



Trying
together

Donor Impact Report

2024–2026*

* The information in this Donor Impact Report covers data and outcomes occurring between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2026 unless otherwise noted.

OPEN FOR
A Brief History of Trying Together

1963

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

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 model to a staffed model.

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.

2016

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

2017

PAEYC Board approves a five-year strategic plan and rebrand. PAEYC partners with PennAEYC to support its Pittsburgh chapter programs.

2018

PAEYC rebrands as Trying Together and 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.

2019

Trying Together joins as an advisor for the Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group.

Supported by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, ELRC Region 5 launches, in partnership with The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers and Trying Together.

2020

The Allegheny Child Care Finder tool is developed to help families locate and caregivers promote early care and education programs.

Homewood locations merge to form The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center.

Trying Together launches the first three parts of a 12-part Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Resource Series to help families make 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

Trying Together strengthens its commitment to racial justice by forming the Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI) Committee to guide staff and organizational efforts.

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

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

2022

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

Trying Together and ELRC Region 5 partner to form the Rapid Response Team in Allegheny County, providing immediate support to children at risk of suspension or expulsion from early childhood programs.

Trying Together leads the new Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA Provider Advisory Board, a group of 40 ECE professionals statewide focused on amplifying provider voices, offering policy feedback, and advocating for the field.

2023

Five-year strategic plan is approved by the Trying Together Board of Directors.

2024

Trying Together launches The Institute for Early Childhood Career Pathways to centralize workforce recruitment, placement, retention, and ongoing professional development for new and current early care and education professionals in Southwestern PA.

OCDEL renews its five-year contract with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, in partnership with The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers and Trying Together, to operate the ELRC Region 5.

2025

Alongside its Early Learning PA coalition partners, Trying Together celebrates the first new line item for child care in nearly two decades, which includes a \$25 million investment to support the recruitment and retention of early educators.

2026

Trying Together celebrates 30 years of the Annual Celebration of Early Childhood Educators Dinner with a reimagined event (*Celebrating Together*) and hosts over 800 guests, marking the first time event revenue fully covered expenses and generated additional funds to support Trying Together's mission.

We need to remember that children are trying, too—trying to understand their feelings and their world, trying to please the people they love, trying to grow. When grownups and children are trying together, just about anything can be possible.

— Fred Rogers

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Welcome

In 2023, in our latest strategic plan, Trying Together outlined the role we wanted to play and the organization we wanted to be: a trusted source for families; an experienced facilitator of inclusive learning opportunities; a collaborative convener of neighborhood systems; a committed advocate; and an accountable nonprofit.

Since then, we’ve continued to strengthen our connections with local businesses, community partners, and individuals while discovering new ways to partner together in our shared commitment to early childhood care and education.

To better illustrate the connection between donations made to Trying Together and the work we are able to accomplish together with the community, we released our first *Donor Impact Report* in 2024 highlighting our increased efforts to grow our community of supporters. In the pages that follow, you’ll see what became possible when our community came together—to celebrate early educators, advocate for change, support career growth, and create opportunities for young children, families, and educators to thrive. **Without the continued generous support of our donors, none of what we do would be possible.**

On behalf of our Board and staff, and the children, families, educators, and communities we serve throughout our 10-county region, THANK YOU for your sustained generosity that enables Trying Together to continue “supporting the work of early childhood” in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and beyond.

With sincere gratitude,

Cara Ciminillo

Cara Ciminillo, Executive Director



Philanthropy Grew

Celebrating Together—Reception & Annual Celebration of Early Childhood Educators Dinner

98% of Early Educators Felt Celebrated and Valued

For nearly 30 years, Trying Together has gathered the early childhood community each April to recognize and celebrate early educators and the essential role they play in the lives of young children, families, and our region. What began as a small gathering grew over the years to become one of the region’s largest celebrations of the early childhood profession.

As the Dinner grew, so did the cost of producing an event that remained affordable and accessible to early educators. At the same time, unrestricted funding became increasingly scarce. Trying Together and its Board of Directors recognized that sustaining the celebration at the scale educators had come to value would require a new approach.

In 2024, Trying Together reintroduced corporate sponsorships after a many-year hiatus to help offset the cost of the Dinner. In 2025, corporate sponsorships grew to \$37,000. Building on that momentum, Trying Together set an ambitious goal for the Dinner’s 30th anniversary in 2026: preserve the celebration and recognition

educators valued while transforming the event into a sustainable signature fundraising event for the organization.

The result was **Celebrating Together**.

Through sponsorships, program book advertising, donations, ticket sales, silent auction bids, and register-to-win sales, the 2026 event generated **\$166,572 in total** revenue. For the first time in the Dinner’s history, event revenue fully covered the cost of celebrating early childhood educators—and generated an additional **\$45,604 to support Trying Together’s mission**.



The Early Childhood Profession Was Elevated

Celebrating Together also created a new opportunity to elevate the early childhood profession among regional policymakers, business leaders, and community decision-makers.

For the first time, the Dinner began with a pre-event reception that brought together leaders from across the region. Pittsburgh Mayor Corey O'Connor and First Lady Katie O'Connor, PNC Corporate Responsibility Officer Stacy Juchno, and Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato were among those who spoke about the essential role early childhood educators play—not only in supporting the healthy development of young children, but also in strengthening families, communities, and the regional economy.



Trying Together

“

Gatherings like this remind me of the lasting change that happens through relationships. It happens when public, private, and nonprofit partners choose to work closely together to build trust over time and commit to long-term solutions.

— **Stacy Juchno**
corporate responsibility officer, PNC

The reception also included presentation of the inaugural **Keystone Award for Early Childhood Advocacy** to the Shapiro-Davis Administration, recognizing its historic investment in Pennsylvania’s early childhood workforce. The 2025–26 state budget created a new \$25 million Child Care Recruitment and Retention investment—the first new child care budget line in nearly two decades.

“I know firsthand how much trust families put in our early childhood educators,” Lieutenant Governor Governor Austin Davis said in a message to attendees. “They are the people shaping the future of Pennsylvania every single day. Yet this work often goes unseen.”

“From supporting children’s development and learning, to their health and safety, and even supporting families during this challenging time,

Trying Together

A Record-Breaking Celebration Was Hosted

Following the reception, over 800 guests gathered for the 30th Annual Celebration of Early Childhood Educators Dinner—the largest attendance in the event’s history. The event included a sit-down dinner, flower bar, photo booths, register-to-win opportunities, and other touches intentionally designed to make early childhood educators feel celebrated and valued.

During dinner remarks, Duolingo Head of Purpose and Experiences Dr. Kendra Ross recognized Trying Together as one of the Duolingo Social Impact team’s earliest and most trusted partners, helping the company reach Pittsburgh-area children, families, and early learning providers at the very beginning of a child’s learning journey.

early childhood educators are creating safe, nurturing environments where children can thrive. This work requires skill, patience, and a heart, and too often it is not valued the way that it should be. You’re not babysitters, you’re educators, caregivers, and the backbone of our communities. I’m grateful to each and every one of you for your commitment to our youngest Pennsylvanians and how you show up every day, not just for our children but for families, employers, and our entire communities.”

“*You deserve to be seen, supported, and valued for the essential work that you do.*

— **Austin Davis**, lieutenant governor,
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



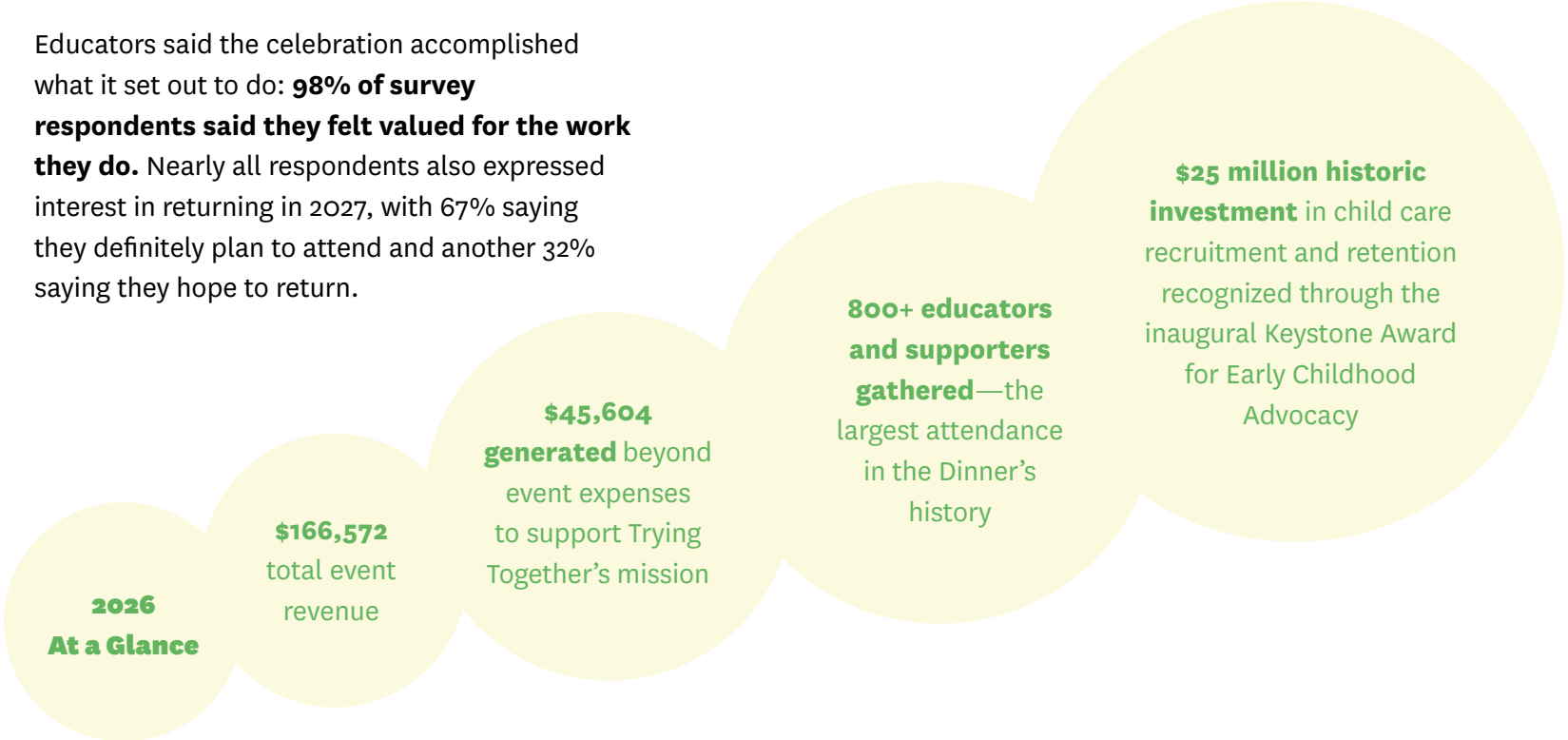


“

Tonight is a celebration of the people who hold that trust every single day. You, the educators in this room. Thank you for 30 years of showing up for children and families in this region. What you’ve built is not just an organization; it’s the ecosystem of trust, and this room is proof of it.

— **Dr. Kendra Ross**, head of purpose and experience, Duolingo

Educators said the celebration accomplished what it set out to do: **98% of survey respondents said they felt valued for the work they do.** Nearly all respondents also expressed interest in returning in 2027, with 67% saying they definitely plan to attend and another 32% saying they hope to return.



“

The thoughtful touches, like the beautiful flowers, the lively photo booth, affordable raffle tickets, and of course the umbrella (which I had to use this week), really melted my heart. These details made the evening not just memorable, but genuinely special. This was a remarkable event, and seeing the joy and smiles on everyone’s faces was priceless. I want to commend you and your staff for organizing such a wonderful experience.

You truly went above and beyond to create a warm, enjoyable atmosphere for all.

— **Celebrating Together attendee**, and local senior community affairs specialist

Celebrating Together demonstrated that recognizing early childhood educators and building a sustainable source of support for Trying Together do not have to be competing goals. By bringing educators, donors, business leaders, policymakers, and community partners together around a shared belief in the importance of early childhood, the 30th anniversary celebration honored a beloved tradition while creating a stronger foundation for its future.

Celebrating Together was Trying Together’s most successful fundraising effort to date, and it would not have been possible without the following sponsors and friends:

Premiere Sponsor

Duolingo

Presenting Sponsors

The Grable Foundation
The Heinz Endowments
PNC
University of Pittsburgh
UPMC

Supporting Sponsors

AT&T
Highmark Health

Advocate Sponsors

Carlow University
Early Childhood Funders Alliance

Champion Sponsors

The Allegheny Conference
Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation

Friends

BridgeCare
Danielle McCullough
Eat’n Park Hospitality Group
Dan Waltman

View our event recap by scanning the QR code or visiting bit.ly/celebrating-together-26.



To support the *Celebrating Together* events in 2027 and beyond, contact us today at info@tryingtogether.org to learn more.

Early Learning Programs Raised Funds

Since 2020, Trying Together has participated in the **Highmark Walk for A Healthy Community**. The Walk is an annual opportunity for nonprofits throughout Pennsylvania to raise funds from February to June that culminates in regional “walks” where teams can come together with community partners and donors to be active and celebrate. In addition to raising funds, Trying Together has maximized the opportunity to further its mission by extending it to early learning programs that raise funds on its behalf—when they create Walk teams—by donating back to them 75% of what they raise to use at their own programs.

From 2024 to 2026, **Trying Together’s Walk donors and teams raised a total of \$15,819**. Collectively across these same years, **13 early learning programs created Walk teams and raised \$9,220 (58% of total funds raised), receiving back \$6,915**.



Our program used the funds raised through the Highmark Walk to take the children in our program on an end-of-summer field trip. It made for a fun time, and a good way to end the summer and transition into the new school year.

— **Tamia Davis**, board member, Trying Together, and owner/operator, Davis Family Childcare, LLC

Donors Contributed to Largest Single Day of Fundraising (GivingTuesday 2025)

GivingTuesday is a global day of giving that occurs annually on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving in the United States. Since 2017, Trying Together has participated in this daylong fundraising opportunity (known as Give Big Pittsburgh locally) by asking donors to renew their support, and supporters to become donors. Between the GivingTuesday campaigns in 2024 and 2025, **Trying Together’s donors raised \$11,279 in total, making December 2, 2025, the most successful GivingTuesday campaign in the organization’s history with \$7,180 raised.**



2025 At a Glance

\$7,180 raised by 64 donors on December 2, 2025.

Surpassed the **\$5,000 goal by 65%.**

Doubled the number of donors and raised **\$3K+ more than in 2024.**

\$19,409 raised (in total with GivingTuesday 2025) through December 31, 2025, as part of the End-of-Calendar Year campaign.



As a Trying Together board member, it’s important to me that I support this amazing organization not just by my board service, but also financially. I believe in Trying Together’s mission of supporting high-quality care and education for young children. Helping to give ALL young children a strong start in life is an incredibly worthy cause—but it takes work. By supporting Trying Together, I’m making a small difference in the lives of young children, their families, and the individuals who care for them.

— **Julie Paden**, board member, Trying Together



Families Afforded Pre-kindergarten; Children Accessed High-Quality Care & Education



High-quality pre-kindergarten in Pennsylvania costs an average of \$13,114* a year—an expense that can put the early learning experiences families want for their children out of reach.

Through Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) Program, Trying Together helps to reduce that financial barrier by awarding needs-based scholarships that families can use toward tuition at high-quality pre-k programs of their choice. Scholarships can cover part or all of a child’s tuition for up to one year.

Thanks to generous donors, Trying Together awarded **\$80,278 in EITC pre-k scholarships to six children between 2024 and 2026**, helping their families afford high-quality early learning experiences while reducing the financial burden of care.

For these families, donor support meant more than help paying tuition. It meant greater freedom to choose an early learning environment that met their child’s needs and gave them the opportunity to learn and thrive.

* Data obtained from Child Care Aware’s “2025 Child Care Affordability Analysis” at info.childcareaware.org/child-care-affordability-analysis-2025.

In 2024, my husband and I became foster parents to four of our grandchildren. As a retired school teacher, I feel strongly that children should attend pre-k, but paying for three children is quite costly. When I was notified about applying for the EITC Pre-k Scholarship program, I jumped at the chance.

“I am so happy that one of our grandsons was a recipient! Our ‘littles’ are thriving at pre-k, and the program they are in is excellent. They come home daily and talk about all the things they have learned like, “how rainbows are made,” “rhyming words,” and “identifying letters” to name a few. Thanks to Trying Together and their sponsors for making this happen!

— **Sharon Belotti**, grandmother and Trying Together EITC Pre-k Scholarship family





Public Policies Advanced

Pennsylvania Made Historic Investments In the Child Care Workforce

Pennsylvania’s child care workforce crisis continues to leave classrooms without teachers and families without care. Wages for child care workers fail to meet the cost of living in every Pennsylvania county, contributing to high turnover and closed classrooms.* In April of 2026, Start Strong PA reported 2,261 **unfilled staff positions— this means that over 21,000 children throughout the Commonwealth do not have access to high-quality child care.**

Thanks to donors and foundation grants, Trying Together had the resources to strengthen its grassroots advocacy efforts and equip educators to speak with policymakers about the challenges they face.



* Data obtained from Start Strong PA’s “2025 Fix Child Care: Recruit & Retain Teachers” poster.

With Trying Together’s support:

19 emerging advocates completed the Trying Together Early Childhood Education (ECE) Advocacy Fellowship, preparing them for effective and sustained advocacy. Together, the advocacy team met with **62 policymakers in Harrisburg.**

40 early care and education professionals participated in statewide advisory boards, strengthening the coalition and bringing unique perspectives.

Thousands of early childhood education champions made their voices heard by signing petitions, making phone calls, and sending postcards to policymakers.

Trying Together, in partnership with the Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA campaigns, brought the realities of the child care workforce directly to policymakers. With support from The William Penn Foundation, *A Day in the Life* captured photos and firsthand stories from **44 child care programs across Pennsylvania, illustrating both the joy of early childhood education and the consequences of low wages, staffing shortages, and closed classrooms.**

Together, these efforts contributed to a much larger statewide advocacy movement calling for meaningful investment in Pennsylvania’s child care workforce.

For early childhood educator Kristen Nowak, participating in *A Day in the Life* became a first step toward deeper advocacy.

Because of my involvement in the A Day in the Life project, I decided to join other early childhood educators to attend the press conference in Harrisburg and speak with our state senator. Because of this project, I learned that to see any larger gains, we must keep the conversation going as a collective group—and that I want to be a part of that larger conversation.

— **Kristen Nowak**, contributor, *A Day In the Life*



Advocacy Led to Historic Investment

After years of advocacy by early educators, families, its statewide partners, and Trying Together, Pennsylvania took a historic step forward. The 2025-26 state budget included \$25 million for Child Care Recruitment and Retention—the first new state budget line item for child care in nearly two decades—moving dollars from policy to people.

In Allegheny County, Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5, of which Trying Together is the Quality Partner, processed grants for **459 providers totaling \$2.77 million**. Those funds provided bonuses directly to eligible early childhood educators—putting additional dollars into the hands of the professionals our communities rely on to keep classrooms open and children learning.

And the investment continued. Pennsylvania added another **\$5 million in the 2026–27 state budget**, bringing the line item’s total investment to **\$30 million**.

This investment was an important step toward a larger goal: stabilizing Pennsylvania’s child care workforce so that more classrooms can remain open, more educators can continue doing the work they value, and more children and families can rely on consistent, high-quality care.

These additional funds provide much-needed breathing room so that the classrooms can continue to be the safe, healthy, and growing places they are designed to be!

— **Kyle Bender**, provider advisory council member, Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA



Relative Caregivers Increased Financial Stability Through Direct Cash

For families working nontraditional hours or living in communities with limited child care options, care provided by a relative may be the only option that meets their needs. These caregivers—often grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, or siblings—play an essential role in Pennsylvania’s child care system but receive little financial support for the care they provide.

In Pennsylvania, relative caregivers receive a subsidy reimbursement of just \$16.07 per day for an infant, and \$15.51 per day for a preschool-aged child. Even when providing full-time care, many earn less than the minimum wage while also paying out of pocket for food, diapers, transportation, and other necessities.

Since June 2025, Trying Together has partnered with United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania on the *Thriving Providers Project*, a national initiative funded by Home Grown that is exploring whether direct cash can improve financial stability for home-based caregivers and inform future child care compensation policies.

Through the Allegheny County pilot, relative caregivers received monthly direct cash payments to use where they needed them

most, and the difference was tangible. Every participant—100%—reported that the additional cash helped. Caregivers used the funds to: purchase diapers, wipes, snacks, and other necessities; pay household bills; maintain reliable transportation; and meet other expenses associated with providing care.

Key Impact

\$500/month provided directly to 19 Allegheny County relative caregivers.

85% of participants said the additional support helped them remain a caregiver and work less.

The direct cash transfers allow me to not worry about meals and [to] not worry about utilities, and I am able to afford to stay home and provide the care.

— **Participant**, Thriving Providers Project

From Pilot to Policy

The participant’s experiences are contributing to a national effort to rethink child care payment policy. Learn more at

thrivingproviders.org.





Caregivers Received Resources & Support

Early Intervention Toolkit Helped Caregivers Navigate Services

When a young child may have a developmental delay or disability, knowing where to turn for help can be overwhelming. Early Intervention (EI) partners with parents, families, caregivers, and early childhood educators to provide services and support that can help their child develop and thrive—but understanding the system, knowing where to begin, and coordinating among families, early educators, and EI professionals can be challenging.

Thanks to the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Trying Together developed the *Early Intervention Toolkit* for early care and education programs in Allegheny County to make that process easier to navigate. Available as both a printed resource and a searchable online tool, the Toolkit gives families and early childhood educators practical information to better understand EI, identify where to begin, and work collaboratively with the professionals supporting a child.

For early childhood programs, the Toolkit is becoming more than a reference guide. It can be incorporated into how programs welcome families, orient staff, and build stronger partnerships around children’s development.

Key Impact:
Since its release in January 2025:

- Online and printed early intervention resources landed directly in the hands of educators and families across Allegheny County
- 100% of licensed programs in Allegheny County received copies of the printed toolkit
- 900 additional individuals were equipped through training and outreach to better connect families with services

“
I am so excited for the Toolkit and already have plans to add it to the onboarding process for new staff and as part of our family welcome information.
— **Early childhood provider and attendee,**
UnConference: Navigating Early Intervention Partnerships

The Toolkit is also generating interest beyond Allegheny County. While its resources were designed specifically for Allegheny County’s EI system, others throughout the region and state have expressed interest in developing county-specific versions, and Trying Together is exploring opportunities to expand the model.



More Families Accessed Parenting Resources In Their Home Language

In the Pittsburgh metro area, 36,500 children—one in 10—have at least one immigrant parent. Yet parenting and child development resources can be difficult to find in languages other than English or Spanish, creating barriers for families seeking trusted information to support their young children.

Trying Together’s *Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Resource Series* gives caregivers practical information and strategies for supporting young children’s learning, development, and well-being.

Previously available in English and Spanish, the series is now available in five additional languages: Arabic, Dari, French, Pashto, and Swahili, thanks to generous support from Duolingo.

Providing trusted information in a family’s home language does more than make the resource easier to understand. It helps ensure they feel welcomed and included in the communities where they live and work, while sharing vital information that supports their child’s development.

Trying Together also worked to put the newly translated resources directly into the hands of the educators who work with families every day. More than 90 early childhood educators received translated resources during *UnConference: From Representation to Inclusion* to bring back to their programs and share with families whose home language is not English. Additionally, Allegheny County Family Centers have been a distribution point for the Resource Series since summer 2024.

Key Impact

Resources translated into five additional languages—Arabic, Dari, French, Pashto, and Swahili—bringing the total to seven languages across the DAP Resource Series.

90+ educators equipped with translated resources to share with families in their early learning programs.

More than two dozen Allegheny County Family Centers distributed the DAP Resource Series to families they serve.

Rapid Response Team Helped Children Remain In Care

Young children communicate their needs, emotions, and experiences through their behavior. When a child's behavior is challenging for the adults in their early learning environment, it can sometimes lead to suspension or expulsion—disrupting the child's learning, relationships, and care. Research also shows that exclusionary discipline disproportionately affects Black and Brown children. With the right support, adults can better understand what a child's behavior is communicating and respond in ways that help the child remain successfully connected to their early learning environment.

In collaboration with the Early Learning Resource Center Region 5 and other early childhood partners, Trying Together's Rapid Response Team works alongside families and early educators when a child from birth to age five is at risk of being suspended or expelled. The team helps identify challenges, develop strategies, and connect children and families with additional services when needed.

For the majority of children, that support helped lead to a successful path forward.

Nearly eight in 10 closed cases ended with the child remaining in their existing program, successfully transitioning to another program with their family's agreement, or connecting to specialized support.

Key Impact

461 children and families received individualized support since July 2024.

188 child care programs received support to better understand and respond to children's behavior and reduce the risk of suspension or expulsion.

Nearly eight in 10 closed cases ended with children remaining in care, transitioning successfully with family agreement, or connecting to specialized support.



I liked working together as a team in creating a plan and staying consistent with it between child care and home. This type of resource is valuable for families and child care centers as we support the growth and development of our children.

— **Parent**, supported by Rapid Response Team

Help Sustain Rapid Response

In October of 2025, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) announced that they would no longer be able to support the initiative in the same capacity due to changes in federal funding (but later did extend funding for an additional year). Trying Together remains committed to continuing the work of the Rapid Response team. For more information on how to support the work of the Rapid Response team, please contact info@tryingtogether.org.



We need to remember that children are trying, too—trying to understand their feelings and their world, trying to please the people they love, trying to grow. When grownups and children are trying together, just about anything can be possible. —FRED ROGERS

Communities Thrived

Families Found Support at Family Center

As part of Allegheny County’s network of Family Centers, The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center provides a welcoming place where children can play and learn, caregivers can connect with one another, and families can find resources and support.

The Hub & Family Center also helps families meet some of their most immediate needs by serving as a diaper and infant formula bank.

Funded by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center connects families with practical resources when they need them, while creating a community where caregivers and young children can feel welcomed, supported, and connected.

Key Impact

50 families received activity kits quarterly that included family-focused activities and materials.

436 families received infant formula to help nourish their babies—nearly twice the number from the previous two years.

508 families received diapers and wipes to help keep their young children clean, healthy, and comfortable.

2,226 families found resources, guidance, and connection at the Hub & Family Center.



Families Built Early Literacy Into Everyday Play

Talking, reading, singing, and playing together help young children build the language and vocabulary that lay the foundation for later learning. Funded by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and PNC Grow Up Great, Buzzword gives families engaging, hands-on ways to build these early literacy experiences into everyday life.

As the facilitating partner for Buzzword, Trying Together coordinates the development and distribution of BUZZ Boxes, which pair a picture book with activities and materials that encourage families to explore new words and ideas together. From July 2024 through June 2026, 2,750 BUZZ Boxes reached families across Allegheny County. Through the activities inside, families read together, learned new words, conducted science experiments, used their imaginations, sang and danced, and explored the world around them—all while building the conversations and interactions that support early learning.

Buzzword partners also worked intentionally to make these experiences more accessible to families whose home language is not English. BUZZ Boxes included books and materials that embraced multiple languages, and, for the first time ever, Arabic-speaking families received a BUZZ Box activity book translated into Arabic.

Key Impact

2,750 families received BUZZ Boxes filled with books, activities, and materials for learning together.

11 BUZZ Boxes were developed around different early literacy experiences, including two in Spanish and one in Arabic.

83 families attended Buzzword family events that included practicing language and vocabulary through reading, conversation, science, movement, music, and play.



Buzzword Partners:

ACH Clear Pathways, Kamin Science Center, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, Trying Together, and Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy in consultation with the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County Family Center Network.



Countywide Partners Aligned Services for Families with Young Children

Families with babies and young children often rely on services that span early learning, health, early intervention, and family support. Yet those services are frequently administered and funded through separate systems. In Allegheny County, programs serving families during pregnancy through age three span three County departments, several health care systems, multiple community-based organizations, and a complex mix of federal, state, and local funding.

Navigating these different systems—and understanding how they connect—can be challenging for families and providers alike.

With support from the Pritzker Foundation, Trying Together works alongside County agencies and community partners to better align programs, partnerships, data, and funding. Rather than asking families to navigate disconnected systems on their own, the collaborative is working toward a system in which organizations understand how their services fit together and families can more easily find the support they need.

In 2025, the collaborative launched new tools to make that complex system more visible and easier to understand, including:

- An Early Childhood Education Funding Map
- A Maternal & Child Health Funding Map
- A Prenatal to Three Data Dashboard

Together, these resources help partners better understand where funding and services exist, identify gaps, and make more informed decisions about how resources can support families.

The work also has potential beyond Allegheny County. By documenting how early childhood and maternal and child health systems are structured and funded locally, Allegheny Prenatal to Three is creating tools and approaches that can inform similar efforts in other communities nationwide.

Government Partners:

Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny County Health Department, and Allegheny County Department of Children's Initiatives.

Nonprofit and Service Partners:

Healthy Start, Inc. Pittsburgh, Trying Together, and The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers.

Looking Ahead: Forward with Families



In April 2026, Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato and her administration launched **Forward with Families**, a coordinated effort to make the region a place where working families can afford to live, work, raise children, and thrive.

Trying Together participated in the initiative's launch and will continue to bring its early childhood expertise and advocacy voice to the work alongside residents, employers, community organizations, foundations, and County leaders.

As *Forward with Families* moves from vision to action, Trying Together is advocating for policies and investments that recognize what families with young children need to thrive—including affordable, accessible child care; a strong and stable early childhood workforce; and paid family leave that gives parents time to care for and bond with their babies without sacrificing their economic security.

Together, these supports can help build an Allegheny County where families have the resources, time, and opportunities they need to give their children a strong start.





Educators Grew Professionally

Spanish-Speaking Educators Advanced Their Careers

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is the most widely recognized credential in the early childhood field and is an important stepping stone for educators seeking to advance their careers. While educators can complete portions of the credentialing process in Spanish, opportunities to receive in-person CDA coursework instruction in Spanish are extremely limited.

For Spanish-speaking educators, that language barrier can make an already demanding credentialing process even more difficult—and can limit opportunities for career advancement.

From February through August 2025, Trying Together partnered with La Escuelita Arcoiris, a Spanish immersion pre-k in Pittsburgh, to bring CDA coursework directly to Spanish-speaking early childhood educators in their preferred language.

Seven educators completed the Spanish-language coursework, receiving bilingual support as they navigated the additional steps required to earn the credential, including portfolios, observations, exams, and scheduling.

For some participants, the experience also became a pathway to further education. Three of the seven educators went on to enroll in early childhood education programs at community college, continuing to build their skills and advance their careers in the field.

Key Impact

Seven Spanish-speaking educators completed CDA coursework in their preferred language.

Three Spanish-speaking early educators continued their education by enrolling in community college early childhood education programs.

A more accessible career pathway was created by removing language barriers from professional learning.

“

Estoy muy agradecida con Trying Together y La Escuelita Arcoiris por la oportunidad de empezar mi CDA, el cual me ha ayudado cimientos tanto profesional y como personal. Estoy muy emocionada por esta nueva aventura donde puedo aplicar todos los conocimientos que adquiriré en mi curso CDA.

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I am very grateful to Trying Together and La Escuelita Arcoiris for the opportunity to start my CDA, which has helped me build a foundation both professionally and personally. I am very excited about this new adventure, where I can apply all the knowledge I gained in my CDA course.

— **Participant**, CDA for Spanish Speakers

The Spanish-language CDA Coursework was funded by the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Professional Development Organization (PDO) at the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and The Hillman Foundation.



Campaign Introduced More People to Early Childhood Careers

Fewer people are entering and remaining in the early childhood education field, contributing to the ongoing workforce crisis. To address this, the *Your Career, Our Future* Campaign seeks to change misconceptions about the field and show the joys and benefits of becoming an early childhood educator.

Launched in September 2024, this campaign from Trying Together—in partnership with The Early Excellence Project—introduces prospective educators to the people already doing the work, who share what they find meaningful about their careers, as well as families who currently utilize child care and the positive impact it has on them and their children—all with the goal of recruiting and retaining more early childhood educators to the field.

Funded by The Heinz Endowments, 15 early childhood educators and parents shared their stories through essays, photography, and video, offering an authentic look at the joys, opportunities, and impact of working with young children. *Your Career, Our Future* exhibits featuring local educators were displayed at three Community College of Allegheny County campuses, the Early Learning Resource Center Region 5, and libraries throughout the county.



The campaign also connects inspiration with opportunity. At yourcareerourfuture.org, prospective educators can explore stories from the field, find available child care jobs, and connect directly with Trying Together’s Institute for Early Childhood Career Pathways for support in taking their next step.

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Key Impact

- 15 storytellers** shared authentic experiences about careers in early childhood education.
- 70+ libraries** brought the campaign into communities across Allegheny County.
- 130+ open positions** were promoted to connect prospective educators with local child care programs.
- 347 current and prospective educators** worked with the Institute for Early Childhood Career Pathways to grow their careers.

With continued support from The Hillman Foundation, Trying Together will add new voices to *Your Career, Our Future*, expanding the campaign's reach and connecting more people with opportunities to build careers in early childhood education.

Entrepreneurs Learned How to Build a Child Care Business



The flexible format allows participants to build their business knowledge on their own schedule while learning about the practical requirements of starting and sustaining a family child care program.

By helping current and prospective providers build the knowledge needed to operate sustainable family child care businesses, Trying Together is supporting entrepreneurs while strengthening an important part of the region's child care system.

Starting and operating a family child care business can be daunting and overwhelming. Often, the hardest part is finding time to learn about the regulations, financial requirements, and the day-to-day operations. Because of this, offering flexible, self-paced learning makes business education more accessible to caregivers balancing work, family, and other responsibilities.

With busy schedules and nontraditional learners in mind, Trying Together launched *The Business of Family Child Care* in April 2026. This self-paced online course was designed specifically for current family child care owners and relative providers exploring business ownership and licensing.

Key Impact

- Nearly 30 entrepreneurs** completed *The Business of Family Child Care*.
- 55 additional learners** are currently building their business knowledge through the course.

The Business of Family Child Care is funded by Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning and PA Keys.

Programs Improved Quality

Children Benefited as More Programs Achieved Higher Quality Ratings

Quality child care gives young children safe, nurturing environments where they can learn, build relationships, and develop the skills that lay the foundation for future success.

Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania’s quality rating system that promotes quality improvement in early learning and development programs and school-age child care. Programs can earn ratings from STAR 1 through STAR 4, with higher STARS levels reflecting increasingly rigorous standards for staff education and professional growth. A Keystone STARS designation informs parents that their children are in a safe, respectful environment in which they are learning new things every day to support their current and future success in school and in life.

As the Quality Partner for Early Learning Resource Center Region 5, Trying Together supports more than 600 licensed child care providers and 1,000 relative care providers throughout Allegheny County in strengthening the quality of care they provide.

Trying Together’s Quality Coaches work directly with program administrators, classroom educators, relative care providers, and

home-based child care providers to develop new skills and continuously improve their early childhood teaching practices to achieve higher program quality.

From July 2024 through June 2026, **74 child care providers achieved higher Keystone STARS quality ratings—more than 2.5 times the 29 programs that advanced during the previous two-year period.**

Those improvements represent more than a change in a rating. They reflect investments in educators, learning environments, program leadership, and family engagement that strengthen children’s early learning experiences across Allegheny County.

Higher STARS ratings can also help strengthen programs financially by providing access to increased Child Care Works reimbursement and other quality-improvement funding—giving providers additional resources to continue investing in quality.



Key Impact

74 programs achieved higher Keystone STARS quality ratings from July 2024 through June 2026.

155% increase in programs advancing compared with the previous two-year period.

600+ licensed providers have access to quality-improvement support through Trying Together and ELRC Region 5.



“

During our journey to achieve STAR 2, we have made significant strides, including the development of a safe and engaging playground that fosters outdoor learning and play. Additionally, we have invested in our staff by providing opportunities for higher education, ensuring they are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge to support children’s growth effectively. We are grateful for our Quality Coach—her guidance has been invaluable in helping us stay focused and move forward to achieve greatness!

— **Victoria Deakings**, owner, Deakings Daycare

Educators Strengthened Their Skills Through Professional Development

Young children benefit when the adults who care for and teach them continue learning too. Professional development gives early childhood educators opportunities to strengthen their knowledge, explore new approaches, and bring new skills and strategies back to their classrooms and programs. Trying Together provides

professional learning opportunities to thousands of early care and education professionals each year.

Through Trying Together’s Institute for Early Childhood Career Pathways, early care and education professionals can access learning opportunities throughout their careers—from individual workshops and large-group learning experiences to credentials that support career advancement.



ECE Professionals Learned Together and Advanced Their Careers

With continued support from PNC Grow Up Great, Trying Together hosted six large-group professional development opportunities called UnConferences, which combine expert speakers, hands-on activities, and dynamic workshops meant to engage and inspire.

629 educators participated in UnConferences during the reporting period, exploring topics including kindergarten transition, early intervention, racial equity in play, inclusion, and engaging school-age children.



“

I really enjoyed how interactive and enthusiastic the instructors were, and I loved all of the examples given! The information was so helpful and will be very useful every day in my classroom. I definitely learned something new from this training.

— **Participant**, Trying Together professional development

Key Impact

4,976 educators participated in professional development—a 42% increase over the previous reporting period.

14,976 hours spent building knowledge and strengthening early childhood practice.

259 learning opportunities offered virtually and in person.

158 educators across eight cohorts completed coursework toward their CDA Credential.

Made Possible By You

The impact shared throughout this report is possible because of a community that believes young children, families, and early childhood educators deserve the opportunity to thrive.

We are deeply grateful to the individuals, foundations, corporations, and public partners whose investments from July 2024 through June 2026 strengthened early childhood across our region and helped Trying Together advocate, partner, and learn alongside the communities we serve.

Donors

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A Growing Community of Support

Trying Together’s work is sustained through a diverse mix of public contracts, grants, and philanthropic investment. Each plays an important role in advancing our mission and strengthening early childhood across our region.

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In fiscal year (FY) 2026, individuals and corporate partners contributed \$231,165 to Trying Together—nearly twice the amount contributed the previous year (\$116,680). This growth reflects our continued efforts to expand the community of people and businesses investing in young children, families, and early childhood educators.

Private support provides important flexibility alongside public and grant funding, helping Trying Together respond to emerging needs, invest in promising ideas, and strengthen work that can lead to broader systems change.

\$231,165

Individual and corporate support for Trying Together nearly doubled from fiscal year 2025 to 2026

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Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Acknowledgments

The impact reflected in these pages is the result of many people working together on behalf of young children, families, and early childhood educators.

Trying Together is grateful to members of our Board of Directors—past and present—whose leadership, stewardship, and commitment helped guide the organization during the period reflected in this report.



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- Dan Waltman
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With Gratitude for Their Board Service

We extend our special thanks to the following Board members who completed their service during the period covered by this report. We are grateful for the time, expertise, and leadership they shared with Trying Together and the early childhood community.

- David Andros
- Kristin Ash
- Jenn Beer
- Dr. Sherlyn Harrison
- Dr. Christine Herring
- Dr. Jane Kwon
- Casey Mindlin
- Tyra Oliver
- Dr. Todd Wolynn

Our Staff

To the Trying Together staff: Thank you for the care, creativity, commitment, and expertise you bring to this work each day. The impact shared throughout this report is possible because of you.

Report Credits

The 2024–2026 *Trying Together Donor Impact Report* was written and edited by the Community Relations Team, including Nathan Duke, Elizabeth Lennox, and Maria Pisano, with contributions from Trying Together staff.

Design: Little Kelpie

Proofreader: Christine Hollinger



Giving Opportunities

Join Trying Together in supporting the work of early childhood!

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When Trying Together collaborates with early care and education professionals, families, and other individuals like you to advocate together, partner together, and learn together, we 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. While Trying Together and our partners are working daily to make this future a reality, there are still many children, families, and caregivers in our own neighborhoods who need our help. We need your financial support to continue and expand this work so all children in Southwestern Pennsylvania can experience healthy development and thrive for years to come. Read in the following pages several ways you can give today.

Make a one-time gift or become a monthly donor at tryingtogether.org/give-now. To request a paper donation form or to learn more about Trying Together’s giving opportunities, please email info@tryingtogether.org.

Become a Recurring Donor

Becoming a recurring donor is the easiest way to show your support year-round. We offer three suggested monthly donation levels:

Early Childhood Supporter

\$5 per month (\$60 annual)

Early Childhood Sustainer

\$10 per month (\$120 annual)

Trying Together Champion

\$83.33 per month (\$1,000 annual)

To send a check, please make payable to “Trying Together” and mail to:

Trying Together
5604 Solway Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217



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Give Big Pittsburgh

Join thousands of Pittsburgh residents and give at www.givebigpittsburgh.com/organizations/trying-together

In-Kind

Trying Together accepts gifts in-kind that help us to achieve our mission. If you're interested in making a gift in-kind or a donation to one of our programs, please contact us in advance to discuss our areas of greatest need. You may also complete our in-kind donation form at: tryingtogether.org/about-us/support/in-kind-donation/

Stock

Gifts of appreciated stock or other securities can be a meaningful way to support Trying Together's work. If you are considering a gift of stock, please contact us for transfer instructions and additional information.

United Way Donor Choice

Use **#1524827** for Trying Together

Donor Advised Funds

If you have a donor advised fund, you can recommend a grant to Trying Together at any time. DAF gifts offer a simple, flexible way to support young children, families, and early childhood educators.

In Honor/ In Memory Gifts

Honor or memorialize a special child, parent, grandparent, friend, family member or business associate by making a tax-deductible gift to the Trying Together in their name. Your gift will be acknowledged with a personalized letter sent to the honored individual/family.

Planned Giving

Including Trying Together in your will or estate plans is a meaningful way to extend your commitment to early childhood for generations to come. Planned gifts can take many forms, and we welcome the opportunity to talk with you about your intentions.

Employee Matching Gifts

Many companies match the charitable donations made by their employees. If you or your spouse work for or are retired from a company that offers this benefit, your gift to Trying Together may be doubled or even tripled. Please ask your company's Human Resources department about matching gifts.

Please consult your financial, legal, or tax advisor regarding the implications of your charitable gift.

About Us

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.

Our Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

When we inspire belonging among caregivers, we inspire belonging within them. Our inclusive approach to advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities strives to place diversity, equity, and racial justice at the core of everything we do. We encourage our team, our partners, and our communities to interact compassionately and honor the range of cultures, ideas, and identities that root us.

Young children develop and learn by example; this means that children whose early learning environments reflect just actions, equitable opportunities, diverse representation, and inclusive approaches experience healthier interactions and build relationships that enable them to thrive.





Supporting the work of early childhood

tryingtogether.org

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