



EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF POLK COUNTY

Heart of Education

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Early Learning Coalition of Polk County Celebrates Childcare Providers

April 20, 2021 Lakeland, FL--Cheryl Kelly, Vice President of Programs knows that this year has been an extremely challenging year for contract childcare providers. Some unfortunately had to close because of the pandemic. Others, however, remained open and continue to serve families in Polk County so that their parents can go to work knowing their children are in good care.

"This year we felt that it was year that held so many challenges for our childcare providers," said Kelly. "When you heard of the many heroes that were acknowledged for their roles in serving their communities, our childhood providers were not always at the top of the list. At the Coalition we certainly recognize that all of them as being essential."

With Childcare Provider Appreciation Day fast approaching on May 7, Coalition leaders wanted to give each provider a meaningful gift that would go beyond the usual proclamation from the governor.

The appreciation gift won't be tangible but certainly long-lasting and beneficial to all child care providers. It will be a 90-minute event that will feature Nefertiti B. Poyner, Ed.D. in a virtual presentation that will provide the Coalition's over 300 providers with inexpensive strategies to reduce stress and promote resiliency. Participants will also be introduced to a self-reflective assessment tool called the Devereux Adult Resilience Survey (DARS) to help support each one's resilience journey.

Like Kelly, CEO, Marc Hutek, Ed.D. acknowledges the extraordinary year that families and childcare providers experienced due to the effects of COVID-19. However, he believes staying positive is the key to resiliency and a social emotional skill that children can learn too.

"After our providers hear this important presentation, we want each of them to leave feeling more valued for all they do every day with the children in their centers. We also want them to have a renewed commitment for all they do with some coping strategies that will make a positive impact in their lives as well as the children they care for. After all, the future of our community is sitting within the walls of each of their centers."

Jobe Ream, owner of Future Care Learning Center in Auburndale credits the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County with assisting its providers last year with emergency grant funds that came at a time when many centers threatened to close at the worst time during the pandemic.

"One thing that really hits home to me is not only did they help childcare providers but the parents as well. So many of my clients were thankful they didn't have to pay their parent fees and yearly registration fees," said Ream. "In a time of such uncertainty and with everyone so overwhelmed with what was happening in the world with the pandemic, the ELC of Polk County made it for me, a little more bearable."

Parents were also glad that childcare centers were open so they could feel confident that their children were in good hands.

Angel Barnes, a registered nurse who is the mother of two boys, gave thanks to Richardson's Learning Enrichment Center for all its staff's precautions in keeping the children safe from COVID-19. She felt at ease leaving her own two sons to go to work and train other nurses and community at her job.

"I felt comforted knowing they were in a safe place," said Barnes.

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