



## **DECAL Awards Transformation Grants to Eight Community Partnerships**

*Funded groups will develop and implement projects  
to improve vital service access and quality throughout Georgia*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (June 15, 2021)** – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has awarded Community Transformation Grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$75,000 to eight community collaboratives to fund initiatives that will serve the critical needs of young children and families in their areas.

The 2021 Community Transformation Grants were awarded to: Communities in Schools Milledgeville Baldwin County, Cook County Family Connection, Georgia Organics, Greenbriar Children’s Center, Gwinnett Building Babies’ Brains, Quality Care for Children, United Way of Central Georgia, and University of West Georgia College of Education Early Learning Center.

The Grant recipients were selected from 34 partnership groups that participated in a rigorous application process. The applicants, representing communities across the state, first submitted Letters of Interest (LOIs) detailing their experience and capabilities, the identified community need, and the project they planned to develop in response to that need. Each LOI was reviewed and scored, with the 20 projects receiving the highest scores invited to submit formal applications.

“We are so pleased that these Community Transformation Grants will fund innovative, data-driven efforts to improve both the access to and quality of crucial services for children and their families in so many parts of the state,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “Though we couldn’t fund every project that was proposed, we applaud all of the applicants for their interest in and commitment to the important work of enhancing the local resources and supports available to Georgia’s children and families.”

The Community Transformation Grants are funded from the three-year, \$11.2 million Preschool Development Renewal Grant (PDG) that Georgia was awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education in January 2020. The federal grant allows Georgia to design and implement activities to help ensure that children ages birth to 5 in the state have access to high-quality early childhood programs and services.

As part of Georgia’s PDG activities, DECAL conducted a Community Needs Assessment to identify services that should be prioritized. To help advance those priorities, the agency created the Community Transformation Grants and required applicants to form local partnerships and design projects that addressed one of the following Focus Areas that were identified in the Needs Assessment:



- Increasing access to high-quality early education programs for infants and toddlers (ages six weeks to 36 months)
- Increasing access to high-quality early education programs for dual language learners (ages six weeks up to kindergarten entry)
- Increasing access to high-quality early education programs for children living in rural areas of Georgia
- Supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors to reduce suspensions and expulsions from early learning programs
- Reducing food insecurity for children ages birth to 5 and their families
- Coordinating early learning services for children in foster care or protective services
- Providing mental health services for the birth-to-5 population and their caregivers
- Providing enhanced services to young children related to the early identification and treatment of developmental delays and disabilities
- Developing a system of care to support children ages birth to 5 and their families who are experiencing homelessness

The Community Transformation Grants have a term of 18 months, but DECAL hopes that many of the funded projects will be expanded or scaled-up over time. Researchers from the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students will provide support to grantees.

Details about the Community Transformation Grant awardees follow.

#### **About Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning**

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to [www.dec.al.ga.gov](http://www.dec.al.ga.gov).



## **Community Transformation Grantees**

### **Communities in Schools Milledgeville Baldwin County**

Communities in Schools Milledgeville Baldwin County's *Bee Strong in School* project will increase access to high-quality early education programs for 20 young children with an incarcerated parent. The project will provide a strong beginning to each child's educational experience and create opportunities for lifelong learning by providing children with necessary supports that will positively impact their success in Head Start and Pre-K. The entire school population will benefit from the grant because the programming events will be open to all students and their families.

### **Cook County Family Connection**

The *Well-Fed & Well-Read* initiative in Cook County will help reduce food insecurity among children ages birth to 5 and their families, while also incorporating storybooks and literacy materials that promote healthy nutrition. Led by a collaborative of six local early education partners, the project will serve at least 500 children and families with low incomes for 18 months. The project will utilize a multi-faceted design that includes family food drops, on-site food pantries, community garden projects, a monthly produce truck delivery, quarterly nutrition fairs and cooking classes, and an aggressive marketing strategy.

### **Georgia Organics**

Georgia Organics will co-design the *Family Farm Share Program* with a group of Ware County community partners to nourish working families and intertwine programming to meet a community need for a low-cost, high-quality access point to fresh local food. Grant funds will be used to reduce food insecurity for children ages birth to 5 and their families. The initiative is a sliding-scale, low-cost vegetable box program specifically designed for families of young children at child care and Head Start programs. It will democratize access to organic and healthy food, while educating families about how to prepare and enjoy their weekly bounty from farmers in their communities.

### **Greenbriar Children's Center**

Chatham County's Greenbriar Children's Center will utilize funds from this grant to provide mental health services for the birth-to-5 population and their parents and caregivers. The Center will educate families and caregivers on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and equip them with necessary tools to mitigate the lifelong impact of ACEs on the physical and emotional health of young children. Education about ACEs will be provided to staff and families in child care programs as well as directly to other populations of parents through Parent University, a partner in the initiative. This project will also create curriculum materials, distribute survey forms for participants to complete, and build awareness of ACEs through social media.

### **Gwinnett Building Babies' Brains**

*Gwinnett Building Babies' Brains in Every Language and Culture* is a project designed to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for infants and toddlers (ages 6 weeks to 36 months) and build awareness around the importance of early learning. The project is focused on ensuring that children receive abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions, which are scientifically proven to increase neural connections in a young child's brain. Funding for the project will move the needle on early learning by offering cultural responsiveness training to partner staff who will deliver programming to families of children from birth to age 3. To ensure lasting effects, the project will create translated materials,



including brochures, flyers, and instructional aids, to support parents and caregivers in being their child's first and best teacher.

### **Quality Care for Children**

Quality Care for Children in Fulton County aims to reduce food insecurity for children ages birth to 5 and their families in Clayton County through *Clayton Farm to ECE*, a community-driven nutrition intervention at early care and education sites. The project will focus on demonstrating transformational changes across four early childhood education programs. These four programs will pilot a centralized kitchen and meal catering service with The School Gourmet to combat food insecurity, and serve as ambassadors to share their experiences and best practices with Hand Heart and Soul Project's Clayton Collective group of ECE providers and community leaders.

### **United Way of Central Georgia**

Focusing on families with young children in Bibb, Crawford, Macon, and Peach counties, United Way of Central Georgia proposes to increase access to high-quality early education programs for dual language learners living in rural areas of Georgia. Funding for this grant will support hiring a bilingual, full-time Parent Educator and contracting with a First Steps Screener to expand the ability to identify, engage, and enroll families from the Hispanic community. Additionally, the project will engage a diverse group of partners deeply connected to Hispanic residents to increase screening and home visitation services, as well as document systemic cultural barriers, identify cultural competency education needs, and define strategies for system improvement.

### **University of West Georgia, College of Education (COE) Early Learning Center**

University of West Georgia's College of Education Early Learning Center proposes to create a resource toolkit that will include activities and services based on the story, *Suri Spider Selects a Solution*. Funding for this project, *Suri Spider: A Collection of Social-Emotional Resources for Challenging Behavior at Home and School*, will build capacity for educators and families to practice and promote problem-solving skills for the youngest learners in West Georgia. The overall goal is to create and distribute critical information on how to support children with persistent challenging behaviors that will help to reduce suspensions and expulsions from early learning programs.