

CRAVEN SMART START NEWS

Craven Smart Start Newsletter

Third Issue FY 2022-2023

Thinking Outside the Box for Solutions

Spring Greetings. ENC is beautiful in the spring with the delicate blooms of Dogwood trees and the flowing pink and white blooms of Azalea bushes. As the flowers and trees are blooming with new growth, so is the program of Craven Smart Start “blooming” with new initiatives. Last fall as our staff was exploring grant opportunities, we identified several areas of need or issues that our partnership might work on. One of the areas is the shortage of childcare slots in our county. In recent years, a number of childcare providers have retired or closed their childcare businesses. This decrease in slots has made it difficult for families looking for childcare and some parts of Craven County have been described as “a childcare desert”. Another issue is the impact of inflation on the budget of families with young children, especially if their child is still in diapers. And speaking of families, another issue that we continue to hear from community agencies that work directly with families is parents’ lack of parenting skills and their lack of knowledge about community resources that might help them.

Our staff acknowledged these were needs they would like to work on, however, they knew that our Smart Start funds are encumbered and can only be used for the programs that we currently fund and we do not have sufficient private funds to take on additional projects.

So, our partnership decided to “think outside the box” and came up with other ways to help meet the areas of need. Our newsletter covers some of their efforts, as well as other Craven Smart Start activities, including our 17th Annual Early Childhood Conference at Craven Community College. We hope you enjoy. Thank you for your support.

Mission of Craven Smart Start:

Building Brighter Futures for Young Children



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Craven Smart Start and local organizations that work with young children & their families kicked off The Week of the Young Child with a Baby & Young Child Expo at the New Bern Mall.



Shante E. Jackson; Tamasharay Bryant & Annissa Raynor, grant participants, will each open a Family Child Care Home in 2023. Congratulations!

Baby & Young Child Expo Held on April 1st

Craven Smart Start kicked off “The Week of the Young Child” by holding a Baby and Young Child Expo at the New Bern Mall on April 1st. The free event was created to provide parents and guardians with opportunities to learn about local resources and their services. Expectant parents and families with young children, who attended, were able to talk with agency representatives from nine local organizations that work with young children and families. The event also included activities for children, participant bags and door prizes. Parents described the event as “super informational and fun for the kids”. We greatly appreciate the support of the attending agencies, the New Bern Mall and Debbie Bradley and Greenville ACE Hardware, our sponsor.

Craven Smart Start Receives Harold H. Bate Grant to Open Three FCCH’s

Craven Smart Start was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Harold H. Bate Foundation, earlier this year to fund a project which will help to open three new Family Child Care Homes (FCCH’s) in Craven County. For some time, our partnership has seen a continuing decrease in the number of FCCH’s, creating a shortage of licensed facilities in Craven County. With a number of home providers approaching retirement age, the trend seems likely to continue.

“There is a real need for these smaller in-home facilities, “ according to Kelly Shaw, CCR&R Quality Enhancement Specialist. “Family child care homes provide long-term continuity and relationships with a primary caregiver, sometimes for decades. But opening a FCCH can be expensive and cost prohibitive to many families, who would like to provide licensed child care in their home.” Recognizing the importance of in-home child care and the cost involved in opening a licensed family child care home, CCR&R staff decided to pursue grant funding to develop some new family child care homes to help replace FCCH’s that we have lost since the Pandemic. Executive Director Cassandra Bennett submitted a grant proposal to the Harold H. Bate Foundation last fall and earlier this year we were notified that we had received the grant. We were thrilled and immediately began to recruit prospective FCCH providers for the project.

On February 23th, after a review of the applications and interviews conducted, CCR&R staff announced the names of the grant participants. They are Annissa Raynor; Shante’ E. Jackson and Tamasharay Bryant. Currently, our Quality Enhancement Specialists are purchasing materials and equipment for the new FCCH’s and are working closely with each recipient to help them meet licensing requirements. According to Ms. Bennett, “The Bate grant will enable our CCR&R quality enhancement staff to work with and help these three grant participants in opening new FCCH’s by providing them materials and resources. Each grant participant will create a Family Child Care environment that is safe and developmentally appropriate for young children. This environment will maintain all rules and regulations required by the North Carolina Division of Child Development. Many thanks to the Harold H. Bate Foundation for making this project possible. We are very appreciative of their support for making this project a reality.”



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Pinwheels are the symbol for the Month & these are located by the entrance of our office.

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Maria Eid, the Early Childhood Instructor at Craven Community College , gave the keynote address at our 17th Annual Early Childhood Conference.

17th Annual Early Childhood Conference

Craven Smart Start and Child Care Resource and Referral held their 17th Annual Building Brighter Futures Early Childhood Conference on March 18th on New Bern campus of Craven Community College. This marked the first time in three years that our partnership was able to hold an in-person conference, because of the Pandemic. The conference proved to be a very successful day of professional development and training for 85 individuals who work in the early childhood field in the six-county region of Craven, Pamlico, Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrell and Washington counties of Region 2, as well as some from neighboring counties.

This year's conference focused on the impact of outdoor environments on learning. Maria Eid, the Early Childhood Instructor at Craven Community College, presented the keynote session "Natural Learning: Connecting Early Childhood Quality Practices with Nature". The conference also featured a number of other breakout sessions on various early childhood topics.

This annual conference is a win/win opportunity for early childhood staff. For the very affordable registration of \$30 (or \$20, if you registered early), attendees receive quality training and .5 CEU's, a continental breakfast, lunch, a participant bag, an opportunity to win door prizes and an opportunity to see old friends and to network with other early childhood folks. Hope to see you again for our 18th Annual Conference in 2024!

Craven Smart Start Diaper Project Update

One in three US families with young children struggle to provide enough diapers to keep their babies or toddlers clean, dry and healthy. The cost of diapers hits low-wage families the hardest and inflation has made the situation worse for them. Most childcare facilities require parents to provide diapers for their children, which can result in workers missing work when they run out of diapers. Nationally, 57% of parents who struggle to provide diapers and who rely on childcare, reported they missed an average of four days of school or work in the past month because they did not have diapers.

Craven Smart Start **cannot use Smart Start funds** to purchase diapers. However with the support of our Board, we held a diaper drive from November to January and received a good supply of diapers from a variety of community organizations and individuals. We began our diaper distribution on February 2nd and Pinkie and Bianca were soon inundated with appointments to help parents needing diapers. In a two month period, they met and assisted 37 families with diapers and wipes, shared information about Craven Smart Start services and made referrals to other agencies, as needed. Over two months have passed since we began our diaper distribution and our diaper supply is now very low. In May we will review the donations we received for diapers and will decide how best to proceed. Many thanks to all who have donated. Stay tuned.

Craven Smart Start is a 501(c)3. Donations are tax-deductible.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information or questions about our services and programs.

Craven Smart Start, Inc.
2111F Neuse Boulevard
New Bern, NC 28560

(252) 671-0689 (Mobile)

pmoore@cravensmartstart.org

Visit us on the web at
www.cravensmartstart.org

About photos on page 5.

- **Top Left:** Craven Smart Start and the Carteret Partnership for Children, teamed up to host a “Dolly Reads Night” at the Highway 55 restaurant in Morehead City on January 31st. Although the legendary Dolly Parton was not in attendance, “Dolly impersonator” Lisa Culpepper and our Savannah Lowe were there for their respective Smart Start programs. They had lots of fun reading to children and sharing information about Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.
- **Top Right :** We saw lots of smiles on the faces of early childhood teachers who attended our Building Brighter Futures Conference, including these lovely ladies during their conference breakout session.
- **Middle Left:** We were delighted that Dr. Sandra Plata-Potter was able to participate at the Baby and Young Child Expo by reading to children in Spanish and English.
- **Middle Right:** Dr. Grinda Fleshman, the Executive Director of the Havelock Pregnancy Resource Center, was the guest speaker at the March meeting of the Local Interagency Coordinating Council.
- **Bottom:** Our Raising A Reader Coordinator Nadia Lowe (Thing 1) accompanied by the Cat in the Hat and Thing 2 added a Dr. Seuss flavor to the open house at Excel 7 in New Bern on March 31st. Teachers from the NC Pre-kindergarten classes at the center joined Nadia and friends in demonstrating STEM activities for parents and children who attended.

