



For Immediate Release

January 28, 2022

Contact Patricia Soutas-Little: Email: psoutaslittle@icloud.com Phone: 231-218-8496

LECDC website: leelanauearlychildhood.org

Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission Announces a New Child Care Business Start Up Initiative

The Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission (LECDC) announced today that it is launching an initiative to increase the number of early child care facilities in Leelanau County. The working model was created in an effort to address the severe lack of child care resources in Leelanau County. The shortage of child care is a nation-wide problem right now and Leelanau County in particular has been hit hard. Three facilities closed last year, leaving few child care options for families with small children.

The initiative was made possible by a grant of \$318,000 from The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC), a private non-profit corporation, to develop a model for assisting Leelanau County residents in starting home-based child care businesses and expanding opportunities for quality infant and toddler child care. Leelanau was one of five communities in Michigan to receive grant monies. The initiative, named the *Infant & Toddler Child Care Start Up* (ITCS), will provide funding to assist new child care providers in all aspects of licensing, education, facility upgrades, and their basic business needs. The ITCS will also help by providing professional assistance with business-building skills including banking, accounting and record keeping.

ITCS will support child care providers for up to \$12,000 for expenses that are required to establish a quality child care business. Each new provider will be assigned a personal coach and a business coach to help them navigate through the start up process and create a facility that will meet or exceed State of Michigan requirements. In addition, there will be grant funding available for existing child care facilities that wish to expand their operations. The ultimate goal of this initiative is two-fold. It will support child care providers for infants and toddlers, and provide more opportunities for families to return to work knowing their young children are in a quality, licensed child care facility.

Unfortunately, the work context for many early childhood teachers and caregivers does not provide adequate support for workforce quality. In particular, working conditions for child care programs are often characterized by low compensation, limited benefits, and few opportunities or incentives to advance. The ITCS initiative hopes to solve this problem by filling the financial gap between what it costs to be a child care provider and what families can afford to pay for child care. And if successful, the initiative can enable more parents an opportunity to return to the workforce, a big benefit for Leelanau County businesses desperately in need of employees.

The research is clear. High quality early childhood programs can change lives. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman's multi-year research study demonstrated that every dollar invested in quality early childhood programs can yield up to a 13% return on investment by increasing school readiness, increasing high school graduation rates and ultimately, decreasing poverty rates. Experts in early child care agree that the benefits of high-quality early care and education are even greater for vulnerable children, and there is research evidence that suggests greater exposure to high-quality early care and education environments (either by starting at a younger age or receiving more hours of such care) improve developmental outcomes for young children.

"We were very fortunate to be one of the first grantees of ECIC's Child Care Innovation Awards," said Patricia Soutas-Little, managing director of the LECDC. "Leelanau child care options and facilities have been drastically diminishing in the last few years, and this grant will be critical in providing some solutions for our working families. Our goal is to establish new fully-functioning facilities over the course of next year so our infants and toddlers can receive the benefits of high-quality child care."

Along with many volunteers, the Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission is being assisted by two key partners in this initiative. The Leelanau Children's Center and the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation have provided valuable resources to insure the grant monies are efficiently and effectively employed. Heidi Kruse, director of the Children's Center, said, "We are so blessed to be a part of this very important effort to expand quality child care resources in our County. We see the need every day. It's a problem that requires a solution, so having an opportunity to be a part of that solution is very gratifying."

Leelanau County was one of five Michigan communities, along with Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Newaygo County, to receive a portion of \$1 million in grants from the first round of ECIC's Child Care Innovation Awards. The ECIC's Child Care Innovation Fund was designed to re-imagine child care through common-sense financing and business solutions. In the summer of 2020 ECIC issued a call for applications from communities seeking to fund unique solutions to Michigan's child care shortage. ECIC received 147 applications, from more than 50 percent of Michigan counties, requesting more than \$23 million in support. Leelanau was one of the first to receive funding in this effort.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation was founded in 2005 and charged with implementing a Great Start system for Michigan both at the state level as well as one community at a time. The Early Childhood Investment Corporation is working across Michigan to assure solid returns from solid investments in early childhood development.

More detailed information and a way to join in this effort can be found on the LECDC website at www.leelanauearlychildhood.org, or to sign up for the program call ITCS at 231-942-4537.