“I think a hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people.”

– Maya Angelou
Every day in classrooms, boardrooms and statehouses across the country individuals like you are working to improve strategies, increase funding and expand access to quality early education. You are our heroes. In these pages, you will read about remarkable people living out our mission. These are our everyday heroes — ordinary people like you making an extraordinary difference in the lives of tens of thousands of children.

CHANGING THE SYSTEM. Not long ago many saw early care and education programs as little more than glorified babysitting – places intended to keep children safe while their parents worked, not as academic institutions. Fast-forward two decades — there has been a drastic shift in public perception fueled by a growing body of research into child brain development and the long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education. The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education is proud to be part of this growing movement to change the system of early learning in our country. We opened 11 years ago with a clear, albeit ambitious, mission — elevate the quality of early care and education in Miami-Dade and beyond. Since then, we have been fortunate to join with like-minded partners and have made great strides.

RESULTS SPEAK VOLUMES. One of our key focus areas is in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). A recent study by the University of Miami showed Head Start students enrolled in the Center’s Demonstration School, Educare of Miami-Dade, had higher gains in science competency scores than children in similar programs in Miami-Dade.

THANK YOU. At the Center, we are thrilled to serve as a catalyst for change in our community and beyond. We have created a platform from which educators, families, lawmakers and so many others can learn innovative practices and strategies and in turn, put that knowledge into practice. Thank you for all you are doing to improve the quality of early learning for ALL children.

Annelies Da Costa Gomez Maria C. Alonso
Chair, United Way Center President and CEO
Excellence in Early Education United Way of Miami-Dade
Our Mission | Elevate the quality of early care and education in Miami-Dade and beyond.

Our Vision | All children will have access to the highest quality early care and education, so they can have the best possible start in school and in life.

The Center’s mission is supported by three guiding principles:

EDUCATE
Empower individuals working with children

DEMONSTRATE
Model evidence-based practices

ADVOCATE
Champion early education policy
In one year, the Center, together with its partners has:

- Provided 8,681 hours of professional learning
- Improved the skills of 1,608 professionals
- Provided quality enhancement services to 436 early education programs
- Influenced the life of 10,693 young children
- Advocated successfully for the passage of 6 early education bills and over $37 million in early childhood funding increases.

2018 | A YEAR OF GROWTH. DISCOVERY, AND PROMISE
THE SECRET IS OUT...THE EARLY YEARS MATTER
Decades of research illustrate the importance of high-quality early education on long-term child development.

WE KNOW...children are born ready to learn
A child’s brain can form 1 million new neural connections per second during the first two years of life. It is a lot easier to help shape the developing brain by providing children with quality early learning experiences than it is to rewire it later.

WE KNOW...the earlier we start, the better
18 months is the age at which disparities in vocabulary begin to appear. By age four, a child from a low-income home will have only heard two words for every seven compared to a child in a higher income home.

90–100% chance of developmental delays occurs when children experience significant adversity.

1 in 3 adults who recall having serious adverse experiences during their childhood are three times more likely to have cardiovascular disease later in life.

WE KNOW...early investments pay off
Investing in early childhood strengthens the economy. $1 invested in programs for low-income children can yield between $4 and $9 in returns to the society.

Children who receive high-quality early education are:

53% less likely to have an arrest
18% more likely to be employed
24% more likely to own a home
more likely to have higher earnings

“The first five years have so much to do with how the next 80 will turn out.”
— Bill Gates Sr., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Sources:
LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD
FOR OUR COMMUNITY’S CHILDREN

**APPROACH:** The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education, Demonstration School, serves 116 children ages six weeks to 5 years old in a mixed-income model environment. Our structure allows us to compare our work at the Demonstration School, Educare of Miami-Dade, with other early education programs in Miami-Dade County, and analyze which strategies are achieving the best results for students. One of our key area of focus is Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

**RESULTS:** A study prepared and administered by the University of Miami in conjunction with Bellwether Education indicated that students enrolled at the Demonstration School’s Head Start program achieved GREATER gains in their science competency scores compared with students enrolled in other Head Start programs within our community during the same time period.

*Educare Head Start* children made the biggest gains in science competency scores when compared to Miami-Dade Head Start and Educare Non-Head Start.
EDUCATE

The Center is a hub for professional learning. We equip early childhood professionals, families, community leaders and others, with the skills, knowledge, and resources to understand and deliver high-quality early care and education.

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2018, the Center trained 1,608 educators resulting in 8,681 hours of professional learning, which impacted the lives of 10,693 children in 436 programs.
### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

#### THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR’S INSTITUTE (ECPAI)

**The Program**
One-year professional development program focused on financial management, human resources, and marketing skills.

**The Goal**
By giving administrators the necessary tools and training, the Center empowers professionals to create high-quality early care and education programs.

**The Numbers**
2018: 75 early care and education professionals.

Since the program started, 709 professionals have taken advantage of this program.

“After taking this training, I feel better prepared with all the skills needed to provide a high-quality service to the children and their families in my program and to serve my community better.”
— Ivon Brinas, assistant preschool director, Kendall Christian School

#### QUALITY COUNTS – NEIGHBORHOOD LEARNING NETWORK

**The Program**
On-site coaching, communities of practice, accreditation supports, and mental health services.

**The Goal**
By partnering with programs and supporting their growth, we elevate the quality of early care and education programs across the county.

**The Numbers**
2018: 254 programs in central Miami-Dade County

“I have seen through the Center’s leadership a strong belief and conviction in the importance and power of continuous quality improvement. The educators who participate are eager to think together as professionals and deepen their knowledge and understanding of early childhood practice.”
— Judy Jablon, nationally recognized educator and author

#### PATHWAYS TO QUALITY

**The Program**
Series of on-site trainings and intense collaboration in order to provide Center partners with individualized programs or “pathways” for success.

**The Goal**
By working in-depth with administrators and teachers, the Center tailors strategies and solutions to elevate the quality of programs across Miami-Dade.

**The Numbers**
2018: 21 United Way-funded early care and education programs

“Through the Pathways to Quality program, I am building relationships with the parents and with my staff to mold a partnership in educating our children. The teachers and parents are more invested and excited about improving the quality of our shared endeavor.”
— Catherine Radziewicz, director, Homestead YMCA Preschool
**EARLY HEAD START CHILD–CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP (EHS–CCP)**

**The Program**
In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families awarded the Center a 5-year federal grant to enhance and expand access to quality infant and toddler care in high-need neighborhoods across Miami-Dade. In 2017, the Center received a second 5-year federal grant to further expand the program and meet the needs of additional communities.

**The Goal**
Ensure infant and toddlers have access to high-quality early education programs so that they can transition to Head Start ready to learn.

**The Numbers**
2018: 19 programs and 520 children throughout Miami-Dade
CREATING CHANGE THROUGH EHS-CCP

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT  Ida Johnson, parent, A New World Academy
“This program changed my life and the lives of my children for the better. Besides providing my children with excellent early care and education, we are so grateful for the food pantry that United Way placed at the program. Every other week, we are given the privilege of shopping for food, toiletries and other important items for our home. There are times when funds are tight and we are short of certain needs and then comes pantry day where we have the ability to receive things we need to make it another few weeks. I am always amazed at the patience and kindness of the staff and volunteers.”

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  Teresita López-Ibarra, resource teacher, Ethel Beckford Primary Learning Center
“Through EHS-CCP, I completed the Infant and Toddler Child Development Credential-CDA and later graduated from the Center’s ECPAI program. I have a passion for teaching young children, and I want to do whatever I can to ensure the students in my class have an opportunity for a good life. I know education will open doors for them, the way it has for my family and me.”

PROGRAM QUALITY  Creation of Lotus Village
In 2010, as a delegate of Miami-Dade County Early Head Start Program, the Center began providing weekly visits to residents of Lotus House, a homeless shelter for women and families. From there, our collaboration continued to grow, culminating in the creation of six infant and toddler classrooms in its new state-of-the-art facility. Providing this underserved community with access to a quality infant and toddler care opens up opportunities for homeless women to go to school or find a job.

SCHOOL READINESS  Mrs. Crystal Coffey, principal, Ethel F. Beckford/Richmond Elementary School
“As an elementary school principal, I believe a high quality early learning program is essential to a child’s later educational success. Our teachers have noted that that students transitioning from the United Way Early Head Start Program into the Head Start and VPK Programs at Ethel F. Beckford exhibit significantly higher levels of independence, ability to work in groups with minimal conflicts, possess socialization skills and often have a more extensive vocabulary.”
At the Demonstration School, we model an inquiry-based learning approach that is guided by an investigation or questions posed by children. Teachers observe children closely to know where their interests lie and together develop questions for research. This approach led students in one classroom to the “itsy bitsy spider,” which illustrates how something so small can inspire a lifetime of learning.

One morning in the outdoor playground a student noticed a spider and a nearby cobweb. His observation, and the interest of the class, sparked a months-long project into the life and activities of this 8-legged animal.
Inquiry-Based Learning
Following the initial discovery of spiders, students launched into a yearlong cycle of observations, research and experimentation, framed and guided by their teachers. Using the Visible Thinking routine of “see, think, wonder” teachers encouraged discovery.

Technology
As interest among the children grew around spiders and their habits, teachers showed them a time-lapse video of spiders creating their webs. Following the video, students attempted to create webs of their own with string and contact paper.

Social-Emotional Development
As they became more aware of their environment, students gradually realized they shared their playground space with a host of small animals. Exploring the movement of the millipedes, students began associating the animal’s behavior with some of their own movements (e.g. when the millipede curled up, one student believe it was “scared”).

Scientific & Mathematical Thinking
On one afternoon, a student spotted a lizard in the playground. A teacher safely placed it in a jar and brought it back to the classroom where the students observed it for a short period (before the animal was released). They questioned its characteristics and formed a hypothesis as to why lizards run away when they went outside to the playground.

Early Literacy
From their initial observations, students began documenting their work through art, videos, pictures and anecdotal notes. Through the mini-documentation posted in the classroom, children looked at their own experiences and were engaged in the process.

Family Engagement
The small individual webs led to the creation of a larger, life-size web involving the class and their families. Students tied recycled cotton string through the playground equipment and plants to give them a sense of how spiders create webs. Families and caregivers then helped students explore moving within the web. Later in the project, families helped students create an herb garden to attract spiders, millipedes and other small creatures.

Meaningful Interactions
Students enjoyed learning about spiders in a series of indoor and outdoor spaces. To promote exploration teachers placed wet soil, magnifying glasses, and cups on a table to help students find small “worms” (millipedes) living in the soil.

Dual Language
Throughout this project, and throughout their school day, children were exposed to a second language. During the discussions, discoveries and documentation, children learned new English and Spanish words.
The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education works with lawmakers, business leaders and others to spark the conversation and raise awareness of the importance of high-quality early childhood education.

STRONGER TOGETHER
In Florida, United Way of Miami-Dade joins each year with 31 United Ways statewide to advocate for quality early care education. In 2018, those efforts resulted in: six early education bills and over $37 million in early childhood funding increases.

Big win for early learning programs | House Bill 1091
For the first time, early learning programs in Florida will be required to meet quality standards to receive state funding. The landmark bill, sponsored by Rep. Erin Grall (R-Vero Beach), is arguably the most significant early learning policy legislation in years. By adding accountability requirements to increase the quality of state-funded childcare (“School Readiness”) programs, it recognizes that high quality early learning programs help at-risk children to catch up with their peers, and that Florida has a responsibility to hold state-funded providers and programs accountable for delivering the quality needed to achieve child outcomes.
“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
— Nelson Mandela

CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

“I love Reading Pals because it gives me an opportunity to do something small that ends up making such a big difference. My job can sometimes be tiring and stressful and full of long hours, but it’s almost impossible for me to have a bad Tuesday, because each Tuesday starts with 30 minutes of laughter and silliness with my little pals.”
— Amanda Estevez, ReadingPal volunteer at Centro Mater East

“When women are empowered, the benefits to children, society, their health, and their community are unmatched.”
— Andrea Jung, president and CEO, Grameen America, and speaker at the 2018 Women’s Leadership Breakfast

“I firmly believe in the power of education to improve the quality of your life. To me, the biggest injustice in this world is the fact that so many children do not have access to this basic right and are therefore caught in a vicious cycle.”
— Annelies Da Costa Gomez, Chair
United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education Committee

“There is nothing more rewarding than working with our women and legislature in Tallahassee to support our children in early learning. It truly takes a village to make it happen. I’m so proud to live united.”
— Laura Kaplan, Women United Executive Council
Public Policy Committee member
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