

# 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

