



“Ensuring Equitable Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education Services for Every Milwaukee Neighborhood”
Office of Early Childhood Initiatives
City of Milwaukee, WI

PROJECT CONTEXT

In recent years, the conversation around early childhood care and education has garnered increased attention. Studies have found that the period of time from a child’s birth to when they enter kindergarten has far-reaching impacts, with the potential for high quality early care and education to benefit America’s social and economic future immensely. Unfortunately, access to high quality early childhood care and education is not readily available for many families in Milwaukee. The City of Milwaukee has roughly 47,000 children under the age of 6, half of whom are estimated to lack equitable access to high-quality early care and education services. More than 14,000 children under the age of 3 are directly impacted, and over 27,000 children lack access to three-star+ child care providers. Additionally, the cost of early childhood care and education is almost triple the national average, with Milwaukee families having to pay 20% of their income or more for these services. These early childhood care and education deserts are found predominantly in the historically segregated and underinvested communities of color in the City – neighborhoods in which educational, economic, and housing inequity has endured for generations.

Before the public health and economic crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, the early childhood care and education sector was operating on razor-thin margins, leaving too many families – especially Black and Brown families who live in these historically underinvested neighborhoods – without access to high quality and affordable care. As coronavirus cases continue to rise to record highs, Milwaukee childcare providers struggle to remain open and to capacity. This has left many essential workers, who are predominantly Black and Brown residents, without safe and nurturing care environments for their children – putting further strain on these families. With this in mind, the City has launched the POP Spot initiative to encourage language and literacy rich spaces in every neighborhood. These POP Spots include bus stops, Women and Infant Clinics, and family courts. The City has also built on successful programs, such as the Family Read, Play & Learn laundromat spaces which turns laundry time into learning opportunities for children. The City is working to lift, scale, and sustain this work to ensure Milwaukee’s children are prepared for academic, social-emotional, and lifelong success.

To support these efforts, the City’s Office of Early Childhood Initiatives will partner with FUSE Corps to host an Executive Fellow for one year who will design and institutionalize a comprehensive early childhood care and education strategy. The Executive Fellow will focus on key zip codes and neighborhoods, first assessing current programming, policy, gaps in access, and availability of resources, and then forming action plans and concrete metrics for improvement across multiple lines of early care and education. The Executive Fellow will be essential to developing a cohesive response to early childhood care and education deserts in the City, ultimately increasing every Milwaukeean’s access to prenatal care, child care, and literacy-rich environments.



PROJECT SUMMARY & POTENTIAL DELIVERABLES

The following provides a general overview of the proposed Executive Fellowship project. This summary and the potential deliverables will be collaboratively revisited by the host agency, the Executive Fellow, and FUSE staff during the first few months of the Executive Fellowship, after which a revised scope of work will be developed and agreed upon by the FUSE Executive Fellow and the host agency.

Starting May 1, 2021, it is proposed that the FUSE Executive Fellow will work to quickly build deep relationships with a wide range of critical stakeholders, including staff across City departments; local non-profits, specifically United Way, and philanthropic organizations, academic institutions; the local school district; child care centers; and community members and community-based organizations. The Executive Fellow will focus their engagement around seven neighborhoods where there are Community Schools as well as areas where there are limited child care centers with a three-star+ rating. Through this initial listening tour with key stakeholders the Executive Fellow will conduct a landscape assessment to map Milwaukee's existing early childhood care and education programs, policies, and resources (financial and otherwise). The Executive Fellow will identify gaps in access to these programs and resources. The Executive Fellow will also research national best practice models around early childhood care and education programs and policy, exploring the applicability of these models locally.

The Executive Fellow will work with internal and external stakeholders to develop an innovative strategic plan to address the early childhood care and education deserts in Milwaukee. The plan will detail which existing programs, policies, and resources are most impactful, how those can equitably be scaled; the programs, policies, and resources that should be phased out or merged; and which new programs, policies, and resources should be piloted. The plan will place emphasis on building action plans with the child care centers in key neighborhoods of color to increase the quality of these centers, the number of children attending these centers, and address the work force shortage and underpay of early child care educators.. A marketing and outreach strategy will be ingrained into the plan to reach and connect more families to the pipeline of resources and programs that has been collated, focusing on families previously not involved or who are the hardest to reach. This strategy will address key spaces and touch points where the families can be reached. The Executive Fellow will design a data system for tracking long and short-term impact of the action plans and improvement in early childhood care and education in the City.

In the next phase, the Executive Fellow will create a thorough and holistic implementation framework. The plan will outline short and long-term goals, timelines, priority areas, and clear roles of internal and external stakeholders. The Executive Fellow will work to initiate activities that are most urgent and can be implemented quickly. The Executive Fellow will build the data system and keep track of progress on goals, including collecting metrics across multiple lines of improvement: the number of families reached and participated, the number of child care centers reached, the type of resource connection offered to both families and child care providers, the number of children ready for Kindergarten, the number of child abuse and neglect referrals made to the Department of Children & Family Services in key areas, the number of child care facilities that showed improvement in quality, and the number of parents participating in child care subsidy. This comprehensive strategy will enable the City to ensure equitable access to prenatal care, child care, and literacy-rich environments for all Milwaukee families, effectively dismantling early childhood care and education deserts in the City.



By April 2022 the Executive Fellow will have overseen the initial implementation of the strategic plan, making sure it is as efficient and effective as possible. This will include the following:

- *Participate in deep community engagement* – Connect with families and community-based organizations in key neighborhoods to understand community needs, gaps in resources, and access issues; bring forward the community-voice to articulate strategies and policies that will have the most community impact
- *Conduct a thorough review of the current landscape* – Conduct a deep landscape analysis, collating all relevant programming, policies, and processes; map gaps and identify cross-cutting themes; collect and analyze existing data; strengthen existing lines of communication between stakeholders
- *Develop recommendations and form a comprehensive strategic plan* – Identify a shared vision and goal for the initiative; in close consultation with key stakeholders, scale or design programs, policies, and resources that will be most impactful; build quality/attendance improvement action plans for care centers with less than three-star+ ratings in certain zip codes; design a marketing and outreach strategy to reach families in key neighborhoods; identify relevant data and metrics, setting benchmarks for tracking progress
- *Engage stakeholders and catalyze buy-in* – Demonstrate cross-cultural agility and successfully engage with all relevant stakeholders; solicit feedback from major stakeholders on strategic plan; identify barriers to implementing any recommendations; incorporate input from stakeholders to build consensus and ensure that the strategy is supported and successful
- *Develop implementation framework and roll out recommendations* – Establish framework outlining short and long-term goals, timelines, priority areas, clear roles of internal and external stakeholders, and build data systems for tracking progress
- *Support long-term implementation* – Oversee implementation of strategies considered low-hanging fruit; work with leadership across Departments to manage the initiative; measure and broadly share progress towards goals; and integrate accountability mechanisms for long-term deployment of the framework

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **Project Supervisor -Dea Wright**, *Director*, Office of Early Childhood Initiatives – Milwaukee Public Library
- **Executive Sponsor - Mayor Tom Barrett**
- **Aaron Szopinski**, *Policy Director*, Mayor’s Office
- United Way of Milwaukee
- Milwaukee Public Schools
- 4C For Children

QUALIFICATIONS



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- At least 15 years of professional experience in a relevant field, particularly with a strong background in strategic planning and program development
 - Excellent community engagement skills with previous experience in community organizing preferred – must be able to understand community needs and know how to utilize and articulate strategies to promote community impact
 - Passion for building equity in the early childhood care and education sector a major plus
 - Proven developer and integrator of metric and data tracking systems
 - Superior critical thinking and analytical skills, with the capacity to quickly elevate their thinking from down in the tactical weeds of day-to-day operations to a higher level
 - Track record of success in resource identification and management, across a variety of areas (i.e. building public-private partnerships, winning grants, philanthropic support, financial pipelines)
 - Cross-cultural agility, ability to relate to a wide variety of diverse audiences with strong emotional intelligence and empathy
 - Proven success in cultivating strategic partnerships, relationship and coalition building, and collaboration
 - Ability to synthesize complex information into clear and concise recommendations
 - Ability to sustain progress and facilitate change management within potentially ambiguous environments
 - Self-motivated, goal-oriented, entrepreneurial leader who can also be an independent worker
 - Exceptional written and verbal communication skills with an ease in public presentations
 - Understands the need for solutions to support all people in a community regardless of race, religion, gender, immigration status, or ethnicity

FUSE Corps is an equal opportunity employer with a core value of incorporating diverse perspectives into our work at every level. We encourage candidates from all backgrounds to apply for this position.