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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Way of Central Virginia Receives \$283,000 Planning Grant from Serve Virginia/AmeriCorps to Launch Bright Beginning Child Care and Workforce Initiative

Lynchburg, VA – [Date] – United Way of Central Virginia is proud to announce that it has been awarded a \$283,000 Planning Grant from Serve Virginia/AmeriCorps. This funding will support the planning phase of the Bright Beginning Child Care and Workforce Initiative, an ambitious project aimed at addressing the critical shortage of quality, affordable childcare in Central Virginia while simultaneously supporting workforce development.

AmeriCorps, the largest funder of national service in the United States, provides crucial support through state service commissions like Serve Virginia. These commissions oversee the distribution of federal funds to state and local programs, driving tangible impacts in education, environmental stewardship, public safety, health, and economic opportunity. To learn more about Serve Virginia and AmeriCorps, visit [here](#).

United Way of Central Virginia, in partnership with key community stakeholders, is leading the Bright Beginning Child Care and Workforce Initiative to advance the well-being of individuals across Central Virginia, including the City of Lynchburg and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell. This initiative is a key component of United Way's mission to address pressing issues related to health, education, and financial stability in the region.

Addressing Critical Challenges

One of the most pressing challenges facing Central Virginia is the availability of quality and affordable childcare. Currently, there is a significant shortage of licensed childcare slots for children aged 0-4, with a 67.7% gap between demand and available services, as highlighted in the October 2023 JLARC report. This deficit is far above the statewide average of 9.1%, putting additional strain on families and exacerbating workforce challenges.

Childcare costs in Central Virginia can consume up to 20% of a family's budget, making it a significant barrier for those seeking to enter or remain in the workforce. Additionally, a sharp decline in worker productivity, as reported in the first half of 2022, underscores the

broader economic impact of the childcare crisis. Nationwide, inadequate childcare for young children results in an estimated annual loss of \$122 billion in earnings, productivity, and revenue.

"The critical nature of this issue underscores the urgency of our efforts," said Kim Soerensen, CEO of United Way of Central Virginia. "To effectively address these escalating concerns, we are resolutely committed to expanding access to affordable childcare, reinforcing our existing network of childcare providers, and cultivating a cadre of highly skilled early childhood educators. This endeavor will not only facilitate the reintegration of current residents who have been out of the workforce due to childcare constraints but will also position us to attract and retain new talent committed to long-term careers. We are excited to work with AmeriCorps members to address one of the greatest challenges in our region—childcare."

"BWXT has been an integral member of the Lynchburg community for nearly 70 years, and we continually look for opportunities that improve the standard of living across our region and to engage in building the workforce of the future," said Rex Geveden, BWXT's CEO. "As this collaborative initiative meets both of these goals, we gladly signed on as an early investor. We are confident that the program will make a positive and lasting impact not just for our current and future employees, but for the entire region."

Bright Beginning Child Care and Workforce Initiative

In partnership with AmeriCorps, BWX Technologies, Central Virginia Planning District Commission (CVPDC), Virginia Career Works, Centra Health, City of Lynchburg Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Central Virginia Community College (CVCC), and the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, United Way of Central Virginia's collective objective is to present comprehensive solutions to the childcare workforce gap and extend vital support to families entering or reentering the workforce. The key components of the initiative include:

1. Establishment of a High-Quality Childcare Center:

- In collaboration with other agencies and corporate partners, this center will provide up to 300 placements.
- 100 placements will be designated for underserved families.
- 100 placements will be allocated for corporate partners through sponsorships.
- 100 placements will be available to the public, with payment structures based on income levels.

- The facility will operate during a minimum of two standard shifts and include an in-house pediatric facility for sick children.

2. Recruitment, Training, and Placement of Early Childhood Educators:

- The facility will serve as a central hub for recruiting, training, and placing new early childhood educators.
- Professional development and training opportunities will be provided for existing childcare workers.

3. Small Business Training and Certification for In-Home Childcare Providers:

- This program will lead to the expansion of childcare facilities, business growth, and employment opportunities.

A Shared Services Alliance will provide comprehensive back-office support and services, ensuring that these efforts are sustainable and impactful.

Through these strategic partnerships, the Bright Beginning Child Care and Workforce Initiative aims to address critical gaps in the workforce, enabling individuals to join or rejoin long-term careers while simultaneously delivering quality, accessible childcare services to the region's children. Moreover, the initiative will foster the growth of small businesses and create new employment opportunities.

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About United Way of Central Virginia:

United Way of Central Virginia is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families in the region by addressing critical issues related to health, education, and financial stability. Through collaboration and strategic partnerships, United Way of Central Virginia is committed to creating lasting, positive change in the community.

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