



Milwaukee
Succeeds

cradle to career 2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Discover how we're working together and raising our voices to move Milwaukee forward.

ECE AMBASSADORS: ADVOCACY & ACTION

FOCUSING IN ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

SNEAK PEEK: OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN





INSIDE, YOU'LL FIND PHOTOS OF PENFIELD CHILDREN'S CENTER AND THE NORTHSIDE YMCA ECE CENTER!

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OUR TEAM



Our talented team has grown and evolved in 2023! Thanks to their incredible work, this year has been one of the brightest yet. [Meet the team now!](#)



“THIS WORK IS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR DEDICATED PARTNERS, OUR EXTRAORDINARY TEAM AND OUR SHARED DESIRE TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE.”

VINCENT LYLES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CLICK THE LINKS OR SCAN THE QR CODES FOUND THROUGHOUT THE REPORT TO ACCESS BONUS CONTENT!

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2023

A MESSAGE FROM VINCENT LYLES

Vincent reflects on the highlights from his first year as executive director.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In 2023, Milwaukee Succeeds experienced significant changes. Our former executive director, Danae Davis, retired in 2022, and I inherited an incredible opportunity to serve my community in a different way.



DEAR FRIENDS,

The Milwaukee Succeeds team and our colleagues at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation (GMF) are courageous, committed and convinced that by working together **we can make Milwaukee greater.**

We've set about doing that in a variety of ways, with the most important being our commitment to letting our lived experience partners guide the work. Since we aim to transform systems, it's crucial that we involve those most impacted by these systems.

This year, our Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Youth Forward MKE Ambassadors stood up and stood out within the broader community. Whether it was our ECE Ambassadors speaking at the Joint Committee on Finance's listening session (page 4) or our Youth Ambassadors [presenting at a national youth conference](#), these incredible individuals provided insight, gained the

courage to tell their own stories and made a lasting impression in the process.

Our engagement work was also recognized by two national funders (pages 8-9). The Wallace Foundation is providing support for our high school success work, while the Kellogg Foundation was so impressed with our ECE Coalition that they provided a capacity-building grant, which will help us prepare for the next round of budget discussions.

In addition, the funding we informed and helped secure over the past few years was put to use this year to support and stabilize the ECE sector (pages 4-5). For example, the City of Milwaukee's historic \$7 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) investment into ECE has resulted in thousands of stipends to early educators. The Accreditation Facilitation Project, which we helped secure funding for, is also well under-

way, with two programs already receiving accreditation! This is an incredible step toward improving the quality of care in Milwaukee and expanding the number of high-quality slots, with hundreds of children set to benefit.

With the input of local youth, we also developed a first-of-its-kind Youth Adult Equity Ladder Assessment to help local organizations better serve Milwaukee's young people (page 7). Finally, we were instrumental in helping to provide culturally relevant behavioral health supports to ECE providers, as well as students at two local high schools (page 6). We believe these efforts will have a lasting impact on our students.

This work is made possible by our dedicated partners, our extraordinary team and our shared desire to create lasting change for children and families. **Thank you to everyone who helped us move Milwaukee forward in 2023!**



WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IS CRITICAL

Check out Vincent's editorial for the Journal Sentinel on the importance of child care.





18
CURRENT AMBASSADORS

2,273
TOTAL HOURS COMPLETED

389
NAMES ON THE NETWORKING LIST



AMBASSADORS & ADVOCACY

How our ECE Ambassadors Learned to Raise their Voices for Change

In February, Milwaukee Succeeds welcomed its first cohort of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Ambassadors. Utilizing their lived experiences as parents, community advocates and ECE professionals, they set out to learn more about the sector, engage with the community and, ultimately, advocate for change.

With major struggles currently facing the sector – from recruitment and retention challenges to skyrocketing costs of care – their work wasn't easy. Yet through their dedication, persis-

tence and collaboration, they've succeeded in supporting local providers and raising their voices for a stronger ECE system.

Building a Network

"The best part about this ambassadorship is really being out there engaging with all the families," said Ambassador Briana Stanford. "You really get to hear their stories and connect."

The Ambassadors had plenty of engagement opportunities this year, including resource fairs, block parties, back-to-school

events and more. At each, they shared their stories, spoke about the state of ECE and cultivated a list of champions eager to learn and do more. The Ambassadors are now conducting conversations with those on the list to learn more about what matters to them. They'll use this feedback to organize trainings on ECE policy, data, grassroots organizing and the power of advocacy.

"This is about activating people around a common good that's going to benefit children for



decades to come," said Ambassador Vanessa Giraldez.

Providing Targeted Supports

The Ambassadors have also made it a point to connect with and learn from local ECE providers. They've become familiar faces in various centers, both by attending partner events and helping to facilitate them. They've even provided targeted supports – like [Teaching Strategies GOLD](#) and [Creative Curriculum trainings](#) – to ensure educators have the best tools to teach our youngest learners.

Calling for Change

Advocating for sustained funding – particularly the continuation of Child Care Counts in the 2023-25 state budget – became a major



part of the Ambassadors' efforts. After learning about the power of their voices and the importance of their stories, they took to the stage at the [Joint Committee on Finance's listening session](#) in April, painting a picture of the sector's ongoing struggles.

Along with members of the ECE Coalition and the statewide Raising Wisconsin coalition, they succeeded in garnering over 80,000 emails to state and local legislators in support of Child Care Counts. This, combined with their sustained advocacy activities, effectively elevated ECE to one of the most prominent issues in the state.

While the request for \$300 million to continue the program



wasn't included in the final budget, because of these combined efforts, Gov. Evers did designate \$170 million in emergency funding to sustain Child Care Counts until June 2025.

"We can, we should and we need to have stronger early childhood education systems," said Ambassador Callie Colbo.

In 2024, our ECE Ambassadors, coalition partners and dedicated team will work to continue this incredible momentum. In addition to ongoing advocacy efforts, institutional pieces (like the Wisconsin Shares research that the Ambassadors are helping to coordinate) will further bolster the sector and create meaningful change for many.



Making an Impact with Public Investments

This year, the ECE Coalition and its partners have been putting public investments into action. Take a look at how the \$5 million [Workforce Innovation Grant](#) and \$7 million [City of Milwaukee ARPA investment](#) are helping strengthen the ECE workforce.

THE ACCREDITATION FACILITATION PROJECT

24

CURRENT PARTICIPANTS: 19 FAMILY & 5 GROUP PROVIDERS

373

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED BY THE 24 PROVIDERS

2

PROGRAMS ACCREDITED, WITH 131 HIGH-QUALITY SLOTS

The 3-year project, funded by GMF and Milwaukee Succeeds, helps ECE programs through the accreditation process. Learn more. >



*Numbers as of October 2023



WORKFORCE INNOVATION GRANT

Currently **43 individuals** are participating in coursework, career counseling and wraparound supports to improve their ECE credentialing, far surpassing the **initial goal of 35**.



ARPA INVESTMENT

As of September, **2,805 educators** had received stipends totalling over \$2M. Plus, **11 high schoolers** participated in dual enrollment coursework at MATC and **11 men of color fellows** were placed in ECE classrooms.



LISTEN TO OUR AMBASSADORS DISCUSS
WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED FROM OUR
COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS.



of MPS students experienced **significant problems with anxiety** in the past year, and 37% had **prolonged, disruptive sadness** (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, WI Department of Public Instruction, 2021)

A FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH



OUR YOUTH NEED MORE WHEN IT COMES TO MENTAL HEALTH.

In 2021, they called it out as part of our [Design Your Future Fellowship](#) – and they haven't stopped calling since. Milwaukee Succeeds is listening and, together with our community partners, we're making moves to change things for good.

DISCOVER WHAT WE'RE DOING

Above: Youth Forward MKE Ambassadors present at the MENTOR Greater Milwaukee Youth Summit. Photo courtesy of MENTOR Greater Milwaukee.

A Clear Need for Support

Recent data reinforces what our young people have been saying. According to the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey by the WI Department of Public Instruction, over half of Milwaukee Public School (MPS) high school students experienced significant problems with anxiety in the past year. On top of that, 37% reported prolonged disruptive sadness, while 17% seriously considered suicide. These statistics paint a clear picture of the struggles our youth are facing – and the

opportunity we have to help.

SKY Schools Curriculum

Making mental health a standard practice in schools is a key step in changing these trends. That's why Youth Forward MKE has been working with SKY Schools to provide stress reduction tools to students and teachers. This fall, the curriculum was piloted at two local high schools, with plans to expand in the next few years.

"This curriculum **empowers youth to take wellness and resilience into their own hands,**"

said Matt Nink of SKY Schools. "We build confidence and agency through daily practices of targeted breathing and impulse control. This is needed in schools because there are very few physiological tools that we have that reduce stress and improve performance."

MENTOR Youth Summit

The MENTOR Greater Milwaukee Youth Summit aims to create a space where youth feel welcome and included. This, in turn, influences their ability to show up in school and life. This year's summit in July marked the second such conference. Milwaukee Succeeds/Youth Forward MKE helped sponsor the event, with Youth Forward MKE Ambassadors utilizing the skills they've learned to present a session on mental health.

Trauma Response Policy

Mental health and violence are part of a vicious cycle, with each feeding into the other. With

violence on the rise – particularly gun violence against those under 30 – it's no wonder our youth are feeling the effects.

Feedback from MPS students, teachers, leaders and central office staff showcased the lack of consistent trauma-informed communications following such events.

The Milwaukee Succeeds-led K12 Civic Action Team (CAT) took up the issue this year, ultimately submitting a proposal for the creation of new policies and guidelines. If adopted, these guidelines would help MPS respond to internal and external events with the develop-



mentally appropriate communications that their students need.

"I am advocating for the communications policies to be updated because our students and families deserve better!" said Sharlen Moore of Urban Underground, who also serves on the K12 CAT. "I send my children to school to not only be educated, but to have systems in place that will protect and support them. When we see a policy that is not in place that directly impacts the mental health of our students, it is the duty of our educational leaders to not only listen to the changes that need to be made, **but to act to change things.**"

PARTNERING TO CREATE CHANGE

THANK YOU TO THE DEDICATED PARTNERS WHO HAVE HELPED US SUCCEED IN 2023!

Thank you to the 19 organizations that completed the pilot of the **Youth Adult Equity Leader Assessment**. A new and improved version is now available!

In 2023, Youth Forward MKE presented **Capacity Building Grants** to five organizations who are leading important youth-centered work: SKY Schools, the MPS Department of Black and Latino Male

Achievement, MENTOR Greater Milwaukee, Teach for America and United Way Community Schools. Thank you for all you're doing for Milwaukee's youth!

And thank you to MPS for their ongoing partnership on the **Student Voice Project**. Started in 2020, the project aims to magnify student voice, identify opportunities for improvement and build community awareness.





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OPERATIONS
Check out how we're utilizing local and national funding to drive change in Milwaukee.

2023 BRIGHT SPOTS

2023 FISCAL IMPACT



\$171 MILLION

IN NEW PUBLIC FUNDING

to support child care in Wisconsin

\$300,000

IN NEW NATIONAL FUNDING

from the Wallace and WK Kellogg Foundations



90%

of outgoing funds directed to **Black and Brown-led** vendors and nonprofits.

Check out the full stories – and other bright spots from the year – on our blog! milwaukee.succeeds.org/blog

This year, we've been busy growing our team of champions, diving into data and raising our voices in support of change. Take a peek at some of our favorite stories:



INCREASING OUR CAPACITY

Creating sustainable change requires a dedicated team of changemakers – and we've been working hard to expand ours!

In April, Kelsey Hau joined as the new fund development manager, focused on identifying new funding prospects. In June, Maria Hamidu ended her tenure as a Trinity Fellow and came on board as the high school success project manager, in charge of our youth-centered special projects. And this fall, Anna Smerchek transitioned to the new role of ECE community engagement manager, driving outreach and engagement among ECE Ambassadors, providers and families.

[MEET OUR NEW STAFF](#)



2 NEW SUCCESS STORIES

Our Success Stories were born out of our ongoing commitment to data. In 2023, we added two new stories to the growing list.

The first dives into the Milwaukee Community Schools' Quality School Lunch Project, where students set about improving the appeal of everyday lunch offerings. The second digs into the SKY Schools curriculum, which uses breathwork, yoga, conflict resolution and life skills to help students and staff manage their stress and emotions. Both Success Stories feature quotes from participants, survey results, program highlights and opportunities for growth.

[READ THE REPORTS](#)



WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

In honor of Week of the Young Child in April, educators, families and advocates all raised their voices in support of ECE.

Their inspiring personal stories provided a firsthand look at everything high-quality ECE can do – from setting children up for success in school and later life to boosting the workforce and supporting the economy. Yet their stories also highlighted the ongoing challenges for families, educators and ECE programs. The stories culminated in a call for change, emphasizing the need for a continuous and sustainable investment in early childhood education.

[DISCOVER THE STORIES](#)



OUR FUNDERS

Our funders align their investments to transform how philanthropy builds better systems for our youth. Thank you for helping us advance education equity in MKE!



“WE BELIEVE SYSTEMS CAN BE
ALTERED, DISRUPTED AND
EVENTUALLY TRANSFORMED.”

2024 AND BEYOND: STRATEGIC PLANNING

BY VINCENT LYLES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Milwaukee Succeeds has evolved over the last few years, despite the societal headwinds due to COVID, the recent economic downturn and the lack of information on how to best serve our youngest learners and our high school students.

This evolution is due not only to our dynamic, dedicated team, but also our commitment to centering the lived experiences of those in the early childhood education (ECE) and high school spaces. We work in

tandem with our stakeholders to ensure their vision is our vision. These collective ideals are needed to transform the systems that have held people down for so long.



FOCUS AREAS



ADVOCACY

We're placing a focus on policy work and advocacy activities in collaboration with our lived experience partners.



DATA & RESEARCH

In 2024 and beyond, you'll see more intentionality with our data and research work.



LIVED EXPERIENCES

We've already committed to centering lived experiences in our work. In the next few years, we'll foster even deeper engagement with these partners.



Strategic Planning Currently Underway

Our new strategic plan is currently in development. Stay tuned for more news on what the next three years will look like!

“We recognize the road to change is a long one, but we also know we can't do it alone.”

Looking to the Future

As we think about our future, **we believe systems can be altered, disrupted and eventually transformed.** That's why the strategic planning process we're currently undertaking includes the voices of people with lived experiences, as well as other key stakeholders. Those voices speak truth to power.

Speaking truth to power takes courage, conviction and action. Within our new strategic plan, we are exhibiting courage by evaluating how ECE and high school education are delivered in Milwaukee and what can be done to improve them. We are also exhibiting courage by using our research capabilities and an equity lens to understand how youth-serving organizations can better serve our young people.

Our conviction happens by way of our data gathering and analytical work, but it also happens because we are engaging the people most affected by the existing systems. By helping them advocate and advance policy initiatives, we are preparing them to be champions



for themselves, their families and their entire communities.

A Collaborative Effort

We recognize **the road to change is a long one, but we also know we can't do it alone.** We are engaging partners at every level along the way.

We reinforce those efforts indirectly by way of our proximity to the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and other local funders. Our ability to leverage these resources helps

our partners make a real difference in the lives of the people they serve.

Our efforts over the next three years will include more intentionality regarding our research and data work; deeper engagement with lived experience partners; and more advocacy and policy activities. At the end of these three years, we hope to see a notable difference in how ECE and high school education are delivered, viewed and supported.

Our **coalitions, ambassadors** and **key stakeholders** are helping us determine our priority areas and drive this work forward!



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