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New Research and \$467,000 from Rochester Area Community Foundation to Bolster Childcare Landscape

Rochester Area Community Foundation has awarded \$467,000 to five local nonprofits to strengthen home-based childcare and boost early literacy — two areas identified as critical to the success of our youngest children.

The grants mark a new level of precision in the Foundation's 35-year commitment to Rochester's youth. Building on its Rochester's Child initiative, the Foundation is pairing national research with community wisdom to make targeted, high-impact investments that support children and the adults who care for them.

The Research Process

Over the course of 18 months, the Foundation assembled promising evidence for what has worked to best support young children in other places, then checked it against real-life experiences of local families and providers.

"It wasn't enough to copy what worked in other cities," says Dr. Tyana Velazquez-Smith, the Foundation's director of early childhood. "We listened to caregivers, parents, and providers to understand what would make the biggest difference here."

Two priority areas emerged: support for home-based childcare programs and literacy interventions that make sure all children get the support they need to read.

Why Home-Based Care Matters

Childcare located in someone's home, rather than a center, is chosen by families looking for trusted care — in their neighborhood, with someone they know, and with non-traditional hours. Children benefit from a comfortable setting that often reflects their home culture and language.

"I tell my families that they can come anytime because their kids are safe here, and this is their second home," says Rose M, a home-based provider in Rochester, NY.

In Monroe County, 98% of home-based childcare businesses are operated by women of color, yet the average provider earns about \$30,000 annually — less than half the county's median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS data). That makes these small businesses both an economic driver and a cultural anchor.

There are more than 800 home-based programs in the eight-county greater Rochester region. For many of these providers, the high costs of food and supplies are significant challenges, and 35%

report limited access to educational resources (*2019 Early Care Scan Report*, Greater Rochester Health Foundation).

The First Cohort of Grantees

The first nonprofit grantees to receive this new funding were: Child Care Council, Literacy Volunteers of Wayne County, Inc., Rochester Childfirst Network, Rochester Public Library, and Wayne County Action Program, Inc..

Through grants ranging from \$60,000 to \$112,000, these grantees received significant investments in order to strengthen their services and gather insights along the way. The grants will generate stronger data on how different early care settings support learning and development, which can guide where resources are needed to ensure all families have access to high-quality programs.

A grant to the Child Care Council will support a coaching pilot to increase the skills of 12 providers while also improving the literacy levels for up to 75 children in their care.

"This funding lays the foundation for lasting improvement in early literacy and inclusive care," says Bethany Williams, Child Care Council's director of special needs. "Individualized coaching helps childcare providers build sustainable, high-quality practices that benefit children and their families."

A \$100,000 grant to Rochester Childfirst Network will enhance support for home-based childcare providers serving 1,600+ children and their families. A new food and supply pantry specifically for providers is aimed at reducing operating costs and helping these small businesses thrive.

"These funds will make a profound difference for the more than 110 home-based childcare providers we serve — 97% of whom are women and minority-owned businesses," says Ivelisse Marrero, Rochester Childfirst Network's director of family child care & CACFP. "We're not only sustaining childcare options for families — we're helping local entrepreneurs build stronger, more sustainable futures."

The Future

Over the next few years, the Community Foundation will work closely with the first cohort of grantees to find out what works and what needs to be supported differently. Do home-based childcare facilities offer a strong educational return on investment? What if we could strengthen early learning in the home-based settings many families already choose? Rochester Area Community Foundation's newest grant cycle and a research partnership with Rochester City School District aim to answer these intriguing questions.

About Rochester Area Community Foundation

In partnership with generous philanthropists and community partners, Rochester Area Community Foundation works to improve the quality of life for people who live and work in the eight-county region through its leadership and strategic grantmaking. As a leading grantmaker, the Foundation is focused on two broad goals: creating an equitable community and strengthening our region's vitality. Since 1972, the Community Foundation has distributed more than \$740 million in grants and scholarships.