

CAUSE CONNECTION

Connecting people who care to causes that matter

Addressing the Lehigh Valley's Early Childhood Education Crisis



For several years, LVCF has been supporting the early childhood sector. During the 2023-2024 year, LVCF stepped up into a pivotal role in leading Lehigh Valley Early Childhood efforts. As a community foundation, we are committed to deeply supporting our communities, with transformational approaches to address root causes. The foundation strategically chose this area as an important issue in which we could make a difference. We are pleased to share with our fundholders and donors a few of the most recent demonstrated impacts of our work in the early childhood focus area.

Why does this crisis matter? The childcare crisis in the Lehigh Valley is negatively impacting our children, families, and communities, in ways that ripple out across our economy. Pennsylvania has an annual cost of \$6.65 billion. Addressing this crisis is a vital economic investment, affecting labor force participation, financial burdens on families, and children's learning outcomes. Key issues include disparities in educator salaries, a lack of an educator pipeline due to lower pay and limited professional growth opportunities, and unsustainable business models for childcare centers. Consider the following key statistics from 38 childcare providers in Lehigh and Northampton Counties:

- 93 closed childcare classrooms
- 156 unfilled staff positions
- 1,014 additional children could be served if programs were fully staffed
- 6,302 children who are eligible to receive high-quality publicly funded pre-k services are without access due to staffing and classroom shortages.

In our leadership role, LVCF priorities include:

- ▶ **Raising Awareness:** Highlighting the importance of quality, accessible childcare and mobilizing support.
- ▶ **Advocacy Partner:** Supporting legislative changes that benefit the early childhood sector.
- ▶ **Coordination and Convening:** Streamlining services, connecting resources, and mobilizing stakeholders.
- ▶ **Grant Distribution:** Providing funding to trusted organizations delivering quality, accessible childcare.

IN THE NEWS

LVCF Names Robyn Weaver New Program Officer for Capacity Building

Robyn Weaver joined the LVCF staff in June as Program Officer, Capacity Building. Her primary responsibilities include implementation and co-facilitation of CORE Fellowship and identifying regional nonprofit capacity building needs and solutions.



Prior to joining LVCF, Robyn has held various roles in racial equity and social justice centered capacity building and nonprofit programming including serving as Equity Officer for Pocono Mountains United Way and as Program Manager for Racial and Ethnic Justice at Community Action Lehigh Valley. She has also engaged with local and regional nonprofits providing contracted services including facilitation developing DEI learning modules. [More...](#)

Maureen Connolley Wendling Full-Time Director of Donor Initiatives

LVCF recently promoted **Maureen Connolley Wendling** to full-time Director of Donor Initiatives. She is working to enhance the Foundation's overall fund development and fundraising efforts with a specific focus on family legacy and philanthropy. [More...](#)



Our Initiatives and Impact

In 2023-2024, LVCF made significant strides in implementing long-term strategies in coordination and convening, grant distribution, and raising awareness that will address the childcare crisis.

Coordination and Convening | LVCF is a key partner the City of Allentown's Re compete Plan, a federal grant application which seeks approximately \$20 million to address employment barriers in the city's most distressed neighborhoods. LVCF's **Megan Briggs**, Vice President of Community Investments, led a group of community partners and stakeholders in developing the part of the plan that seeks to improve access to quality childcare. By enhancing childcare services, the plan aims fund services that support families and those working in childcare services to facilitate better job opportunities for residents and contribute to the overall well being and economic growth of the Lehigh Valley.

In addition to participating in the Re compete Plan as a key partner, LVCF also was invited to be the backbone convener of the Early Childhood Education Action Committee, a Lehigh Valley Coalition that is working towards systemic change in the early childhood sector. In our role as a backbone, LVCF is working in partnership with nonprofits, policymakers, advocates, and community to identify and implement action across four focus areas that will make significant improvements to the sector.

Raising Awareness | LVCF is also steadfastly committed to raising awareness and mobilizing support around early childhood needs as part of our leadership role. In our role as the backbone convener of the Early Childhood Education Action Committee, LVCF partnered with this coalition and the Lehigh Valley Chamber to organize a fall event focused on this issue at LVCF's Board of Associates meeting.

In addition, LVCF's staff is leading the coordination of another event on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Action Committee to partner with the Carbon County Community Foundation and Monroe County Community Foundation to raise awareness about this issue in the Pocono and Carbon regions. Through these events, hundreds of regional stakeholders will learn about the issue, the ongoing efforts, and the action that each person can take to make a difference.

Grantmaking | LVCF distributed over \$190,000 in general operating grants to area nonprofits serving youth and families, with a central focus on early childcare. [See the list of nonprofits receiving grants.](#)

Funding Priorities | Priorities for the Early Childhood grantmaking cycle focused on supporting the early childcare sector (ages 0-5) through several key initiatives:

- ▶ **High-Quality Childcare Centers:** Funding centers that demonstrate active efforts to improve the quality of their services, such as improving facilities, retaining staff, increasing salaries, expanding slots, and developing programs.
- ▶ **Addressing Behavioral and Mental Health Needs:** Supporting programs that equip childcare workers with resources to care for children with challenging behaviors or high mental health needs, as well as providing direct care for such children.
- ▶ **Advocacy for Improved Policies:** Supporting organizations that advocate for better regulations, funding, and policies for early childcare providers.



LVCF's partnership and funding for these important organizations who have demonstrated their commitment to bolstering the early childhood system and addressing the current issues is critical to continuing the work to address root causes.

LVCF remains dedicated to addressing the early childcare crisis by supporting high-quality, accessible childcare services and advocating for systemic changes. Through our grants and initiatives, we aim to create a sustainable and thriving childcare system that benefits children, families, and the broader community. We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts with community partners and stakeholders to make a meaningful impact in the lives of the Lehigh Valley's youngest residents and their families.



"This crisis has far-reaching impacts on children, families, communities, and the regional economy," said **Megan Briggs**. "The lack of high-quality childcare prevents children from receiving essential early education, restricts parents' ability to participate in the workforce, and leads to broader economic challenges, including increased poverty and reduced tax revenue."