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## WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD™ Apr. 10 - 16, 2021

*Week of the Young Child™ is an annual celebration hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children that celebrates early learning, young children, their families and teachers.*



Dear friends,

The start of a new year is always an exciting time. We look forward to new opportunities and things we want to accomplish. With the many challenges that 2020 brought our way, a “fresh start” is even more appealing than ever.

We are excited to be launching some new efforts to address child care supply and demand in our region. Child care capacity is needed as parents with young children return to the workplace over the coming months. Communities working to attract new employers understand that a workforce with young families needs high-quality child care options. We have a new opportunity to address child care issues in several communities in a very “hands-on” way, helping us learn more about how to best support communities and employers as they partner to address the recruitment and retention of child care in their area. You can read more about these exciting initiatives later in this newsletter.

The lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused us to make the difficult decision that a spring 2021 Designers' Showhouse simply will not be possible. Protecting the health and well-being of the public and our treasured volunteers is simply too important to us. There is still many unknowns about how the next few months will unfold and whether the community will be ready to join in to support a social fundraising event such as the Showhouse. Without this major fundraiser, the agency will be challenged to raise funds in other ways in 2021 to sustain programs and agency operations. We don't have all the answers yet but we are optimistic about finding a solution that will meet our needs. We expect that we will need to implement a variety of smaller fundraising efforts including hosting smaller summer and fall fundraising events, seeking new grant opportunities, and garnering support from individual donors and businesses that believe in the importance of the work we do. Our board and staff are united in tackling this challenge together and are committed to using this opportunity to creatively approach our fundraising needs in new ways. We are planning for the 2022 Showhouse to come back, being a celebratory event that is bigger and better than ever!

I am, by nature, a planner. I like to know where I am heading and have a strategy for how I am going to get there. Entering this new year with the path ahead remaining a bit elusive is hard for me. Yet I know that our collective commitment to ensuring that families have access to the resources and information they need remains steadfast. We all want young children to have high-quality early learning experiences that start them off on a path to success in school and throughout life. And together, we will implement new ways to make that happen!

Until next time..

*Rene Wyandt*

# BOARD & STAFF...

## 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jane Tilghman, President  
Liz Steffen, President-Elect  
Jamie Stafford, Secretary  
Lucinda Anstaett, Treasurer  
Dawn Bicknell-Reiser, Treasurer-Elect  
Lori Downing, Immediate Past President  
Deb Crowl  
Donna Doel  
Matthew Godinez  
Paige Jones  
Erin Lewis  
Lindsey Munson  
Christy Rodriguez  
Cherie Sage  
Catherine Shafer  
Sarah Snyder  
Beth Toland  
Kelly Trussell

## STAFF MEMBERS

Reva Wywadis, Executive Director  
Becky Meyer, Accountant  
Mark Kotich, Marketing & Communications Coordinator  
Holly Wehner, Data Specialist  
Karla Valdez, Administrative Assistant/  
Bilingual Resource Specialist  
Laurie Pigg, Parent Resource Center Manager  
Lori Boos, Breanna Gellings, Resource Specialists  
Marie Treichel, Renee Wohletz, Provider Services Managers  
Grace Cott, Audrey Danielson, Deb Danielson, Susan Drewelow, Michelle Gilbert, Talia Juiliano, Lexi Merz, Sherry Voth Early Care & Education Specialists  
Jane Redger, Nancy Rohr, Tori Beam, Successful Connections Parent Resource Specialists  
Stephanie Prue, Library Resource Specialist



# ANNUAL MEETING & 2021 BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS



At the agency's annual meeting this past December, **Jane Tilghman** was elected to the office of Board President for 2021. Jane's relationship with the ERC [dba Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas] first began as a mother. In addition to raising her children, she worked outside the home and relied on child care in order to do so. "I discovered early on that finding affordable high-quality child care was a challenge and used the services of the ERC," says Jane. "I am so appreciative of the child care providers who helped support my family and am happy to, in some small way, give back by supporting this important work."

Jane retired in July of 2020 from her position of Director of Operations with Topeka Collegiate School. After holding this position for 27 years, Jane was ready to devote time to enjoying her four grandchildren with a fifth grandchild due in June! Jane continues to pursue her love for cooking, while additionally participating in various volunteer activities through Topeka community organizations.

Two new board members, Christy Rodriguez and Erin Lewis were elected to three-year terms that began on January 1 of this year.

**Christy Rodriguez** lives in Manhattan and brings a wealth of experience as an urban and regional planner with municipal, county, regional, private sector, and non-profit community organizations. Christy is currently serving as the Executive Director of the Flint Hills Regional Council—a seven-county regional voluntary service association working to enhance economic development and improve quality of life throughout the Flint Hills. Christy was previously the Program Director of Region Reimagined—a community and economic strategic plan among Geary, Pottawatomie, and Riley counties. The long-range strategy of Region Reimagined is ultimately inclined toward job creation that enhances the region's prosperity. Christy and her husband, Adrian, are the parents of two beautiful daughters, Alexandria and Ayden. Christy is passionate about making the community a better place and doing her part through various volunteer activities and recognizes the important role that child care plays in the economic development of local communities. "I am thrilled to have the opportunity to serve and assist in any way I can in support of our kiddos. As a parent, we want the best for our children and will do anything we can to give them the best opportunities, yet this can be quite challenging in areas in which options are limited or non-existent."



**Erin Lewis** is a Business Analysis and Quality Assurance Analyst with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka (FHLBank). She has fourteen years of experience at FHLBank and has worked in various departments, including wire services, credit, and information technology. Throughout her time at FHLBank, Erin has been involved in several volunteer opportunities that FHLBank sponsors that support local organizations. Erin has a bachelor's degree in business administration from Baker University. Erin is a proud mom to three beautiful children: John, 10; James, 7; and Claire, 4. Christy says their house is rarely quiet! As a working mom to three young children, Erin understands the importance

of finding child care providers and resources that "check all the boxes" and fit the needs of the family. Erin is excited to join the Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas board and assist the agency in carrying out its mission and purpose.

# 2021 BRINGS A HOST OF NEW PROGRAMS & OPPORTUNITIES TO THE REGION



Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas has been awarded two Preschool Development Grants (PDG).\* **Communities Partnering to Improve Child Care Access in Eastern Kansas** brings three distinct communities (Chanute, Ottawa, and Hi-Crest Topeka) together in a collaborative effort. Through broad coalitions at the local level, partners will work to increase the access and availability of high-quality child care for families that need it in their respective areas. Special efforts will focus both on supporting infants, toddlers, and their families as well as addressing the need for non-traditional hours of child care to meet the needs of working families. In Chanute and Ottawa, initial efforts are focusing both on the retention of existing child care programs as well as supporting new programs. Approximately 40 child care facilities will receive direct grant support during the project period. In Hi-Crest Topeka, project funding will support an expansion of child care availability in this community lacking child care options by supporting the start-up of a new program caring for infants and toddlers. A leadership team from all three communities is connecting regularly to share ideas and strategies, providing a unique opportunity for peer learning and support.

The **Connecting Families to Services in Hi-Crest** project, also funded through the PDG, provides outreach and engagement opportunities for families with children ages birth to five within Topeka's Hi-Crest community. Families will receive support navigating community resources through an expansion of the current Successful Connections program combined with a twice-monthly resource fair for families with young children with the goal of connecting families to the right service at the right time. Families will also be reached through a coordinated marketing strategy that comprehensively and creatively increases the awareness of neighborhood residents of services available in the community and how to easily access those services. We anticipate providing services to 100 families from the Hi-Crest neighborhood in Topeka with children ages 0-5 during the project period.

A grant from **Child Care Aware® of America** brings the opportunity for 75 child care providers and teachers throughout the region to register for "Building Resilient Classrooms," a 30-hour self-paced online course offered through the nationally respected Conscious Discipline. Teachers will benefit from the online coursework combined with group peer learning community facilitated by one of the agency's early care and education specialists. This course was specifically designed to help support child care programs navigating the stress of the pandemic, providing access to an extensive library of resources compiled by Dr. Becky Bailey, Ph.D. and her Conscious Discipline team.

The **Bods Building Bods** project, funded by the **Joe and Janet Aleshire Foundation**, will serve 30 Shawnee County providers and focuses on helping preschool-aged children develop healthy lifestyles and habits. Participants will receive a free online course, a resource book, access to the Go NAPSACC database, and an extensive library of online assessment tools and resources. A second grant awarded by the Aleshire Foundation will support a refresh of the libraries in 35 Shawnee County child care classrooms serving at-risk children. Exposure to high-quality age-appropriate books promotes young children's optimal learning and development which play a critical role in school success. This added support provides an exciting opportunity to impact approximately 275 young children in the community!

The agency is launching a new service specifically designed to support new child care programs throughout the region. The **Successful Start** service brings coaching support and peer learning opportunities to new providers throughout their first year in business, focusing on the business aspect of child care.

A grant from the **Women's Fund through the Topeka Community Foundation**, will serve for 25 early learning classrooms in Shawnee County to purchase social-emotional materials. These materials utilize a training curriculum from the Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning to build their skills and knowledge on how to better support the mental health needs of children in their care. Teachers have the opportunity to receive a classroom kit that contains a set of books on knowing how to identify emotions in children as well as a visual schedule to help children with transitions throughout the day. These classroom materials will impact an estimated 190 young children ages 2-6 enrolled in these classrooms. The benefits of this effort will be sustained in future years as teachers continue to utilize the information in their work with young children.

In a continued effort to connect child care businesses to early learning resources, our agency has launched **On The Go!** mobile services. This service delivers learning materials and business resources directly to early educators that work in Douglas, Franklin, Jefferson, Miami and Linn county. Additionally this service provides support through one-on-one coaching, peer learning, free professional development opportunities, and full access to our mobile library of classroom materials at no cost.

\* This project was made possible by grant #90TP0078-01-00. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.



# Our Team Anniversaries & Celebrations!



**Lori Boos**  
Resource Specialist



**Grace Cott**  
Early Care & Education Specialist



**Lori Downing,**  
2020 Board President

We were pleased to present the President's gavel to our 2020 Board of Directors President, **Lori Downing**. Between our former Board President and our staff here in the office, we are very appreciative for their hard work and dedication.

From left to right: **Lori Boos** receives her five year service award; **Grace Cott** receives her five year service award, Lori Downing receives the President's gavel.



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