care for Child Care Works eligible families with children ages 6 weeks to 36 months
- 24 children were funded by ITCS during 2022-2023 FY
- Low child to staff ratios in child care classrooms
- Allows continued focus on quality programming while building strong transitions from infant-toddler to pre-kindergarten classrooms
- 4 of our 5 Early Connections locations accept ITCS funded enrollments



EARLY CONNECTIONS

PRE-K COUNTS

A FREE STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Pre-K Counts (PKC) provides quality half-day and full-day pre-kindergarten to eligible 3 and 4 year old children in Pennsylvania. This state-funded Pre-K program is designed for children who are between age 3 and younger than the age for entry into kindergarten, are at risk of school failure, and living in families earning up to 300 percent of the federal income poverty level (such as a family of four earning \$79,500).

- Full-day Pre-K Counts is offered at 4 Early Connections locations with an additional classroom offered in partnership with Iroquois Elementary School
- Wrap care is available for care provided before and after PKC class hours
- 132 children participated in PKC classes during the 2022-2023 school year



I am beyond happy with how my daughter has been progressing while enrolled in Early Connections. Her vocabulary has come so far! She also is loved by her teachers and caretakers, which is exactly how you want your child to feel while at school/daycare.

~ Julie Warner



BENEFITS OF HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE



increased employment and tax revenue



increased job retention and productivity for employers



higher earning potential for parents



improved math and language ability



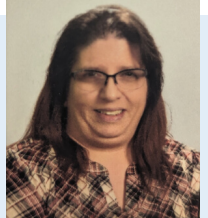
healthy development



reduced grade repetition

Although our Center, and childcare as a whole, have faced many challenges and obstacles, I'm proud to say my team strives to come together to serve the children of our community to the fullest. We are a family here at Union City, in the best sense of the word.

~ Hope Glover



FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Family Support Program services identified children through our partnership with Office of Children and Youth of Erie County. This program helps promote success and independence within the classroom as well as in life. Services were provided to 17 children during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

EARLY CONNECTIONS

EARLY EXPLORERS

Our children are our future. Quality early childhood education programs prepare children for success in school and increases the chances they become gainfully employed in the future workforce. It also provides their parents/guardians with the opportunity to become gainfully employed (Brookings.edu). Early Connections is thankful for Erie Insurance's partnership with our Early Explorers program. Early Explorers children will be entering kindergarten in the fall and attend during the summertime to prepare for kindergarten success, while engaging their parents/guardians in fun, educational activities throughout our community. Thank you, Erie Insurance, for your commitment to Erie County's children!



"With an increase in staffing, City Center has been able to re-open our school-age program and fill our infant room with 7 beautiful babies. We are excited about the positive changes and cannot wait to see what the next year has in store for us!"

~Daryl Dambaugh



EXCITING THINGS ARE HAPPENING AT OUR CENTERS!

- Re-opened our John Horan location in May 2023
- City Center opened an additional toddler room and re-opened their School-Age classroom
- 2023 was a state-wide full rebid year for Pre-K Counts grant funding. We were awarded 95 full-day PKC slots, allowing us to expand all of our PKC spots to full -day classes
- City Center received a facelift, courtesy of ServErie. A team of volunteers painted the entry way, the hallway on the first floor, along with the staff rest room on the second floor
- *Women Inspiring Women* chose Erie's Future Fund as their 2023 golf outing donation recipient
- All 5 Early Connections locations retained their STARS 4 high-quality designation
- While staffing remains a challenge across the entire field of early childhood education we have been pleased to welcome several new staff to our centers in the past few months



"Though I am very new to Early Connections, I immediately noticed the warmth between the HACE staff and children. This provides the parent security in knowing that their child is comfortable with their teacher."

~Martina Johnson

POP POP'S FOOD PANTRY

Early Connections City Center continues to partner with Second Harvest Food Bank to offer Food Pantry services to children and families who, for many reasons, are unable to access other Food Pantries in our community. During the 2022-2023 fiscal year 12 families received pantry distributions. We are very thankful to Second Harvest for their partnership!



FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT

Early Connections was selected as a grant recipient of the farm to school program for the 22/23 school year. This grant provides a wonderful learning opportunity for our preschoolers and their families to learn the benefits of using our local agricultural resources and healthy eating. Throughout the school year Early Connections used this funding to purchase produce from local farmers for the children to sample and enable the children to plant seeds to grow their own vegetables.



I am amazed by the academic and social progress my daughter had made since attending Early Connections! Before I enrolled her there, she would not talk to anyone but has since broken out of her shell and made all kinds of friends! She loves school and I am grateful for her amazing teacher and the wonderful staff at the center! I appreciate the hard work, time, and patience it takes to shape those little minds! I now see why it is called Early Connections because the relationships she has formed will leave a lasting imprint and set a solid foundation for new friendships in the years to come!

~ Shaina K. McKinney



Erie's Future Fund is a high-quality preschool scholarship program for income eligible families of children up to two years prior to Kindergarten eligibility, who reside in Erie County. Erie's Future is uniquely designed to partner with over 40 centers throughout Erie County to reach high need families thanks to the continued support of our stakeholders and supporters!

2022-23 Erie's Future Fund highlights:

- Scholarships are provided for either 3 or 5 half days per week during the school year
- Provided preschool scholarships for 45 children from September to May of the 22-23 school year
- In 2022-2023, 71% of 3 year olds and 87% of 4 year olds were proficient in the 5 early learning domains
- Over 1600 high quality preschool scholarships awarded since the start of the program 11 years ago

Erie's Future Fund
Changing Our Community One Child At A Time

THE PROBLEM: SCHOOL READINESS
Children entering kindergarten who are not prepared have a significant impact now & in the future on Erie County's economy and quality of life.

5 Key Learning Areas: Mathematical Thinking & Expression, Social & Emotional Development, Learning Through Play, Language & Literacy Development, Scientific Inquiry & Technology.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENTER KINDERGARTEN IN PROCESS OR PROFICIENT IN THE 5 KEY LEARNING AREAS

THE SOLUTION: ERIE'S FUTURE FUND
Scholarships pay for up to five half-days a week; the educational component of a program.

Since 2012, over 1645 scholarship opportunities have been provided.

Since 2016, the Summer Scholars program decreased the educational "summer slide" for over 200 children.

SCHOLARS in process or proficient in the 5 Key Learning Areas

2022-2023 School Year:
71% or more of 3 Year Old Scholars
87% or more of 4 Year Old Scholars

THE RESULTS: SUCCESS IN KINDERGARTEN
Children who are prepared for kindergarten.

- less likely to use special education services & repeat a grade
- less likely to become involved in juvenile crime
- will be more likely to graduate on time & enter skilled workforce

The Erie Community Foundation | **PENNSYLVANIA EARLY LEARNING** | **EARLY CONNECTIONS**

Erie's Future Fund is administered by Early Connections and was formed in 2011, an outgrowth of the Erie Community Foundation's Early Childhood Advisory Panel in partnership with members of the Early Learning Investment Commission and United Way of Erie County's Success By Six and Erie Together.

REGISTERED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM – AN AFFORDABLE OPTION

Early Connections is the NW Region Early Childhood (EC) Apprenticeship Intermediary, under the auspices of the District 1199c Apprenticeship Training Fund and in partnership with PennWest Edinboro/PASSHE PDO. The Registered Apprenticeship program provides low to no-cost continuing education opportunities and on-the-job learning supports to increase the number of CDA, Associates and Bachelor's degree credentialed workforce candidates in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field.

The EC Registered Apprenticeship program in Pennsylvania is entering the 6th year of programming and the 4th year of programming in the NW Region. Year 3 saw continued refinement of program processes in collaboration with regional and statewide partners, allowing for greater reach and implementation in the region. During 2022-2023, 22 CDA apprentices completed their apprenticeships and received Journey Worker certificates from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, Apprenticeship and Training Office. There was also growth in AS apprenticeships and CDA apprentices matriculating upward. The Workforce Coordinator tutored apprentices in their CDA classes and assisted those navigating the voucher system to pay for CDA tests.

- 46 officially registered Apprenticeship program participants at varying stages of progress
- 38 apprenticeship coaches were mentored
- 8 counties represented
- 33 unique childcare site locations participated



January 2023 saw the commencement of ABA Grant Work under the leadership of NWPA Job Connect to continue work implemented and concluded by the PA Smart Grant.

June 2023 Early Connections expanded the team to support work in Pre-Apprenticeship in the NW Region, supported by Pre-Apprenticeship Coordinator Jessie Dardaris, Workforce Coordinator Kim Kuehl, Coach Mentor Jestina Klink, Executive Director Michelle Harkins, and Workforce Director/Intermediary Supervisor Kim Beers.



This project is supported by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) of Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services (DHS) and Pennsylvania's Department of Education (PDE). For more information, visit dhs.pa.gov and education.pa.gov



EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE- APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Early Connections is designated by the PA DL&I ATO (PA Department of Labor & Industry's Apprenticeship & Training Office) as the Regional Sponsor for the ECE Pre-Apprenticeship Program. Jessie Dardaris joined the team in June 2023 as Pre-Apprenticeship Coordinator for the NW region. Her work will help guide High School/Career & Technical Education Students to complete CDA coursework and connect them with ECE Career and Continuing Education Opportunities.

The District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund in Philadelphia endorsed Early Connections designation as the Regional Sponsor for Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeships from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. High School Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeship Programs help prepare students to achieve childcare credentials, future employment, and higher education opportunities post-high school.

Early Connections officially partnered with 3 High School and CTE ECE Programs – Corry HS, Erie High, Millcreek Township School District. Through this work, as Intermediary, Early Connections with partners advanced the progress of the Pre-Apprenticeship Program in the Erie County region, by facilitating the purchase of educational materials including CDA books, technology devices such as iPad/google tablet, support of ECE Club Creation, and PennAEYC memberships for students. This Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship program is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry of the U.S. Department of Labor as part of an award totaling \$94,017.00 (19%) with 81% (\$379,990.00) financed from non-governmental sources.

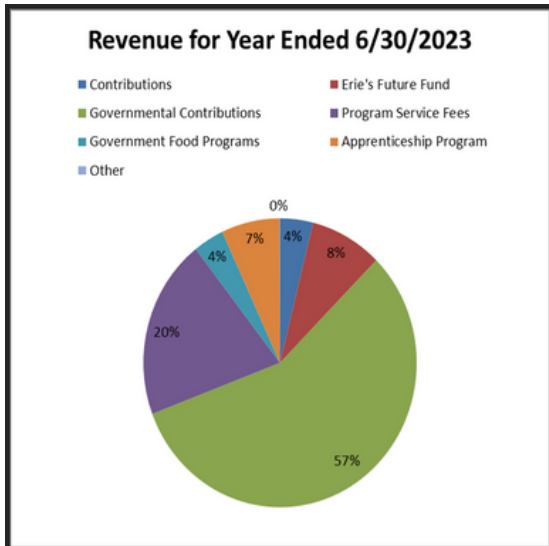
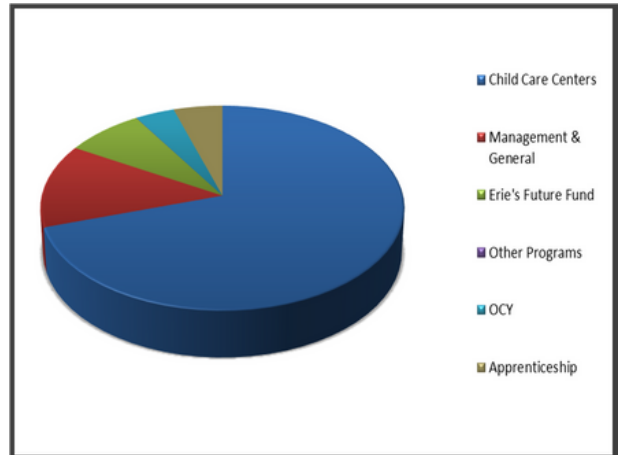
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023

REVENUE

Revenue for Year Ended 6/30/20	
	2023 Revenue
Contributions	126,663
Erie's Future Fund	277,757
Governmental Contributions	1,845,113
Program Service Fees	655,801
Government Food Programs	118,033
Apprenticeship Program	223,517
Other	2,080
Total Revenue	3,248,964

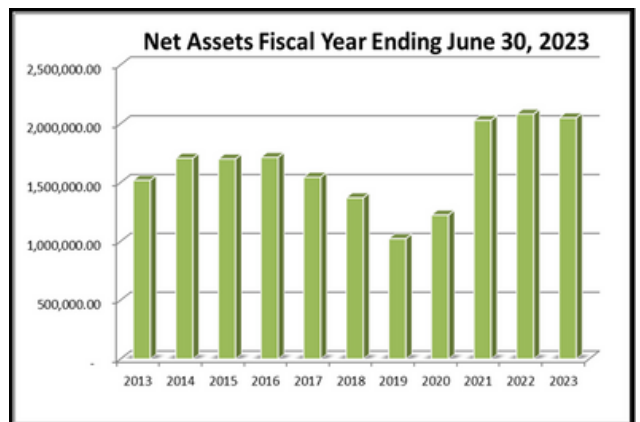
EXPENSES



2023 Audited Expenses	
Child Care Centers	2,299,418.00
Management & General	435,578.00
Erie's Future Fund	255,742.00
Other Programs	1,064.00
OCY	128,974.00
Apprenticeship	160,134.00
	3,280,910.00

EARLY CONNECTIONS IS A 501 (C)3 NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. The official registration and financial information of Early Connections may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



EARLY CONNECTIONS

Early Connections is thankful for the generosity of our partners.....

Quite simply, our work would not be possible without the support of the community. The following individuals and organizations made contributions to support the work of Early Connections. Each gift directly and positively affected a child's life. Thank you!

Early Connections

4 N.I.N.E.
Andrea Diniaco
Barbara Dengler
Brenda Morrison Borgia
Britton Family Foundation
Carm Beardsley
Carpenters Union Local 420
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TJ Scott
United Way of Erie County
United Way of South West PA

Restricted Donations

Erie Bank - Central Pennsylvania Scholarship Fund
Henry and Mary MacDonald Foundation
Sisters of Saint Joseph Mission & Ministries Foundation

Erie's Future Fund

*Preschool Scholarship Fund
Administered by Early Connections*

American Tinning and Galvanizing
C.A. Curtze
Erie Dawn Inc
Erie Insurance
Foust for Controller
Friends of Pat Harkins
Gail and Jim Kurre
Gerald J & Connie Kerr Vogt
Great Lakes Automation

Karen Geier Sullivan
Lilly Broadcasting
MacDonald Illig Jones & Britton LLP
McGill, Power, Bell & Associates
Mercy Center for Women
Monica Masterson
Northwest Bank
Parker Philips Inc
Pat and Michelle Harkins

PennAEYC
Scott Enterprises
Scott's Corporate Services, Inc.
UHS of Delaware
UPMC
Vicary Insurance Agency LLC
Women Inspiring Women
YMCA of Greater Erie

We have made every effort to list all contributions and gifts received during the period July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023. We apologize for any errors or omissions and ask you to contact Early Connections Administrative Offices at 814-874-0144 with corrections.



THANK YOU TO THE MANY VOLUNTEERS & DONORS WHO ENRICH OUR PROGRAMS!

EARLY CONNECTIONS



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www.earlyconnectionserie.org
www.facebook.com/earlyconnectionsinc

Our mission: Early Connections supports the success of young children and their families through leadership, advocacy, and quality programs in early care and education.