

Community Report 2020-2022

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Supporting the work of early childhood

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Vision

*Trying Together envisions a future
in which all caregivers feel valued.*

Mission

Trying Together supports high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them. Trying Together works regionally (in Southwestern Pennsylvania) and takes its expertise and models to statewide and national audiences.



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Timeline

1983

P.A.P.A. affiliates with the National Association for The Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and becomes The Pittsburgh Association for The Education of Young Children (PAEYC).

Early 2000s

PAEYC moves from a volunteer to staffed model.

1963

Early care and education professionals volunteer to create the Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association (P.A.P.A.).

2013

The Homewood Early Learning Hub opens and the Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative is co-founded with the Carnegie Museum of Art and Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy.

PAEYC becomes the lead organization for Homewood-Brushton Family Support Center.

2016

2017

Five-year strategic plan and rebrand approved by PAEYC Board of Directors. PAEYC partners with The Pennsylvania Association for The Education of Young Children (PennAEYC) to support the Pittsburgh Chapter of PennAEYC.

2018

PAEYC rebrands as Trying Together. Helps to qualify The Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative as a ballot referendum, the first to be added as the result of collecting petition signatures.

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Trying Together becomes an advisor for the Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group. ELRC Region 5 launches in partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, and Trying Together.

2019

Allegheny Child Care finder tool developed to assist families with finding and caregivers with promoting care and education programs for children. Homewood locations merge to become The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center.

2020

2020

In support of its newest strategic goal to directly support families, Trying Together launches the first three parts of the initial 12-part Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Resource Series to aid families in making well-informed decisions about their child's early experiences.

Trying Together begins to use NeonCRM to build relationships, record data, and support continuous quality improvement of its resources and services.

2021

Building on its commitment to racial justice, Trying Together establishes the Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI) Committee to meet regularly and guide the work of staff and the organization.

Trying Together launches the Parenting Together Pathway videos to provide high-quality information on early childhood topics for caregivers.

Trying Together conducts an audit of its fundraising and develops an annual giving plan.

2022

Trying Together and ELRC Region 5 collaborate with community partners to establish the Rapid Response Team in Allegheny County to provide immediate support to children who are in danger of being suspended or expelled from their early childhood program.

Allegheny County establishes the Department of Children's Initiatives (DCI), created from the recommendations of the Allegheny County Children's Working Fund Group Report.

A Message From Leadership

Dear Caregiver,

Today we are writing to you more than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. When we released our last Community Report in 2020, we could not have imagined that we would still be dealing with this disease. At the same time all of our physical bodies have been endangered, our mental and emotional capacities have also been taxed. From ongoing racial inequities to violent tragedies and war, it is often difficult to manage what is happening for us, let alone the young children in our lives.

As caregivers of young children, not only have you had to navigate these shared challenges, but you have also had to overcome numerous personal constraints. From continuously changing child care regulations to uncertainty about your safety and the safety of those in your care to being understaffed, the work of early care and education professionals required a monumental effort in recent years. For families, some of you have had to navigate remote learning and working from home, or the abrupt closure of your child care program, all while trying to provide a sense of calm and safety. For children, they have had their routines upended and lost valuable time to build the social-emotional skills necessary to form healthy relationships.

Collectively, we have and are continuing to experience trauma through these shared global events. Individually, we are experiencing this at varying degrees due to our inherited trauma and experience of white supremacy, whether as a Black, Indigenous, or person of color (BIPOC), or a white person. To say that these are challenging times is an understatement, and yet, there are things to celebrate and reasons to be hopeful.

While the unprecedented investments in education proposed by the federal Build Back Better plan were not realized, there was a discretionary federal investment of \$90 million to provide recruitment and retention bonuses for child care staff in Pennsylvania, and a \$25 million state increase to Child Care Works to serve families currently enrolled up to 300% of poverty level in the fiscal year 2023 state budget. Additionally, there was a \$79 million expansion in state funding to expand access to pre-k, a historic investment of \$15 million for evidenced-based home visiting, approximately \$20 million in increased funding to support early intervention, and the creation of a Pennsylvania Child Care Tax Credit for working families in Pennsylvania. We applaud these investments and thank the Early Learning PA campaign supporters who took

action to let the General Assembly know their position on early childhood investments. It is, however, important to note that the federal funding allocated for child care is a one-time investment. As we look toward a General Election in fall 2022, we call on all residents of Pennsylvania to make sure their [voter registration](#) is up to date so they can review candidates' positions and vote for people who value the importance of early care and education, the role of caregivers, and the future of our children.

Locally, the [Department of Children's Initiatives \(DCI\)](#) was developed as a result of the Allegheny County Children's Working Fund Group Report recommendations in 2019. So far, \$10 million of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds has been committed in 2022 to support early care and education and out-of-school-time programs and will be used to pilot funding opportunities for children, families, and educators.

To better support families in making well-informed decisions regarding their child's early learning experiences, Trying Together met its strategic goal of creating the first 12 parts of the topic-based resource series [Developmentally Appropriate Parenting](#). Additionally, we began producing the [Parenting Together Pathway](#) video series to further support families' learning. And through our work with ELRC Region 5, we have partnered with community partners to create the [Allegheny County Rapid Response Team](#) to minimize and hopefully prevent suspensions and expulsions from early childhood programs, which disproportionately impact BIPOC children and families.

To meet the ongoing impediment of racism to the healthy development and learning of young children and to create a future where all caregivers feel valued, Trying Together has committed itself to advocating, making community connections, providing professional development, and

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In the words of Amanda Gorman, the nation's first youth poet laureate:

*We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes and we step out of the shade,
afire and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
if only we're brave enough to be it*

sharing resources to facilitate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in early childhood experiences. Our staff continue to meet biweekly for guided conversations to examine our own actions and roles in ending racism and have formed an internal committee focused on addressing racial inequity in our early learning work. In fall 2022, we will host our second professional development **UnConference** on the topic. We hope to see you there as we continue the ongoing work of being anti-racist.

While the tasks ahead of all of us feel daunting, we do see glimmers of hope as we come to the conclusion of our 2018-2022 Strategic Roadmap later this year.

With your continued support and collaboration, we believe the needs and rights of educators, families, children, and communities must be bravely prioritized to create a future in which caregivers feel valued; children have access to high-quality early learning environments; and families have the resources they need to support their children's early learning experiences.

Thank you for your bravery, and thank you for being a light for the young children in your life. We are honored to be together with all of you in this moment to continue supporting the work of early childhood. If you have any questions regarding this Community Report or if we can be of assistance in some way, please email us at info@tryingtogether.org.

Sincerely,

Cara Ciminillo EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jan Sapotichne ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reasons to Hope

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there have been many challenges for caregivers of young children. In spite of these constraints, there have also been events and progress that have positively impacted the communities Trying Together serves. Moving forward, Trying Together will maximize these opportunities and continue to advocate for the inequities that still hinder the healthy development of young children.

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Increased Awareness & Investment In Child Care

At no other time in recent history has child care been more at the forefront of national dialogue. Thrust into the spotlight by the COVID-19 pandemic, more people than ever before are now aware of the pervasive issues the early childhood education sector has faced that were made worse by the unique challenges of the pandemic. To manage staying open during the pandemic, early care and education professionals were called upon to meet a plethora of increased job expectations at the same time they faced increased challenges, such as fewer staff and increased health and safety concerns.

In March 2022, nearly 1,000 early learning programs in Pennsylvania responded to a survey from the statewide [Start Strong PA](#) child care advocacy campaign. They reported that:

- 91% of them had staffing shortages
- 32,500 children were currently on waiting lists
- 30,000 additional children could be served if these programs were fully staffed

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 71% of children in Pennsylvania had all of the adults in their household in the workforce, according to the [Elevating the Early Childhood Workforce](#) report in June 2022 authored by Trying Together on behalf of Start Strong PA.

With the juxtaposition of demand against these constraints, it is clear to families, early educators, and other advocates that additional investments and changes are needed to provide

children with consistent healthy development opportunities, working families with affordable and reliable child care, and early educators with thriving wages and better support.

Through the work of Trying Together staff who support early learning providers served by ELRC Region 5 in Allegheny County, early educators and programs were given assistance since 2020 with applying for desperately needed funds, including:

- \$50 million to help employers provide hazard pay to employees in life-sustaining occupations during the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020
- \$38 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding that likely prevented more from closing
- A one-time [Pandemic Relief Award](#) of \$600 and first and second draw loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program in January 2021
- \$303 million in federal funds through the Coronavirus Response and Relief [Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 \(CRRSAA\)](#) announced by Governor Tom Wolf in March 2021
- ARPA Stabilizations Grants, offered by OCDEL through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds to eligible child care providers to cover personnel, rent/mortgage, utilities, mental health supports for employees and children, and more



While these federal investments from the Commonwealth have been critical to keeping early learning programs solvent in the last two years, state investments in child care have been level funded.

In the City of Pittsburgh, several unprecedented **investments** were made in support of early learning, including:

- A total of \$2 million offered through the Child Care Quality Fund (CCQF) grants in 2021 to licensed child care programs located within the city to improve the quality of their programs, which Trying Together administered
- A Childcare Reinvestment Business Fund (CRiB) forgivable loan pilot program for new and existing child care businesses in the city offered through the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of Pittsburgh with funding from The PNC Foundation
- A year-long Shared Services Pilot program managed by Trying Together that will provide human resource, financial, and marketing services to a dozen child care programs through November 2022 in its first year

COVID-19 Health & Safety Support

Imperative to the continued operation of early learning programs was the ability to mitigate the increased health and safety concerns presented by COVID-19.

Through the Universal Face Covering Order issued by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Health in November 2020, children over the age of two and staff at child care facilities needed to wear masks to minimize the spread of COVID-19. More than a year later, this order was finally lifted in December 2021. At the same time, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) added COVID-19 to the list of reportable communicable diseases for child care programs. To meet this need, Trying Together's Quality Coaches, who support quality initiatives for ELRC Region 5, and administrative staff provided support to early learning programs in reporting infections to the County.

In preparation for a national vaccine rollout in spring 2021, Trying Together advocated for child care providers to be prioritized in receiving it. To support this effort, the organization communicated with early learning providers in Allegheny County to assess how many vaccines were needed for staff. On March 3, 2021, at the direction of President Joe Biden to states, Governor Tom Wolf announced that Pennsylvania would prioritize Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccination for school staff and early learning providers. OCDEL later announced that month that relative care providers were also eligible to sign up for this vaccine initiative. For children, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the emergency use of vaccines for:

- Children ages 12 to 15 years old in May 2021
- Children ages five to 11 in November 2021
- Children six months through four years of age in June 2022

To further support the health of early educators and the children in their care, ELRC Region 5 and Global Links partnered to deliver cleaning supplies such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and facial tissues to licensed child care operators in Allegheny County. To support these distributions, Trying Together Quality Coaches coordinated the deliveries with these programs.

Progress Toward Achieving Racial Justice

In January 2020, Trying Together began a concerted effort to address racism by having ongoing conversations and training with its staff. Through this work and with the support of Dr. Aisha White and Medina Jackson from the Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (P.R.I.D.E.) Program and consultants Sheba Gittens and Hanna du Plessis, the organization is making progress toward building an internal culture of accountability and action to become actively anti-racist in our relationships. Beyond regular conversations with staff, Trying Together works to incorporate these learnings into its early childhood advocacy, community resources, and professional development offerings.

Shifting Internal Culture

- In late 2020, Trying Together began to convene staff from each department as part of its Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee. Through their efforts, Trying Together has developed: the organization's JEDI Statement, which articulates an explicit position on racial justice in its early childhood work; questions regarding racial equity to be asked in interviews with prospective job candidates; and reflective questions that all staff consider and answer in their quarterly check-ins with supervisors. As part of our sustainability efforts, our partner consultants are working with us to build the skills to continue to lead our ongoing race equity efforts for staff.
- As the organization looks toward its next Strategic Roadmap for 2023-2028, staff have begun to discuss how they will approach achieving departmental goals by prioritizing race equity in their practices and policies.

- Continuing in December 2021, Trying Together released part eight of its Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Resource Series on the topic of "Race & Equity." Resources developed and written by staff for this part included a "[Family Guide to Discussing Race and Equity](#)" in both English and Spanish.

A Historic Election

On Tuesday, November 3, 2021, Pittsburgh made history by electing its first Black mayor, former Pennsylvania State Representative Ed Gainey.

An important milestone for all citizens, specifically Black residents within the City, thousands of BIPOC children and their caregivers now have the opportunity to see policy decisions that affect them influenced by someone with whom they share a racial identity, an important step toward making positive progress in addressing the historical inequities that have persisted in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. Building on its existing relationship during Mayor Gainey's time in Harrisburg, Trying Together looks forward to working with Mayor Gainey, his staff, and City Council to meet the needs and rights of young children and their caregivers throughout Pittsburgh.

Caregiver Resources

- Due to COVID-19, a Virtual Annual Celebration was held in April 2021 in lieu of an in-person dinner. Keynote Dr. Denisha Jones, Director of Art Teaching at Sarah Lawrence College and Co-Director of Defending the Early Years, delivered a keynote regarding how to be a model for anti-racism in early childhood interactions and settings. In 2022, Trying Together will release a new Parenting Together Pathway video where Dr. Jones presents on how to foster positive racial identity development in young children.
- In response to the death of George Floyd, Trying Together began to curate anti-racism tools for children and their caregivers. Since launching in June 2020, more than 40,000 people have viewed this resource page on Trying Together's website, which includes more than 100 tools.

Strategic Goals: Outcomes & Beyond

In 2018, Trying Together launched its Strategic Roadmap. As the end of 2022 approaches, Trying Together reflects on the significant progress that was made in achieving its goals, instances where it was necessary to pivot and reprioritize to meet the needs of children, families, and educators, and opportunities to expand upon this work in 2023 and beyond.

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Strategic Goal:

A national leader offering its expertise in coordinating and connecting systems at the neighborhood, local, and regional levels to support early childhood development and early learning.

“When grownups and children are trying together, just about anything can be possible.” - Fred Rogers

This quote from the television personality and well-known advocate for early childhood education continues to be a founding inspiration for Trying Together’s vision and mission through our work with early care and education professionals, families, and other individuals. The theme of “togetherness” has also shaped the strategic work in establishing Trying Together as a convener of change for early learning environments in these communities, with a physical presence in Homewood and collaborative partnerships with individuals and organizations in East Liberty, Hazelwood, Hill District, Northside, and Wilkinsburg.

From 2020 through 2022 with the support of its community partners, Trying Together:

- Developed the [Allegheny County Family Resource Map for ELRC Region 5](#) in 2020
- Developed the [Recess Advocacy Toolkit](#) and “[Summer of Play](#)” social media toolkit in tandem with the [Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative](#)



- Coordinated efforts with The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center to:
 - Transition the [Buzzword](#) program
 - Add the [Hub & Family Center](#) as a [Diaper Bank](#) location in Allegheny County
 - Add the [Hub & Family Center](#) as an [infant formula bank](#) location of the Greater Pittsburgh Infant Formula Bank

The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center

Trying Together has provided opportunities for families and early childhood educators in the Homewood community to “gather, play, and grow” together for nearly a decade. In 2020, the merger of the Hub and Family Center locations to Kelly Street led to an enhanced reach within the Homewood community to families and center- and home-based early learning programs.

Since the location merge and with the contributions from Hub & Family Center staff, Trying Together has provided several new opportunities for families. In October of 2021, The Hub & Family Center hosted two new series of programs dedicated to women’s health and financial literacy. The **six-week Health is Wealth, Women’s Education Series** provided mothers with the opportunity to learn about various health and wellness resources to support themselves as they support their families. The Your Money, Your Goals: Financial Literacy and Wellness Group met on the fourth Friday of each month to provide a space for the community to focus on financial wellness and learn about budgeting, paying off debt, second-chance programs, financial planning, investing, and home ownership.

In response to current issues surrounding the rising costs of everyday items amid the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hub & Family Center helped to resolve the lack of resources for families by **becoming a diaper bank location in November of 2020**. This diaper bank location has currently served 76 families.

The Hub & Family Center also continues its weekly, in-person family and monthly group support programs. These programs include:

- **Fathers Trying Together** | First Tuesdays Monthly 6–7:30 p.m.
- **Women’s Rap** | Second Fridays Monthly 6–7:30 p.m.
- **Rise Together** (co-ed) | Fourth Fridays Monthly 6–7:30 p.m.

The Hub & Family Center continues to evolve as a staff, and as a dedicated community resource, in order to properly and appropriately serve the families and children of today.



Buzzword

Buzzword has continued its growth as an early literacy collaborative made up of 10 arts and sciences-based organizations, including: The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust; The Pittsburgh Festival Opera; The Pittsburgh Ballet; The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh; The Carnegie Science Center of Pittsburgh; The Kingsley Association; Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC); The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy; Trying Together; and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

With a virtual programming plan in place due to COVID-19, Buzzword has continued its process of creating "BUZZ Boxes" to distribute to families in the Hazelwood and Homewood areas through established community partners, including the Greater Hazelwood Family Support Center and the Homewood-Brushton YWCA. BUZZ Boxes provide children's books, family engagement activities and materials, partner organization materials and resources, and links to virtual programming produced by the Buzzword partners.

Buzzword has further enhanced its purpose of coordinating and connecting systems to promote early childhood literacy through the funding support of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services by establishing the Early Literacy Strategist position, which will work to scale Buzzword to more Family Centers. Buzzword will continue to offer BUZZ Boxes and digital resources to families while transitioning back into some in-person programming at Allegheny County Family Centers beginning in fall 2022.

Rapid Response Team

In January 2022, The ELRC Region 5 joined forces with Trying Together and other early childhood community partners in Allegheny County to create a **Rapid Response Team** that provides immediate support in the event that a child age zero to five is in danger of suspension or expulsion.

The goal of the Rapid Response Team is to provide assistance and support to a child care center's administration and staff, and to help families with locating resources that may supplement the child's care. The team provides:

- An immediate response, within 48 hours, to any child care center that requires supports for themselves or regarding a specific child
- A plan outlining strengths and needs evidence-based tools, along with input from parents and staff and a thorough observation
- A Revised Inventory of Practice tool
- An Ages and Stages Questionnaire
- Individualized support to the center, staff, family, and/or child from a designated team member
- Quicker connections and referrals for easier access to external supports

The Rapid Response team has had 72 unique inquiries for assistance since January 2022.

Allegheny County Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative

The Allegheny County Prenatal-to-Three (PN-3) Collaborative ensures that families of infants and toddlers receive a comprehensive set of supports that promote healthy child development.

Collaborative members include: ABK Learning & Development Center, Allegheny County Health Department, Allegheny County Department of Children's Initiatives, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, Allies for Children, Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC), and ELRC Region 5. Through the generous support of the Pritzker Children's Initiative, Trying Together provides leadership and administration for the Collaborative.

The Collaborative's primary strategy toward achieving its goal is to create a comprehensive plan coordinating an existing set of strategies beginning with Hello Baby and leading into high-quality home visiting and child care services. While Allegheny County is resource-rich comparatively, state and federal funds fall short, and many families of children PN-3 are still not receiving the high-quality services they need. Additional historical challenges include a lack of coordination across systems, a lack of high-quality offerings accessible to

the highest-need families, distrust of government programs by high-need families, and reactive versus proactive engagement with families. Moving forward, the partners are committed to a collaborative, upstream, and data-driven approach to address these challenges.

Trying Together and its partners were also awarded a race equity grant to help their PN-3 leaders develop a better understanding of key issues that impact Black and Brown children and families in the region, with the objective of developing a common race-equity language across the PN-3 systems and to provide support for organizational equity plans and practices. Training sessions began in early 2022 and are continuing.



Crisis Child Care Project

Typically, local families with urgent child care needs are served through Jeremiah's Place. However, due to an influx of demand for Jeremiah's Place, Trying Together, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, and three local child care providers partnered early in 2022 to extend its reach by reserving child care "seats" for families in crisis across the County with short-term child care needs that may also need longer-term care.

Heritage Community Initiatives, Providence Connections, and Hilltop Community Children's Center were able to offer 13 spots for children. The seats are reserved for families experiencing a crisis.



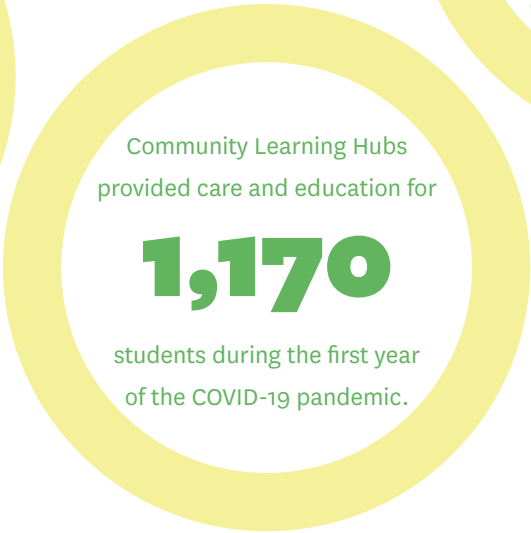
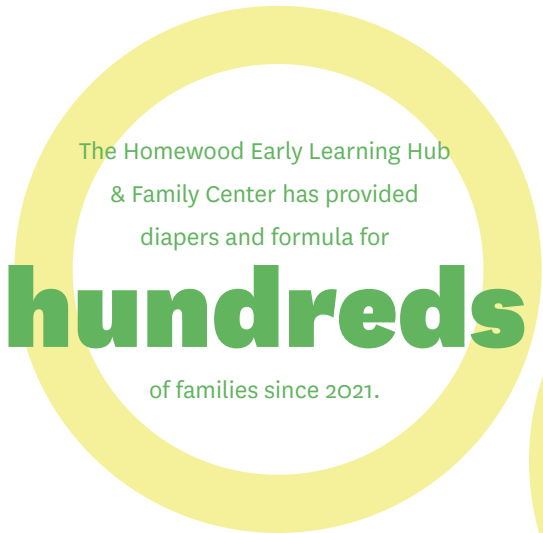
Community Learning Hubs

During the school year 2020-2021, Trying Together in conjunction with Allegheny County Department of Human Services and United Way of Southwestern of PA offered Community Learning Hubs. Community Learning Hubs served to care for children who were in remote school situations and needed a caring place during the school day so parents could return to work.

Trying Together worked with 29 Community Learning Hubs across Allegheny County and helped the Hubs care for 1,170 children during the school year.



Community Resource Impact



Strategic Goal:

The premier provider of in-person and online professional growth opportunities for home, center, and school-based professionals to ensure that every child has access to high-quality early childhood and early learning experiences.

Over the past two years, the early childhood education field has consistently undergone changes and adjustments. Early care and education professionals have had to pivot, adjust, and learn to meet quality expectations, keep their businesses open, find qualified staff, and keep the children they care for safe during a global pandemic.

Pennsylvania's ECE programs struggled and faced the possibility of losing their Keystone STARS rating due to the difficulty in finding and maintaining a strong, qualified workforce.

Trying Together continued to support educators in their work by meeting them where they were and working with them to navigate new professional standards, the Keystone STARS designation/renewal process, and grant applications, as well as offering a variety of professional development opportunities.

In November 2020, Trying Together also hired a Home-Based Child Care Coach to support home-based child care providers in Allegheny County to develop new skills and continuously improve their early childhood teaching practices to achieve higher program quality.



Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5

As the quality partner of the ELRC Region 5 for three years, the Trying Together Quality Coaches, Early Learning Program Engagement Specialists (ELPES), Leadership Development Strategist, and Everyday Interactions Matter Strategist have supported quality improvements for more than 600 licensed child care providers throughout Allegheny County.

Staff have worked with program administrators, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers and home-based child care providers to develop new skills and continuously improve their early childhood teaching practices to achieve higher program quality. Between July 2020 and June 2022, 49 child care providers have made positive movement in Keystone STARS:

- STAR 1 to STAR 2 - 19
- STAR 1 to STAR 3 - 1
- STAR 1 to STAR 4 - 5
- STAR 2 to STAR 3 - 4
- STAR 2 to STAR 4 - 10
- STAR 3 to STAR 4 - 10

ELRC Region 5 Quality Coach Outreach:

- 77,811 emails
- 5,260 phone calls
- 713 site visits (impacted by COVID-19 pandemic)
- 860 meetings (in person and virtual)
- 84,749 interactions

From July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022, ELPES had 8,014 total contacts with relative care providers—mostly through emails and phone—mainly relating to CARES stimulus funding, payment/invoice issues, the enrollment and application process, and assistance with clearances. As of June 2022, ELPES were supporting 450 relative providers serving 985 children.





Director Roundtables

Trying Together, as ELRC Region 5's quality partner, continued its series of weekly Director Roundtable sessions to support directors and managers of early learning programs in Allegheny County. During these sessions, participants discussed important topics such as the impact of COVID-19, staffing difficulties, funding opportunities, health and safety protocols, the mental health of educators and children, and more.

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) representatives and certification supervisors of the OCDEL western region office regularly joined the roundtables on a monthly basis to share updates, provide guidance, and answer questions from participants.

Since its inception, 288 unique providers have attended, with an average of 60 unique providers per week. Though the Director Roundtables began as a way to guide providers during

the COVID-19 pandemic, participants have expressed a desire to continue, as the sessions have helped them share ideas and network with others.

Virtual Community of Practice and Ask The Coaches Sessions

In 2020, the ELRC Region 5 Quality Coaches began offering their Community of Practice sessions via a virtual platform to support providers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2021, Quality Coaches kicked off a monthly one-hour discussion for child care owners, directors, and teaching staff to ask questions, network with peers, and learn about resources available to them.

Topics for these sessions included school-age programming, mental health, the Internal Assessment Process with PA Keys, Keystone STARS, and more. Participants received PQAS credit for attending the sessions.

Professional Growth

To support the learning and career advancement of early learning professionals, Trying Together offers a combination of in-person and virtual courses, coaching, mentoring, and UnConferences. Custom professional development services are also available upon request.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Trying Together has been offering professional development sessions via Zoom and Schoology, a nationally renowned online learning management system (LMS) that enhances Trying Together's ability to offer virtual professional growth opportunities in a user-friendly manner. The Schoology platform supports Trying Together's Child Development Associate (CDA) programs, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship program, and custom and public professional development courses.

Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators

In 2022, Pennsylvania adopted a new set of standards and competencies informed by trends and shifts occurring nationally to ensure consistency and reliability in early care and education. Replacing the PA Core Knowledge Competencies (CKCs), the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE) are the general knowledge and skills that educators need to know and be able to demonstrate to support the growth and development of every child.

To prepare for the transition, Trying Together hired a Curriculum Development Specialist to work closely with the

professional development team to review curriculum content and include a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and social/emotional wellness perspective.

Pennsylvania Professional Development Organization (PDO) Liaison

Trying Together partners with the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization at Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (ECE PDO@PASSHE) to serve as a regional PDO Liaison. In this role, Trying Together connects early learning professionals to credit-bearing coursework and credentials offered by professional development organizations and institutions of higher education in the region. PDO funding covers tuition, expenses, and other support.

Through this, Trying Together ensures that high-quality professional development is available and accessible to early learning professionals at all levels. Trying Together's PDO Coordinator has supported 460 educators in the application process to receive funding for higher education programs.

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Child Development Associate (CDA) Programs

Trying Together offers three unique community-based Child Development Associate (CDA) programs:

- CDA Credential Preparation Program offers 135 hours of professional development over the course of six to nine months focused on practice knowledge and skills early learning professionals need to become credentialed. Participants can matriculate up to nine course credits at Carlow University once they obtain their credential.
- CDA Community of Practice assists educators with

completing CDA portfolio requirements, as well as CDA test preparation and CDA observation steps.

- CDA Renewal supports early learning professionals in Pennsylvania who are interested in renewing their CDA Credential.

Trying Together offers the CDA program at a community-based level with the support of various funding and development partners, including: Shippensburg University; Hillman Foundation; The Buhl Foundation; and The Pennsylvania Key. With support from the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Trying Together also supports Early Head Start programs in meeting federal qualification requirements through CDA and mentoring programming.

Matriculation

28 Through the partnership with ECE PDO@PASSHE, Trying Together hired a Curriculum Development Specialist to develop articulation agreements with local universities and community colleges to offer college course credit to participants who complete Trying Together's CDA program and select professional development series. Trying Together currently has agreements with Carlow University and Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC).

Trying Together's CDA and professional development series curriculum for early childhood educators continues to be reviewed for educational rigor and aligned with NAEYC standards, the Danielson Framework, and the new Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE).



Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship Program

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program is a learn-as-you-earn career pathway that helps early learning professionals in Allegheny County earn a CDA Credential or Associate's Degree while maintaining employment at an early learning program. The program is employer-driven and flexible in meeting apprentices' needs.

Apprenticeship combines on-the-job learning with relevant instruction to build skills that increase the potential for higher wages and career advancement.

Through a partnership with the CCAC, Trying Together currently offers a CDA-Track Apprenticeship and an Associate's Level Apprenticeship. Trying Together also partnered with Literacy Pittsburgh to offer expanded support to apprentices, such as tutoring and access to a variety of resources.

Trying Together plans to extend the apprenticeship program opportunities to home-based child care providers.

Teacher Induction and Certification

In Pennsylvania, Pre-K Counts teachers are required upon hire to have a Level I teaching certificate, after which they have six years to obtain a Level II teacher certification. Teachers must meet several criteria to obtain a Level II certification, including the following:

- Teach in Pennsylvania on a Level I certificate for three to six years of satisfactory service
- Earn 24 post-Baccalaureate credits
- Obtain six credits associated with the area(s) of certification
- Complete a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved Induction program

Trying Together offers an Induction program for Level I teachers in Allegheny and surrounding counties that features 12 hours with an experienced mentor and 18 hours of high-quality professional development. This program is provided to teachers in Pre-K Counts classrooms. Additionally, Trying Together provides evaluators with early childhood experience that meets PDE requirements for certified Level I and Level II early childhood education teachers.

From June 2020 to June 2022, 40 Level I teachers completed Trying Together's Induction program and 289 teacher evaluations were conducted for Induction and Teacher Certification Level I and Level II teachers.

ECE Lending Library

In December 2021, the Trying Together and ELRC Region 5 ECE Lending Library opened for early learning providers to borrow an array of materials for their programs. The ECE Lending Library items support and recognize learning abilities, cultural diversity, and health and safety. Available materials include children's books, child and program assessment materials, teaching and leadership resources, play kits, storytelling kits, and three Inspire Interactive Panels. All items are located at Trying Together's Squirrel Hill office.

ECE PDO@PASSHE funded the library materials as well as the purchase of technology devices, such as iPads, laptops, hotspots, and tablets, to eliminate technology barriers for educators.

Educators from 19 distinct early learning programs have borrowed 46 items from the ECE Lending Library in the first six months.



UnConference Series

Made possible by PNC Grow Up Great, Trying Together hosts innovative, hands-on professional growth UnConferences centered on a range of early childhood themes and topics.

Hosted virtually, UnConferences over the past two years have discussed inclusion, trauma-informed care, selfcare for ECE professionals, and the impact of COVID-19 on child care, and served 916 participants.

Caring in a “New Normal” | September 2020

Workshops:

- Positive Interactions During the Pandemic
- A Conversation on How to Support the Social/Emotional Needs of Children
- Building a Foundation for your Organization’s Financial Wellness
- Providing Safe and Healthy Care in Child Care Now and Beyond the Pandemic

Exceptional Care with a Team Approach to Inclusion | January 2021 (Co-Hosted with The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh) | Keynote Speaker: Wendy Pardee, The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh

Workshops:

- Transition and Educational Support in the Early Childhood Environment
- Creating and Building Inclusive Support Teams for Children
- How to Assess Your Students’ Needs: Using the ASQ

Through the Lens of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Program

- Overview of Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services in Allegheny County Referral Through Transitioning Out of 0-3 Services
- Catering to The Whole Classroom: Lesson Development and Implementation That Speaks to Every Child

Creating a Safe Place with Trauma-Informed Care | February 2022 | Keynote Speaker: Dr. Veirdre Jackson, Living Strong Consulting

Workshops:

- Co-Creating a Healing Community of Equity & Trust
- Rapid Response Team: Reducing Expulsions and Suspensions in Early Childhood Education
- Self-Care Isn’t Selfish, It’s Necessary: Practical Tools for Early Childhood Educators to Reduce Stress and Avoid Burnout
- Talking to Listen: Exploring Family Stressors and Creating Positive Relationships to Support Families
- Teaching Children Through a Trauma Lens

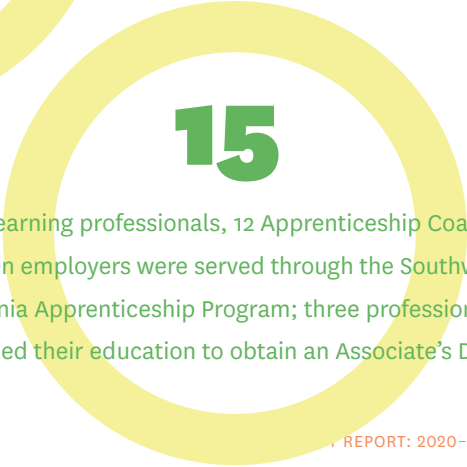
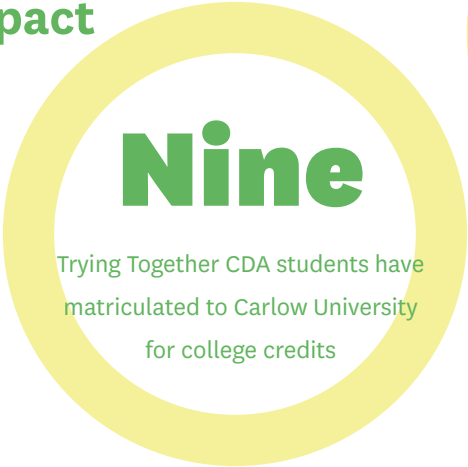
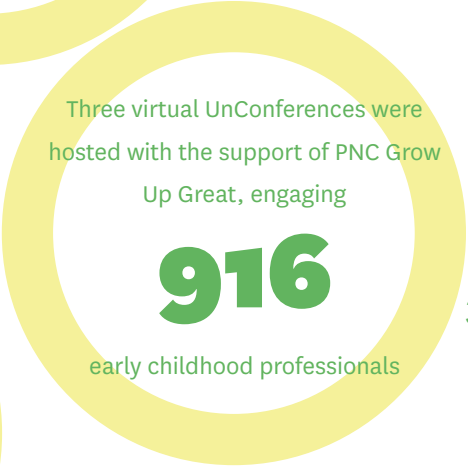
Trying Together and partners are planning an UnConference in fall 2022 that will cover race equity in early childhood.

Message from Me

Message from Me serves as a tool for children to communicate with their families about their daily activities and learning experiences through the use of digital pictures and recorded audio messages. From 2020-2022, families received 39,840 messages from their children.

In January 2022, Trying Together and the Carnegie Mellon University CREATE Lab launched the Message from Me Caregivers App where families could access their child’s message. Caregivers without smartphones can still receive the messages in the form of an email.

Professional Growth Impact



Strategic Goal:

A “go-to source” for families to aid them in making well-informed decisions regarding their child’s early experiences.

Engaging in a child’s learning and development is a dynamic and intentional process. Research shows that active family engagement leads to better outcomes for children and builds strong learning communities.

The everyday interactions that adults have with the young children in their care have a great impact on their healthy development and learning.

Trying Together has made significant strides in helping families make educated choices about their children’s care and education.

Since 2020, Trying Together has:

- Completed the first 12 parts of [Developmentally Appropriate Parenting](#), a resource series for caregivers to learn to engage in positive ways with their young children that supports healthy learning environments and relationships. The series includes several Guides for Families on topics such as: [early intervention](#); [supporting social-emotional development](#); [childhood mental health](#); and [discussing race and equity with children](#).
- Produced the Parenting Together Pathway, a [video-based learning series](#) that provides high-quality information on early childhood development to parents and caregivers.
- Created an online Family Engagement Toolkit for families and child care professionals.
- Curated a list of and promoted anti-racism resources for families and child care providers. To date, the page has been viewed 40,572 times and is consistently one of the top-performing pages on the website each month.
- Distributed monthly email newsletters to an audience of families served by ELRC Region 5.
- Created family-focused web pages on the ELRC Region 5 website with information about applying for Child Care Works (CCW) subsidy, finding child care, and more.



Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Resource Series

Since beginning in 2020, Trying Together has completed its 12-part family resource content series, [Developmentally Appropriate Parenting](#).

These resources were curated and developed to empower parents, relative care providers, and other caregivers to create high-quality experiences at the earliest stages of their child's life. In each part, Trying Together focuses on a specific early childhood topic and shares relevant digital and printable content that features information, tips, and helpful resources.

Series topics include:

- Part I: Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
- Part II: Childhood Physical Health

- Part III: Child Care
- Part IV: Early Intervention (EI)
- Part V: Safety
- Part VI: Social-Emotional Development
- Part VII: Childhood Mental Health
- Part VIII: Race and Equity
- Part IX: Transitions and Routines
- Part X: Gender and Gender Identity
- Part XI: Family Dynamics
- Part XII: Caring for the Caregiver

Trying Together also created and distributed card sets featuring information and resources on the early childhood topic featured in each part. To date, Trying Together has distributed 530 card sets to caregivers.



Parenting Together Pathway

The Parenting Together Pathway is a video-based learning series created by Trying Together that provides high-quality information on early childhood development to parents and caregivers.

Launched in April 2021, the Parenting Together Pathway provides families the opportunity to learn more about topics to better support their children's health growth, such as:

- Brain development
- Play
- Interactions and relationships
- Technology
- Child care
- Advocacy
- Early intervention
- Safety and emergencies
- Social-Emotional development

In 2022, Trying Together plans to add more videos to the series. The next topic will focus on positive racial identity development.

The Parenting Together Pathway page on the website has been viewed 906 times, with an additional 177 video views on Vimeo.

Family Resource Referrals

In fall 2020, Trying Together hired a Family Resource Coordinator to assist families who contact the ELRC Region 5 for resource requests.

Requests fall into two categories: child care-specific needs or family-related needs. The Family Resource Coordinator helps families:

- Navigate the Allegheny Child Care Finder Tool
- Find spots for children who qualify for assistance programs
- Find high-quality child care programs
- Obtain early intervention resources
- Find resources for early intervention or behavior support

Since beginning, the Family Resource Coordinator has given 3,191 referrals with more than 2,500 for child-care related needs. To continue to support and meet the needs of families, the partners of the ELRC Region 5 have expanded staffing.

Family Engagement Toolkit

In an effort to support caregivers in bolstering their family engagement practice, Trying Together created the **Family Engagement Toolkit**, an online toolkit of printable resources that enables families and early childhood educators to:

- Access strategies that strengthen the relationships that nourish a child’s growth and sense of belonging
- Find ideas and resources to enrich relationships in their learning community
- Learn ways to increase equity and access for all involved
- Take the opportunity to reflect on the family engagement practices in their home or program

The Toolkit is best suited for families and child care providers of children ages birth to nine years and provides information and resources on family engagement practices in a variety of settings, including child care centers, family child care homes, group child care homes, and relative provider locations.

Since its launch in February 2021, the toolkit page on the website has had 3,693 pageviews.

Family Engagement Impact



Strategic Goal:

An expert policy resource in Western Pennsylvania and a leading advocate for high-quality early care and education in the state, mobilizing its network to take action on issues important to young children and their families.

A key component of Trying Together's advocacy effort is educating the community about the funding and policies that affect young children, families, and the early childhood education field and connecting them to the policymakers who vote on them.

While there were existing problems and challenges with the child care system—staffing, low wages, subsidy-reimbursement rates, inflation—the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated them and shed a national spotlight on child care. That attention led to investments through the federal stimulus packages, which have helped providers stay open but are not sustainable. In response to these constraints, Trying Together pivoted to virtual advocacy efforts, including meetings, roundtable discussions, forums, and tours, to meet the needs of providers and families.

In the spring and summer of 2022, Trying Together returned to some in-person events and staff returned to the Capitol to meet with elected officials for the first time in two years. To help with the education of its various stakeholders, the Trying Together policy team also developed an [Early Childhood Funding Map](#). The map provides an overview of the complex early childhood system of programs and funding streams and illustrates how public investments flow from the federal and state levels to early childhood programs.

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2021–2022 Public Policy Agenda

Trying Together released its third public policy agenda in the summer of 2021 with a sharpened focus on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The policy agenda prioritized fair, just, and inclusive practices, resulting in a stronger vision for Trying Together’s policy efforts, particularly in elevating the early childhood workforce. The 2021–2022 Public Policy Agenda outlines four main priorities to:

- Invest significantly in and strengthen the early learning infrastructure
- Focus on equitable and developmentally appropriate care and learning
- Elevate the early childhood workforce
- Build connections and leverage partnerships to support health, wellness, and the community

In order to achieve its policy goals, Trying Together continues to collaborate with public, private, and philanthropic stakeholders to advocate for change at the local, state, and federal levels.

Voter registration, engagement, and education are important pieces of Trying Together’s policy and advocacy efforts.

To address these needs, the Public Policy team has created and conducted professional development for child care providers on how to educate and support families in registering to vote. Additionally, Trying Together has supported efforts to elevate child care, pre-k, and other issues impacting families and businesses in the election process. In late 2020, Trying Together worked with a child care provider to host two candidate conversations for House and Senate races and continues to share voter education information with providers and families ahead of the 2022 general election.

Increased Sustainable Investments

With early care and education being prioritized following the 2020 election, several proposals were made throughout policy discussions, ranging from the Biden Administration's American Families and Jobs Plans, which included a proposal of \$450 billion for child care and pre-k, to a Congressional budget resolution, including a proposal for \$400 billion directed to child care and pre-k.

In 2021 and 2022, Trying Together staff participated in the virtual NAEYC Public Policy Forum. Along with other partner organizations and providers, staff met with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation and Senators to highlight how federal stimulus dollars were helping the field to survive, and discussed the need for continued sustainable investments. NAEYC asked Trying Together to participate in a pre-recorded session presenting the organization's advocacy fellowships, which aired during the 2022 Public Policy Forum.

Early Childhood League

Through the generosity of The Grable Foundation and a [Remake Learning TOMORROW grant](#), Trying Together facilitated the [Early Childhood League](#) from January through September 2021. The League served as a pilot project to bring together parents, caregivers, and leaders of community organizations to advocate for early childhood education. Members met monthly via Zoom to discuss communications techniques, community organizing strategies, early childhood education principles, and public policy processes. Trying Together brought in several experts to present, including federal advocates, state and local policymakers, and educational organizers.

Within smaller committees, the participants led and created their own resources for the community, including the:

- Mobilization Committee, which focused on grassroots policy issues for children and families and learned about the three ELPA campaigns and community organizing strategies
- Toolkit/Early Intervention Committee, which compiled a guide to support families with children with developmental concerns
- Policy Committee, which developed a report outlining the collective advocacy focus of the Early Childhood League

Through this training and their collaborative efforts, the Early Childhood League formed a [call-to-action campaign](#), produced an [Early Intervention Resource Guide](#), and developed a [policy report](#).

Family Care Act

Trying Together is a partner of the PA Family Care Coalition campaign supporting the Family Care Act, which aims to secure a paid family medical leave insurance fund for families statewide.

If Pennsylvania passes the Family Care Act, families will no longer have to choose between remaining financially stable in the workforce and caring for their young child in the most critical period of their life. Making paid family leave available is critical to healthy infant development, and a critical support for early care and education professionals who still do not have access to benefits. As Trying Together advocates for child care and early learning in federal reconciliation packages, it also supports the inclusion of paid family leave as the initial step for supporting families with infants.

Grasstops Leadership

Trying Together continues to collaborate with grasstops leaders, such as business and philanthropic stakeholders.

In October 2021, Trying Together began compiling early childhood education policy briefs to share with grasstops leaders on a monthly basis, which has led to more connections and important conversations to elevate early childhood across the region. From February through June 2022, Trying

Together hosted monthly calls to provide state budget updates and share opportunities to participate in policy actions. Additionally, policy staff have been joining the weekly ELRC Region 5 Director Roundtable to present a mobilization moment and provide updates on local, state, and federal policy and ways child care providers can take action.



Early Learning PA Coalition

As solutions to child care continue to be framed around equity barriers in systemic problems, Trying Together has compounded its advocacy efforts with partners across the state and country. Trying Together continues to be a principal partner in the statewide Early Learning PA (ELPA) Coalition. In addition to Start Strong PA, Pre-K for PA, and Childhood Begins at Home, a fourth campaign—Thriving PA—launched in 2021, and a process to focus on Early Intervention advocacy has begun.

Throughout 2021, ELPA partners—including Trying Together—engaged in training with School Readiness Consulting centered on race equity and how it shows up internally across lead organizations and campaigns, as well as within external policy and advocacy work. Trying Together is leading the ongoing equity efforts for ELPA, which includes drafting the campaign’s first Statement of Commitment to Racial Equity.

Start Strong PA

The statewide child care advocacy campaign, Start Strong PA, which Trying Together is a partner of, held 12 virtual forums in April and May of 2021 to engage provider and family voices around how ARPA funding could best be spent. Trying Together led two forums—one for Allegheny and another for the surrounding Southwestern Pennsylvania counties—with more than 170 participants. Start Strong PA also sent a survey to collect written feedback and received more than 1,000 responses.

Based on the forums and survey feedback, the campaign provided recommendations to the administration and General Assembly including:

- Payments for providers to use for recruitment and retention or staff
- Elimination of copays for families
- Advertisement of the child care subsidy program
- Paying providers on enrollment versus attendance
- Expanding infant and toddler contracted slots

In addition to collaborating on the Start Strong PA campaign, Trying Together leads the campaign’s communications and policy committees. Through this role, Trying Together produced a story collection project to capture videos of providers sharing how the staffing crisis impacted their businesses and abilities to serve children and families. To help illustrate the staffing shortages faced by providers, Start Strong PA conducted a survey quantifying Pennsylvania’s current child care crisis, which threatens parents’ ability to work and the overall economy. The first survey, conducted between August 30 and

September 8, 2021, detailed the child care staffing crisis in 1,163 Pennsylvania child care programs across 63 counties and its effects on working families' ability to access care.

A follow-up survey, conducted between March 8 and April 3, 2022, demonstrated the continued impact of classroom closures and the ability of programs to serve children.

According to the respondents of the survey:

- Nearly 32,500 children sat on waiting lists.
- More than 30,000 additional children could have been served at respondents' sites if they were fully staffed.

- 91% of respondents reported staffing shortages.
- Programs need to fill nearly 7,000 open child care positions.
- 48% of respondents have closed at least one classroom.

On April 12, 2022, Trying Together participated in Start Strong PA's press conference in the Pennsylvania Capitol Rotunda to release the results from this 2022 staffing survey.

Another key element in reducing the inequities within the field surrounds providing care during non-traditional hours (NTH), or outside of Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.



As part of its research deliverables for Start Strong PA, Trying Together authored the campaign's first policy brief on NTH child care titled *Policy Brief: Overview of Non-Traditional Hour Child Care*. The brief discussed the definitions of NTH hours in the child care sector, highlighted the research on family needs, and put forth recommendations to strengthen NTH care within the sector.

On April 22, 2022, Trying Together partnered with the Westmoreland Chamber of Commerce to [host a discussion](#) about the impact of child care needs on the business community, with a specific focus on non-traditional hours. Westmoreland County providers, business leaders, and elected officials joined the discussion to share challenges and brainstorm solutions. Trying Together is committed to more efforts for unique offerings like non-traditional hours as part of its commitment to fair, just, and inclusive policies, as Black, Latinx, and low-income children under six disproportionately have parents working non-traditional hours.

Currently, Pennsylvania is utilizing ARPA discretionary child care funds for rate incentives for providers that offer child care during NTH. These funds will support add-on incentives to Child Care Works (CCW) base rates for child care providers that offer at least two hours of care during non-traditional hours.

In June 2022, Trying Together and Start Strong PA released *Elevating the Early Childhood Workforce*, a report that highlights the historical and current context for the underinvestment and undervaluing of the early childhood field. This report summarized the details of the staffing crisis while also offering pathways toward a more equitable, high-quality early learning system through elevating the value of

the profession and increasing provider compensation. The report was presented virtually on June 9, 2022, to child care providers, families, advocates, policymakers, and community members to discuss the struggles early childhood educators are facing.

The necessity of the campaign continues to be evident as the state administration and legislature has level funded child care for three years. Since fiscal year 2019-2020, the child care services line item has remained at \$156.5 million and child care assistance at \$109.9 million, despite 80% of Pennsylvania children who are eligible for subsidy not being served.

Start Strong asked advocates to "Raise Child Care" to elevate the impact of the child care crisis on employees, working families, and young children. The Raise Child Care mini campaign within Start Strong PA took significant steps toward advocating for increased wages. These efforts were ultimately met by the General Assembly in the 2023 state budget, with \$90 million in appropriations toward one-time bonuses for child care teachers.

To date, 398 organizations and 13,262 individuals have signed on as Start Strong PA supporters.

Pre-K for PA

The Pre-K for PA campaign works to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania enters kindergarten ready to succeed. State funding for pre-k has significantly increased since the 2014 inception of the campaign. Following a year of no increase due to budget shortfall, the 2022 fiscal year saw a \$30 million increase (\$25 million for Pre-K Counts and \$5 million for Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program), bringing the total investment to \$311.5 million. Currently, the programs provide high-quality pre-k education for 33,445 three- and four-year-old children across Pennsylvania.

As the Commonwealth continues to increase public dollars for early childhood education, it is imperative that investments go toward increasing rates for publicly funded programs to pay providers closer to what high-quality pre-k costs. In March 2021 Trying Together released the report *Invest in Quality: A Case for Paying Closer to What High-Quality Pre-K Costs*. Improving quality through rate adjustments in both Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program ensures these programs can maintain high-quality early learning experiences for children and families, and a skilled and stable teaching workforce maintains a high-quality early learning environment. While quality expects and demands the appropriate knowledge and credentials of professionals, the compensation for pre-k teachers remains significantly lower than their colleagues in K-12 settings.

In the 2023 budget, pre-k received \$60 million in additional funding for the state's Pre-K Counts program and \$19 million in additional funding for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance

Program. Together, this \$79 million expansion will serve over 2,300 additional young children and increase rates for providers to support the early care and education workforce and address rising costs.

To date, more than 681 organizations and 20,934 individuals have signed on as Pre-K for PA supporters.

Childhood Begins at Home

The unmet need for home visiting services in Pennsylvania is 95%. In 2021, Childhood Begins at Home released the report *Forward Thinking: Diversifying Funding to Grow and Sustain Evidence-Based Home Visiting in Pennsylvania*, which provided an overview of funding streams that support home visiting and made recommendations for potential new funding. Trying Together participated in the research and review of this report.

In Pennsylvania's 2023 fiscal year budget, Childhood Begins at Home received an increase of \$15 million in the Community-Based Family Center line item to serve an additional 3,800 pregnant women, young children, and their families with evidence-based home visiting services. Additionally, the Nurse-Family Partnership line item received \$1 million to serve 200 more families in the Commonwealth. This was an important win for children and families, as evidence-based home visiting had not received an increase in a few years.

Early Intervention

ELPA is in the process of assessing early intervention (EI) issues to inform development of a statewide legislative and administrative action agenda for implementation via a policy advocacy campaign. Trying Together participated in the advocate focus group in late 2021 to offer perspective to inform the development of the strategy and recommendations for policy goals. Trying Together also recruited families and EI professionals to participate in the process. The EI efforts are focused on the infant/toddler program (known as Part C) and the transition to the preschool program.

Following several focus groups and community feedback sessions, the EI campaign will likely focus on:

- 44
- Serving all children who can benefit (outreach, referral, enrollment)
 - Ensuring Part C EI services offer the quality needed to make a difference
 - Achieving equitable access in Part C EI
 - Addressing the mental health needs of infants and toddlers
 - Partnering with Medicaid to improve Part C EI

Implementation of this campaign will begin in early 2023.

Public Policy Impact

**Over
\$1.5B**

in Federal Relief and Assistance
Funding to Pennsylvania to support the
child care field

\$16M

in increased state
investments for home visiting

80+

meetings with state legislators in
district offices, Harrisburg, virtual
visits, and child care tours

17

Early Childhood
League Members

\$109M

in increased investments for pre-k

\$90M

toward one-time bonuses to child care staff

\$25M

in increased state investments
to child care

3,168

actions taken by advocates





Staff Representation

Trying Together staff provide their expertise to support the work of early childhood on the following boards and committees:

Regional Representation

Allegheny County Children, Youth and Family Advisory Board

Allegheny County Family Center Network

All for All Coalition Education & Family Support Subcommittees

Best Books for Babies Committee

Buzzword Collaborative

Digital Media and Learning Affinity Group of Remake Learning

Early Literacy Workgroup

ELRC Region 5, Local Leadership Council

Hi5! Transition from Pre-k to Kindergarten Team

The Homewood Community Engagement Center
Advisory Council

Lead Safe Allegheny

One North Side

Pittsburgh Learning Collaborative

Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative

Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education
(P.R.I.D.E.) Advisory Committee

Remake Learning Council

Western Pennsylvania Early Literacy Team

Statewide Representation

BUILD Initiative

Childhood Begins at Home Campaign

Early Learning Council (ELC)

PA Coalition for Healthy Families and Workplace

Pennsylvania School-Age Child Care Alliance

Pre-K for PA Campaign

SharedSource Pennsylvania

Start Strong PA Campaign

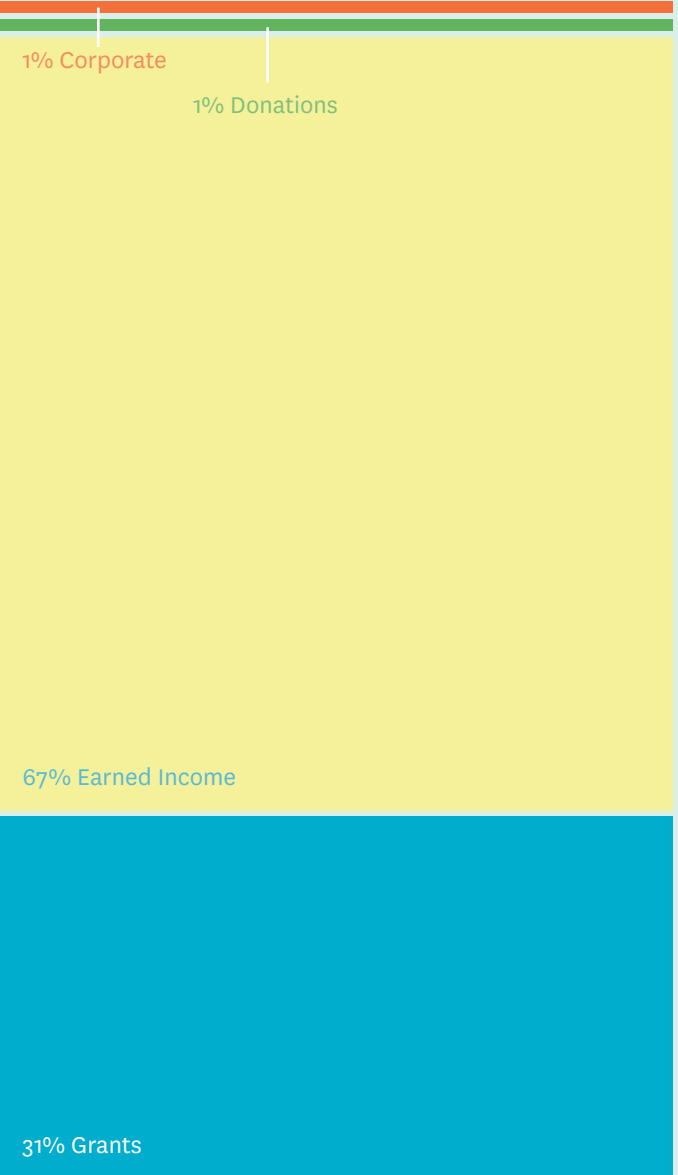
Thriving PA Campaign

Revenue & Support

FY 2021



FY 2022



Philanthropic Support

Trying Together thanks these philanthropic partners for their continued support of early learning:

Birmingham Foundation

The Buhl Foundation

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

The Grable Foundation

The Heinz Endowments

Hillman Foundation

Jefferson Regional Foundation

McAuley Ministries

New Sun Rising

PNC Grow Up Great

The Pittsburgh Foundation

Pritzker Children's Initiative

Remake Learning

Richard King Mellon Foundation

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania

William Penn Foundation

Acknowledgments

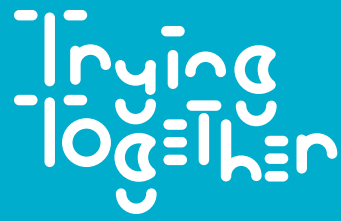
Trying Together extends its deep appreciation and thanks to all of its Board of Directors members and staff, without whom this work could not be achieved.



In spring of 2021, “Miss Cynthia” Battle retired from her position as a Community Outreach Specialist at The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center. Miss Cynthia was with Trying Together for 10 years and supported the early literacy development and learning of hundreds of children and families through the Raising Readers Together Club program held at Willie T’s Barber Shop and the Hub & Family Center. Since “retiring,” Miss Cynthia has started her own early literacy nonprofit and continues to consult with Trying Together to support early literacy initiatives in The Hill District in collaboration with Macedonia FACE. Trying Together thanks Miss Cynthia for her years of service and wishes her the utmost success in her continued passion for increasing literacy.

Credit: The 2020-2022 Trying Together Community Report was written and edited by the Communications Department, including Trent Abbate, Jeff Milliner, Maria Pisano, and Heidi Winkler, with contributions from Trying Together staff, and was designed by Little Kelpie.





Supporting the work of early childhood



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Trying Together is
pleased to partner with
PennAEYC to support the
Pittsburgh Chapter of
PennAEYC.